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INDIA TODAY

JULY 31, 1987

THE SPECTRE OF TERRORISM

Can it be contained?

FESTIVAL OF INDIA: CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT: R. VENKATARAMAN

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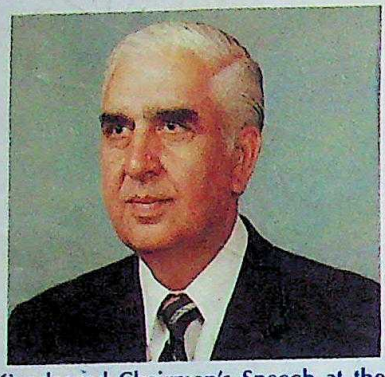
Another record year at Shalimar Paints



Condensed Chairman's Speech at the Annual General Meeting on 19th June 1987 at Calcutta

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that you are pleased with the performance of your Company in the year 1986. It has been possible for the Company to increase its turnover from Rs.43.83 crores in 1985 to Rs.47.62 crores in 1986 and the profit before tax from Rs.1.71 crores to Rs.2.01 crores, i.e. by 17%. Both the turnover and profit are the highest ever achieved by the Company.

Your Directors have pleasure in recommending, for your approval, a higher dividend of Rs.1.75 per share as against Rs.1.50 per share for the preceding year. The overall improvement in the Company's operations has been achieved through a positive co-operation between the management and the workmen. Long term agreements have been satisfactorily concluded with all categories of employees. There is a marked improvement in the work culture and a clear evidence of employees' dedication towards consumer satisfaction through improved productivity, quality and service. The net return after tax on shareholders' funds has improved from 18.5% in 1985 to 21.1% in 1986 and earnings per share have increased from Rs.3.99 to Rs.5.36.

The Research & Development wing of the Company has been further strengthened with the induction of fresh talent and the installation of advanced equipment including a colour computer. Our marketing activities have also been further strengthened to provide consumer service.

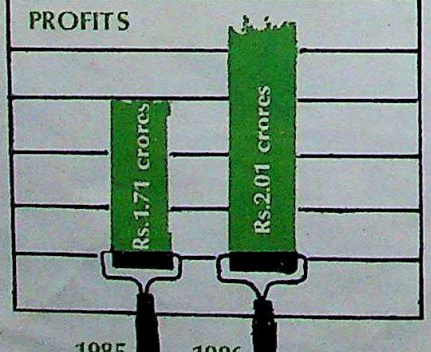
The new products recently introduced, especially anti-corrosive products, have not only sharpened the Company s competitive edge but also demonstrated the Company's commitment to fight corrosion — a national problem. Today Shalimar Paints offer the most comprehensive range of protective coatings in the country. Of course, a highly visible part of your Company's product range is in the decorative sector. For consumer satisfaction, we make available a variety of products for a wide spectrum of applications. These are spearheaded by our flagship brands of Superlac Emulsion and Superlac Enamel. Our products contribute to the beautification drive throughout India for improving the quality of life for the public.

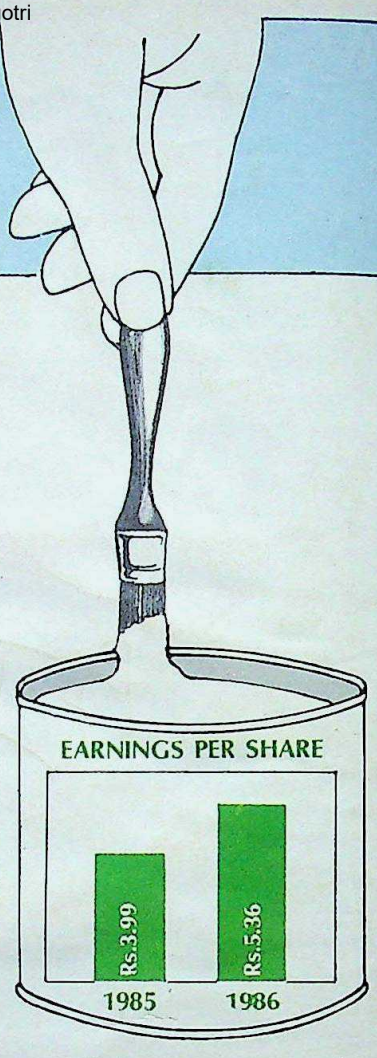
The rapid strides made by the Company on various fronts, particularly in the area of growth and profitability, have been recognised not only in India but also on the Asian scene. Your Company was awarded the VII International Asia Award in February 1987 for the significant progress made over the entire spectrum of its activities.

Meanwhile, your Company is poised for further expansion not only in the plant at Howrah in West Bengal but at another location to be selected close to the source of vital raw materials and the major markets.

In the operations of your Company, we enjoy the full benefit of our enduring links with International Paint plc, UK. I take this opportunity of expressing our appreciation and thanks for their continuing deep interest and support.

Dr. P.K. Bhandari, whole-time Director of the Company, retired from the services of the Company on 31st December 1986, after a very long and distinguished service. I wish to place on record our sincere appreciation of the services rendered by him.





The overall improvement in the performance of the Company, the sound foundation, the productivity, quality and service, the close co-operation between the management and the workmen and their high morale could not have been possible but for the dynamic leadership of Mr. Vinod Krishna, the Managing Director of your Company. He has turned the Company round to its rightful place in the paint industry. I am sure that the shareholders would like to join me in complimenting him on the excellent job done over the last three years since he took over the reins of your Company. I feel sure that the management is fully geared to take the Company to greater heights.

Before concluding, I would also like to convey my thanks to all the employees of the Company at various levels who contributed to the Company's achievements in 1986. May I also express my sincere thanks to my colleagues on the Board for their support and guidance.

M.M. SABHARWAL

Note : *This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.*

Shalimar Paints

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PRESSMAN

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The Spectre of Terrorism

The slaughter of 74 innocent bus passengers in Punjab and Haryana raised, to new and menacing proportions, the spectre of terrorism, and posed the crucial question of how best to restrict its growing reach and contain its toll.

COVER STORY 30

Cultural Diplomacy

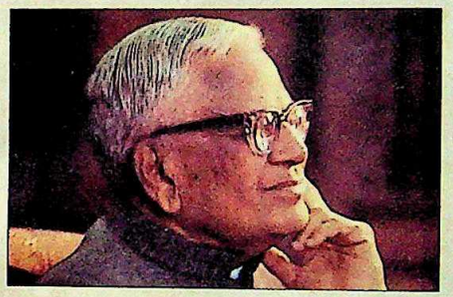
The Festival of India opened in the Soviet Union to a charmed Russian audience, even as the Soviet leaders gave visiting Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi a special treatment that broadcast its own political message. A report from Moscow.

SPECIAL FEATURE 24

A Decade of Decay

After 10 years of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran's controversial rule, this southern state presents a very sorry picture of industrial stagnation, atrophied politics and institutional decline. A detailed report.

SPECIAL FEATURE 74



"President has no powers"

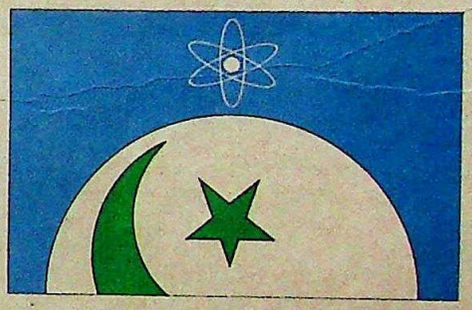
The prime minister is answerable only to the Parliament, not to the President of the country, who must be content with whatever information the prime minister gives him, says Ramaswamy Venkataraman in an exclusive interview.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 80

A Disillusioned State

Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde faces a sudden decline in his popularity, because of the disillusionment with his 'value-based politics' and the growing dissidence in his party. A report; and a candid interview with Hegde.

SPECIAL REPORT 92



The Nuclear Heist

Pakistan has been caught red-handed in its latest attempt to smuggle an entire, ultra-modern uranium enrichment plant, capable of producing enough enriched uranium for as much as 10 bombs every year. An exclusive report.

GLOBE-TROTTING 101

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CONFIDENCE

The International Asia Award heralds a new era o qual

Getting better. Winning... Bringing a touch of class to everything we do.

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ra o quality for Shalimar Paints

Asia's top companies were in the running for the coveted Asia Awards. But we raced past. And won the trophy.

Months of superhuman effort have been richly rewarded. Serving as a further boost to our confidence, our determination.

Today as a Rs 50 crore company, we're back amongst the leaders. Our people—in research, in production, in marketing—are the best in the business. Our products are better than ever before. Our service to customers is improving every day.

Shalimar Paints is surging ahead... swifter and stronger than ever.

Shalimar Paints

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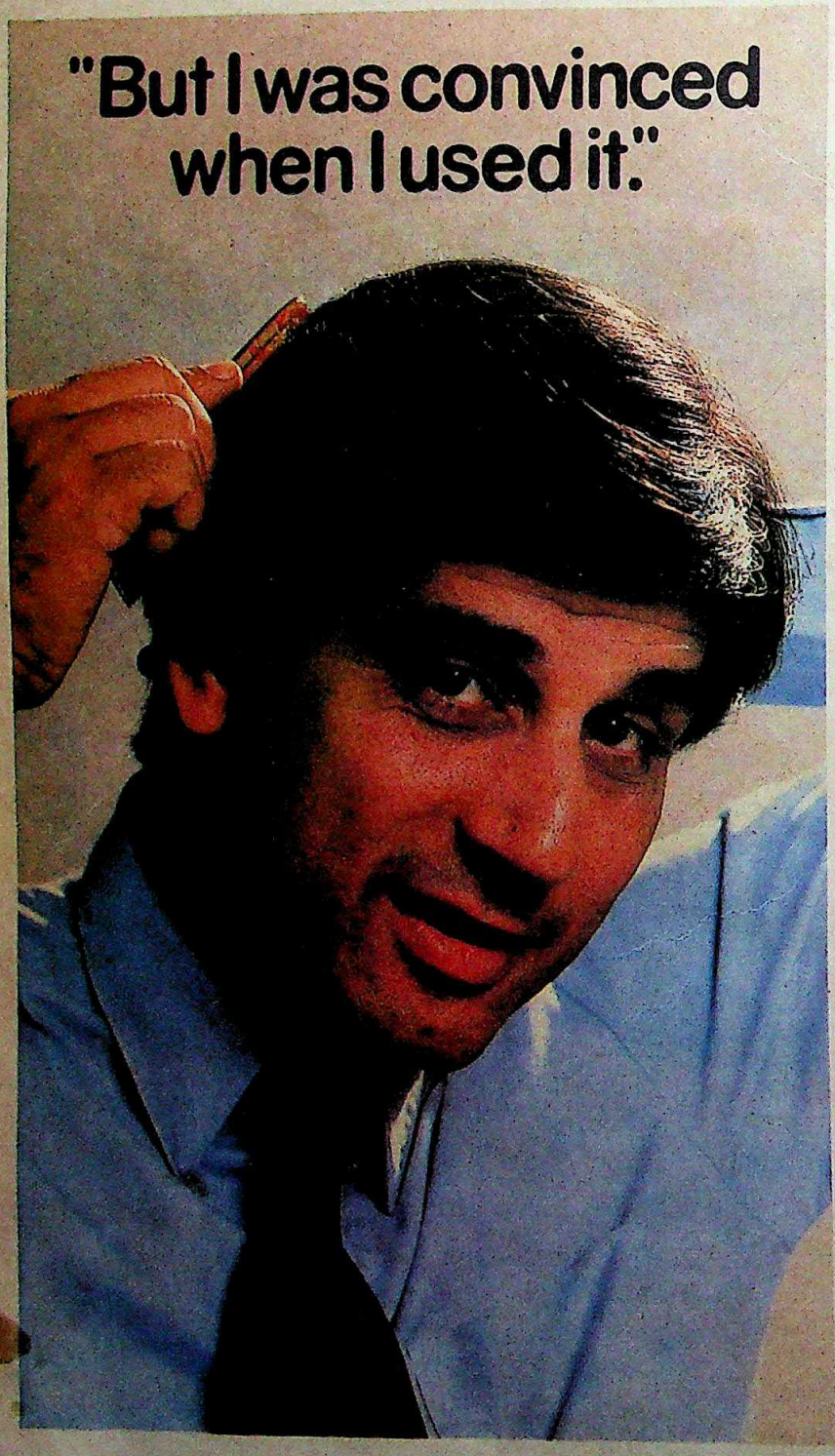
"I was impressed when my doctor said Keo-Karpin Hair Vitalizer really stops hair loss".



"But I was convinced when I used it."

"My doctor told me Keo-Karpin Hair Vitalizer* is a unique scientific formula based on extensive research. He also told me it provides all the essential proteins, co-enzymes and vitamins for strengthening hair roots.

All I know is that it has certainly stopped my hair from falling and checked dandruff."

Here's an excerpt from the research report:

"66.66% gave excellent and 33.33% gave good results with complete disappearance of dandruff in all cases and nearly cent per cent stoppage of fall of hair...So, success rate with Keo-Karpin Hair Vitalizer may be stated to be cent per cent."

Indian Medical Gazette 118 223 (1984)

The proven scientific way to prevent hair loss.

Dey's® Care you can trust

* It is not a toilet preparation.

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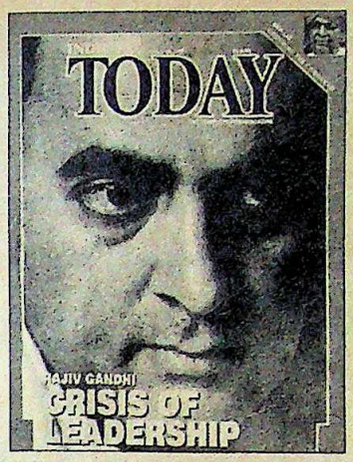
LETTERS



CENTRAL CRISIS

Your cover story on Rajiv Gandhi ("Crisis of Leadership", July 15) amused me, to say the least. You advise Rajiv to put the stench of corruption behind him by, for instance, quickly getting the names of the culprits in the Bofors deal and ensuring speedy punishment. This, of course, presupposes that he personally has had nothing to do with the scandal. How does he get over the scandals, by using this advice, if your supposition is incorrect?

Similarly, your advice to Rajiv on the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of being prime minister reads like the advice a parent would give a teenaged boy about to go on his first holiday trip with friends. If our prime minister deserves the kind of advice you are giving him, do we deserve to have him as prime minister at all?

Bombay **K.R. SHARMA**

■ Your concise cover story cogently summed up the two years of Rajiv's rule, and showed that the doldrums the Congress(I) is presently in, is due to the political immaturity of the prime minister. On all fronts Rajiv remains a poor politician and an even poorer diplomat. The greatest threat to the prime ministership is Rajiv himself.

Calcutta **ARVINDER SINGH WALIA**

■ Your article exposes the absence of visionary thinking in the ruling circle. No one can guide the people in a democratic set-up without broader vision, high integrity and a sense of service—qualities that our present leadership unarguably lacks.

Bombay **S.A. SRINIVASA SARMA**

ALIENATED VIEW

Your editorial ("The Lessons of Failure", July 15) is a testimonial to Rajiv Gandhi's failure to deliver the goods. The basic problem with our young prime minister is that he first saw the world from a cockpit and he now does so from a gun-wielding security circle. Alienated from the people, surrounded by self-seeking henchmen, and hiding behind the Government-controlled media, he does not realise his limits.

Bangalore **RAMANAND SHARMA**

■ Your guidelines to the prime minister to retrieve his crumbling credibility are nothing but commendable. Rajiv's hesitation in booking those with illegal Swiss bank accounts, his prevarications on the Bofors affair, and his propensity to ignore critics have done him incalculable damage. He must distance himself from self-seeking politicians if he is to remain in the political saddle.

Ahmedabad **M.V. RAVINDRAN**

TRAGIC STATE

History tells us that whoever went to the Sikhs—and particularly to the great gurus—for protection, received it in full measure. Today, the shrieks of the innocent people dying at the hands of the terrorists in Punjab shows the absence of the true Khalsa spirit. It is only the presence of people like Jathedar Umranangal, who stand firm in their beliefs, which shows that all is not lost yet.

Dehradun **LT-COLONEL B.K. NAUTIYAL**

MEDICAL FACT

Your article ("Lotus Blossoms", June 15) states that 'Perinorm' is an antacid that is now widely used for heartburn conditions. This is factually incorrect.

'Perinorm' is a brand name for the drug 'Metoclopramide Hydrochloride' which is indicated to correct gastrointestinal motility. It has no antacid activity and is not supposed to be dispensed without a prescription like a harmless antacid. In susceptible patients, the drug can induce serious central nervous system side-effects that may be alarming for a patient.

Mysore **DR K. JAVED NAYEEM**

LURID LURE

Your story ("The Flesh Trade", July 15) gives an impression that all foreign films imported under the NRI scheme are full of explicit porn. This may be true in the south but is surely not the case in Bombay. The NRI film attraction is more a result of lurid posters than the few nude

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scenes that are actually shown. Indian movies depict more 'suggestive sex' than their western counterparts.

New Delhi — S.E. MEERZA

NO TIES

With reference to 'Shoe Scramble' ("Trade Winds", April 30), the Indian Hotels Co Ltd has not made any application to the Government for setting up a shoe production unit, nor has it tied up with any foreign company.

Bombay — V.R. AGNIHOTRI
secretary, Indian Hotels Co

The application (with a proposed foreign collaboration) was actually made by Rafique Tejani of Metro Shoes, with Prasun Sengupta, executive assistant to the vice-president and managing director of Indian Hotels, being involved as a director. Tejani has clarified that Sengupta is involved in his personal capacity, and that Metro has an arrangement with Taj Trade and Transport Co to retail shoes through its shops in the Taj group of hotels. —Editor

DECISIVE MOOD

The outcome of the Haryana elections was a forgone conclusion ("Crushing the Congress", July 15). While the victory for the Lok Dal(B)-BJP alliance was not unexpected, the extent of the stunning defeat of the Congress(I) has sent shock waves through its leadership. It is a strong signal to fence-sitters and defectors not to take an intelligent electorate for granted.

Bangalore — H.P. MURALI

■ The verdict of the Haryana electorate has driven the final nail into the coffin of the ruling party. It has amply shown that the Congress(I) will soon be only a Gaya Ram all over the country, if it is not careful.

Amritsar — K.S. AHLUWALIA

BUSINESS TRAVELS

Your feature ("Careening Crazily", June 30) alleges that "Ambassador P.K. Kaul was holidaying in California when the AWACS debate raged in Congress." It would have been better if the facts had been checked with us before publication.

As part of the process of briefing senators, Congressmen, the media, the moulders of public opinion and prominent members of the Indian community about our concerns on issues of military supplies to Pakistan, the ambassador is required to hold meetings in Washington and different parts of the US. The legislative process concerning US military supplies to Pakistan has continued over many months and is likely to go on for some time. The ambassador will have to continue his meetings in Washington D.C. and outside.

To put the record straight: he has not been on holiday during this period.

Washington — S.S. MUKERJEE
counsellor (press), Embassy of India

SAD STRIFE

Your cover story on the latest offensive in the ethnic war in Sri Lanka and the Indian relief mission ("Tackling the Tigers", June 30), presents a grim and horrifying picture. Massacres, whether perpetrated by the militants or the army, are to be condemned in equal terms. Despite the need for humanitarianism, nothing lasting was achieved by the Indian intrusion on Sri Lankan air space. In fact, it fanned further an already tense situation.

Kottayam — V.K. SATYAVAN NAIR

■ The only solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis is a negotiated political settlement. Sending relief supplies is only a temporary approach to provide succour to the people of Jaffna. Delaying sincere endeavours towards a political solution will only trouble our bilateral relations with several hitherto friendly neighbouring nations.

Srikakulam — M.V. SURYANARAYANA

CENSORED SCENE

Sujata Mehta was not raped in *Pratighaat* ("Eye-catchers, July 15). She was only "disrobed"—in the way that Draupadi was in the ancient epic. And thank god for the censors, for a change! They showed the scene in the form of a negative print.

Bangalore — VANDANA SURYANARAYANAN

COOL RESPONSE

In the interview with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ("I am much the wiser", June 30) I think that the headline remark stemmed from the fact that we, the Indian public, are so much more the wiser to the corruption in Congress(I) rule—much more than Rajiv Gandhi cares to admit. No longer can the party sell to the public the earlier all-pervading image of Mr Clean.

Jabalpur — ADITYA MALAVIYA

■ Though many of the answers were to be expected, by and large, the whole interview with the prime minister made interesting reading. Seemingly disregarding the recent allegations on pay-offs in the defence deals, Rajiv kept cool and collected—to an extent that surprised some readers.

New Delhi — FRANKLYN STANLEY

MISMANAGED MISSILE

Your editorial ("Explosive Questions", June 30) is a clear indictment of the Central Government's mismanagement of the explosive Bofors issue. It aptly reflects the indignant feelings of the common man on this issue and raises questions that are of vital importance to the health of the body politic. The Government must stop raising the bogey of destabilisation as it has been doing till now and decisively deal with the defence scandal by persecuting the offenders.

Kanyakumari — G. DAVID MILTON

UNRULY RULE

Your special report ("The Lawless State", June 30) was a well-depicted coverage on the deteriorating law and order situation in Bihar. It seems incredible that after so many cases of caste carnages, the chief minister is incapable of taking action against the culprits and even goes to the extent of admitting that the Naxalites control large tracts in the troubled state. A government that cannot save the life of its people has no right to rule.

Adra, West Bengal — K. DEVI PRASAD

CONTROLLED NEEDS

It has been rightly analysed in your guest column ("Judging the Public Sector", June 30) that decreasing the 'quantity' of government controls may not improve performance in this sector unless qualitative controls are also improved. As part of the public sector workforce, I have observed, first hand, the lack of controls which leads to "levels of helplessness" rather than authority.

Rampant over-staffing, an unmotivated work-force, concentration on unproductive paper work rather than achieving results, and absence of punitive action lead to a chaotic situation. The fixing of organisational goals, backed by the authority to carry them out, is an urgent need.

Chandigarh — B.S. PUNIA

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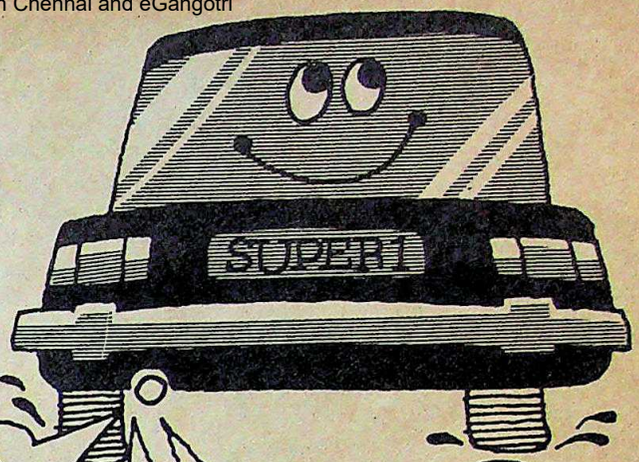
How to make your car talk to you while driving...

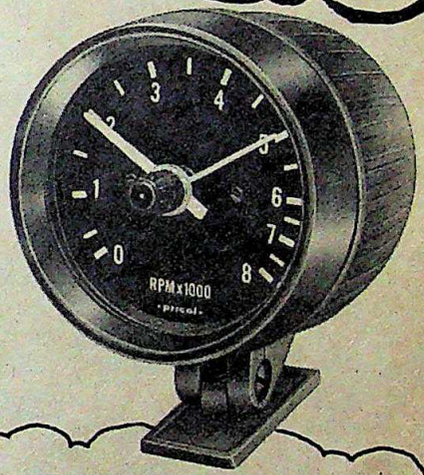
on all these subjects



Maximum output

Optimum engine performance

Optimum fuel economy



Believe it or not every time you start up your car, shift gears, cruise along or stop at a traffic light, your car has something to say to you. Only you're not listening. Something you pay for dearly in terms of engine life, fuel economy and performance over the years. Now you can relax. Pricol's new electronic RPM meter is here.

Introductory offer - Rs. 450/- * by VPP. Specify 3 or 4 cylinder petrol engine.

Guarantee: Money back within 30 days if not fully satisfied.

*** Will be available at retail outlets @ Rs. 500/—.**
(The above prices are inclusive of excise, local taxes and octroi.)

What's an RPM meter...?

It indicates engine revolutions per minute. You'll be able to change gears and drive at optimum engine speed! The advantage — better fuel economy, lower wear and tear, and maximum engine life. Not to speak of a ready warning not to push the engine on cold mornings. And a safe guide to just how much a newly re-bored engine can take. What's more, your RPM meter is unbeatable when it comes to setting idling speeds.

Pricol's new range of electronic RPM meters are for both 3 cylinder and 4 cylinder petrol engines. So what are you waiting for? Before your car starts complaining install one. And start communicating with something you love. Your car.

✦ pricol ✦

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Post Box 6331, 339 A, Avanashi Road, Coimbatore-641 037.
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CALAMA TAMES TRAGEDY IN A TRIUMPH OF TECHNOLOGY

The Tragedy...

Dhanbad, Chasnala Coal Mines, Disaster descends. Men are trapped deep in the bowels of the earth. Lives are in peril. Is there a solution?

The Triumph

Water engulfs the trapped miners. The water must be brought to surface. A reliable dewatering pump is needed. One that is tough. One that can work round-the-clock. Calama Pumps perform in the most adverse conditions. Man and technology triumph. Lives are saved.

7 Gaiwadi Industrial Estate, S.V. Road, Goregaon (West), Bombay-400 062. Phone: 695201-02. Telex: 011-71346 PUMP IN. Grams: 'CALAMAPUMP' ● 173, G... Hyderabad-500 037. Phone: 263815. ● B-119, Sector II, Noida Complex, Pin-201 301. Dist. Ghaziabad (U.P.) ● 20/53 Kengal Hanumanthayya Road, Ba...

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The Technology

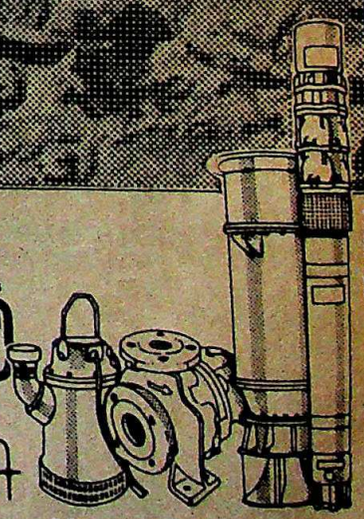
The Calama commitment to excellence. It began in 1962. And it continues. With an emphasis on technological brilliance, with the needs of the buyers in mind.

Calama Pump applications include agriculture, lift & sprinkler irrigation, mining, city water supply, fire-fighting, chemical, petrochemical, fertilizer, oil exploration industries. And other special purpose needs. The Calama range includes submersible, sump, process and polder pumps.

Over 50000 pumps are installed all over the country, suitable for 4" to 22" size borewells (motor rating upto 350 HP).

They are ample testimony of consumer confidence in Calama.

IS : 8034-1976



APEX 87380

Calama

Pioneer Submersible Pump Manufacturer in India

173, G[illegible]state, Naroda-382 330, Ahmedabad. Phone: 811216-316-416. Telex: 0121-635 PUMP IN. Grams: 'CALPUMPEN'. ● C/2, Co-operative Industrial Estate, Bala Nagar, [illegible]oad, Bar[illegible]60 027. Phone: 227 488. Grams: 'CALAMAPUMP' ● 10A, Mominpur Road, Calcutta-700 023. Phone: 454474. Grams: 'CALAMAPUMP'

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"To her you can not say tomorrow... her name is today." — Garcia Peres—Mexican Poet.

For over a year, Love and Care, a band of dedicated volunteers, has been working quietly behind the scenes...changing the lives of an entire generation of underprivileged children.

We made a beginning in Tigra village in Haryana and in the slums of Delhi, bringing changes in the environment, medical care and education of children. We have immunized over 10,000 children and aim to immunize 1,00,000 by early '88. We have set up free clinics, schools, vocational training centres for children in slums. But our task is very large and our means, very little. We need help... your help. Please donate generously. You will be surprised at how much difference, just a little money can make.

Children's needs are very small. All you have to do is share a little.

Rs. 20/- will give a child a complete one year course of immunization.

Rs. 300/- will provide a child with nutrition, or a better environment, or medical care for one year.

Rs. 360/- will pay for a child's education for one year.

Rs. 1200/- will provide a child with vocational training for one year.

Rs. 2400/- to adopt a child for complete care by us, for one year.

Send as much money as you like other than the listed specifications and every month you will receive his/her progress and picture.

You can also specify the age and sex of the child.

Contact us for details/voluntary services.

Come, make a hundred flowers bloom...

Yes. I'd like to share a little Love and Care. I wish to donate Rs. _____

Please use this amount for

☐ Immunization ☐ Vocational Training
☐ Nutrition ☐ Medicare
☐ Education ☐ Environment
☐ Yes, I wish to "adopt" a child by proxy. Please send me photographs and details.

Income Tax Exemption under Section—80G

* All donations may be sent by M.O., Cheque or Bank Draft payable to:

LOVE AND CARE
D-40, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110024.

Share a little Love and Care

FSA/LC/2/87

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A Moral Authority

THE unseemly controversy between the President and the prime minister has brought the country closer to a constitutional breakdown than ever before, and focused national attention on the question of what precise powers and responsibilities the President has under the Constitution. Indeed, the breakdown may already have taken place. After all, if prime ministers refuse to keep the President informed, or presidents decide that they should behave like activist politicians, and if privileged correspondence between the head of state and the head of government is systematically leaked to the press in order to generate controversy, what defence can the Constitution offer? Lasting damage has not been done (in the form of a prime minister with a parliamentary majority being dismissed by presidential fiat) only because brave civil servants in Rashtrapati Bhavan refused to be party to unconstitutional deeds.

As Zail Singh finally bows out of office, and the curtain hopefully rings down on a forgettable chapter of modern Indian history, it should be apparent that the Constitution's original design cannot be preserved if the men in high office do not measure up to the trust placed in them. If the President is not meant to be a rubber stamp (signing an emergency proclamation even before the Cabinet has discussed it), he is not meant to be an alternative centre of power either (as both the main candidates to the presidential election last fortnight have fortunately stressed). In essence, the President has to be a source of moral authority, accepted and respected nationally because of his persona, and the dignity and impartiality with which he applies his mind to affairs of state.

As Zail Singh finally bows out of office, and the curtain hopefully rings down on a forgettable chapter of modern Indian history, it should be apparent that the Constitution's original design cannot be preserved if the men in high office do not measure up to the trust placed in them.

Long ago, Jawaharlal Nehru said that the President should be a man of "great authority and great dignity". Yet, over the years, presidential candidates have been chosen because they were seen as faithful partymen who would do the prime minister's bidding, and would even be willing to sweep floors. To compound this, the electoral college has tended to vote on party lines. This may have been the result of prime ministerial fears about having to contend with an uncooperative head of state, and there may even have been instances to justify such fears. After all, Rajendra Prasad did once declare publicly that there was nothing in the Constitution which laid down that the President should act in accordance with the advice of his ministers—a statement that was flatly contradictory to what B.R. Ambedkar had told the Constituent Assembly. And Dr S. Radhakrishnan had gone even further, confessing at one stage that he wanted to bring the country as a whole under 'President's rule' after Nehru's death, and handle affairs himself for a while before swearing-in a new prime minister. The fact that this would have meant suspending the Constitution did not seem to have bothered Radhakrishnan.

But whatever the reasons for seeking to place seemingly pliant men in Rashtrapati Bhavan, it has lowered the stature of the presidency, and weakened the Constitution. In an as yet developing society, where democratic traditions have still to take such firm root as to make the Constitution inviolate, there is a price to pay if the President believes he is an independent centre of power. Equally certainly, a presidential response can be expected if the prime minister delivers one deliberate snub after another, fails to perform his constitutional duty of keeping the President informed, and then declares authoritatively in Parliament that he has, in fact, performed his duty.

Clearly, both offices can be misused to destroy the spirit of the constitutional provisions involved. Fortunately, the various controversies that have erupted around the presidency over the last 35 years—and some of the constitutional amendments that they provoked—have now served to define reasonably clearly the duties and rights of the President. He must act according to the advice of the council of ministers (and can ask them to reconsider their advice only once). The weight of public opinion has also made it clear that presidents must ask prime ministers to prove their majority in Parliament (and not repeat what Sanjiva Reddy did in 1979). And recent events have helped underline the national consensus on a limited role for the presidency, and on the elementary rule that the prime minister must show due respect to the President.

There will still be ambiguities, of course. The Constitution, for instance, does not set a time limit for the President to sign a bill passed by Parliament, and the postal censorship bill still awaits approval. But the solution is perhaps not to write in more and more legalese into the Constitution. Instead, everyone concerned must help strengthen the kind of traditions that make it possible for Britain to run smoothly without a written constitution. The first step towards this is to ensure that presidential candidates are selected on the strength of their standing in society, not on the strength of momentary political convenience. The second would be to test the merit of a candidate by allowing the electoral college of parliamentarians and legislators to vote according to their best judgement, without a party whip being issued. This is not an argument for a bogus conscience vote, *a la* 1969. It is an argument for giving the presidency back its dignity, its restraint, and its assigned constitutional function, as a legitimate voice with a moral authority which the country willingly accepts.

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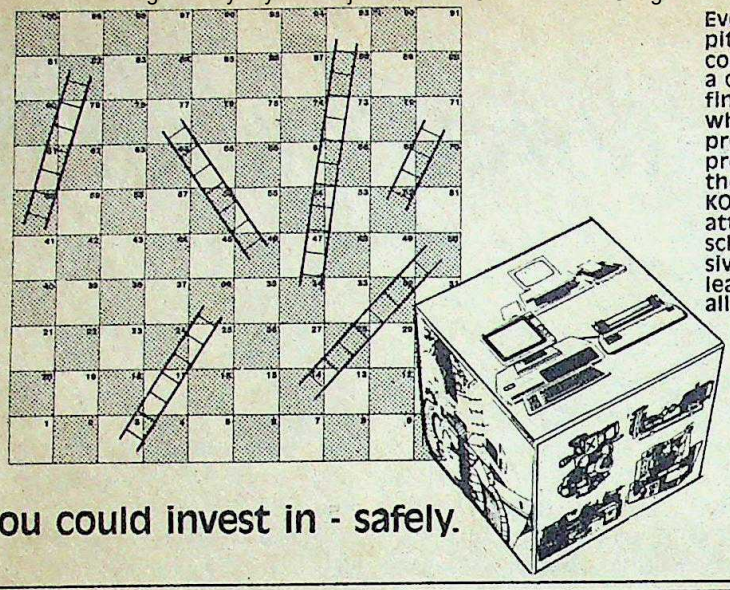

Every business has pitfalls. Pitfalls that you could avoid, by choosing a company with a sound financial base. Like KOLF, where any investment is productive and profitable.Promoted by the 'House of Kotharis', KOLF offers you attractive fixed deposit schemes and comprehensive hire purchase and leasing services. To meet all your needs.

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KOTHARI ORIENT LEASING AND FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

Regd. Office: "KOTHARI BUILDINGS", 114, NUNGAMBAKKAM HIGH ROAD, MADRAS 600 034. PHONE: 472131
Admn. Office: "KOTHARI ANNEXE", 6,VILLAGE ROAD (FACING N.H.ROAD), MADRAS 600 034. PHONE: 474602

THE HOUSE OF KOTHARIS

FIXED DEPOSIT SCHEME

A. NON-CUMULATIVE SCHEME :

Minimum Amount of Deposit	Period	Rate of Interest		Interest Payment
		Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 9,000	Rs. 10,000 & above	
Rs. 2,000/- (Any addition to be in multiples of Rs. 1000/-)	1 Year	13.5% p.a	14% p.a.	Quarterly
	2 Years	14% p.a.		
	3 Years	14% p.a.		

B. CUMULATIVE SCHEME :

Minimum Amount of Deposit	Period	Maturity Amount
Rs. 2,000/- (Any addition to be in multiples of Rs. 100/-)	1 Year	Rs. 2,299/-
	2 Years	Rs. 2,642/-
	3 Years	Rs. 3,037/-

IN RESPECT OF DEPOSITS OF Rs.6,000/- AND ABOVE, POST-DATED MONTHLY INTEREST WARRANTS IN ADVANCE, TO BE PRESENTED ON DUE DATES. THREE YEAR DEPOSITS ACCEPTED FROM NON RESIDENT INDIANS ON NON-REPATRIABLE BASIS AS PER R.B.I. PERMISSION.

Particulars as per the Non Banking Financial Companies and Miscellaneous Non-Banking Companies (Advertisement) Rules 1977 as amended.

A. **Name of the Company** : **Kothari Orient Leasing and Finance Company Limited**
B. **Date of Incorporation** : 30th August, 1983
C. **Business carried on by the Company** : Hire Purchase Financing, Leasing and Industrial Financing
D. **Brief particulars of Management** : The Company is managed by the Board of Directors
E. **Names, Addresses and Occupation of Directors :**

Name	Address	Occupation
Mr. Pradip D. Kothari Chairman	28 Kothari Road, Madras 600 034.	Industrialist
Mr. C.V. Karthik Narayanan	30 Maharaja Surya Road, Madras 600 018.	Industrialist
Dr M.A.M. Ramaswamy	Chettinad House, Raja Annamalaipuram, Madras 600 028.	Industrialist
Mr. G.N. Venkatapathy	2 NKPM Layout, Red Fields, Coimbatore 641 018.	Industrialist
Mr. K. Srinivasan	"Sripuram View", Royapettah, Madras 600 014.	Advocate
Mr K.R. Shenai	M-Block, 70 Anna Nagar, Madras 600 102.	Dir. Genl. of Police Tamil Nadu (Retd.)

F. **The Company commenced business on 9th January 1984 and the details of the profits and dividends are given below :**

Period Ended	Profit before Tax (Rs. in lacs)	Profit after Tax (Rs. in lacs)	Dividend declared on Equity Capital (Rs. in lacs)
31.8.1986	14.77	14.77	8.82 (16%)
31.8.1985	9.03	9.03	5.96 (12%)
31.8.1984	1.24	1.24	—

G. **Summarised financial position of the Company as appearing in the audited Balance Sheet:**

Liabilities	(Rs.inLacs) As at 31.8.86	As at 31.8.85	Assets	(Rs.inLacs) As at 31.8.86	As at 31.8.85
Share Capital	69.79	49.64	Fixed Assets	88.80	20.59
Reserves & Surplus	7.90	3.24	Investments	2.25	—
Secured Loans	157.73	94.55	Current Assets & Loans and Advances	369.64	242.37
Unsecured Loans	114.26	39.05	Miscellaneous Expenditure	10.66	4.62
Current Liabilities & Provisions	121.67	81.10			
	471.35	267.58		471.35	267.58

Contingent Liabilities : Nil

H. **The Company can raise by way of deposits under the Non-Banking Financial Companies (Reserve Bank) Directions, 1977 - Rs.670.32 lacs and the aggregate of Fixed Deposits held as on 31.8.86 is Rs.114.26 lacs.**
I. **The Company has no overdue deposits.**
J. **The Company hereby declares that:**

1. The Company has complied with the provisions of the Non-Banking Financial Companies (Reserve Bank) Directions,1977 as amended to date.
2. The compliance with the directions does not imply that repayment of deposits is guaranteed by Reserve Bank of India.
3. The deposits accepted by the Company are unsecured and rank pari passu with other unsecured liabilities.

This advertisement is issued on the authority and in the name of the Board of Directors of the Company and was approved by a Resolution dated 15.04.87.

A copy of the advertisement duly signed by the majority of Directors of the Company has been filed with Reserve Bank of India - Bangalore.

By order of the Board
For **KOTHARI ORIENT LEASING AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED**
G. MOHAN DAS
COMPANY SECRETARY

Madras
15-04-1987

Deposit application forms can be had from the Company's Administrative Office at:
"Kothari Annexe", 6 Village Road (Facing Nungambakkam High Road), Madras - 600 034. Phone: 474602

And also from the following Brokers:

ALPHA FINANCIAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES,Kamala Arcade, Ground Floor, 669, Mount Road, Thousand Lights, Madras 600 006 ● **BAJAJ CAPITAL & INVESTMENT CENTRE PRIVATE LIMITED**, 829, Mount Road, Madras 600 002.Phone: 811646 ● **H L FINANCIAL CONSULTANTS & MANAGEMENT SERVICES SOUTH INDIA (P) LIMITED**, 12, North Crescent Road, Madras 600 017 ● **INTEGRATED ENTERPRISES**, No.1, Shree Flats, 42, Motilal Street, T.Nagar, Madras 600 017.Phone: 447830 ● **UNIVERSAL FINANCE TRADERS LIMITED**, 157, Linghi Chetty Street, Madras 600 001.Phone: 28567, Continental Chambers, 142, Nungambakkam High Road, Madras 600 034.Phone: 478607

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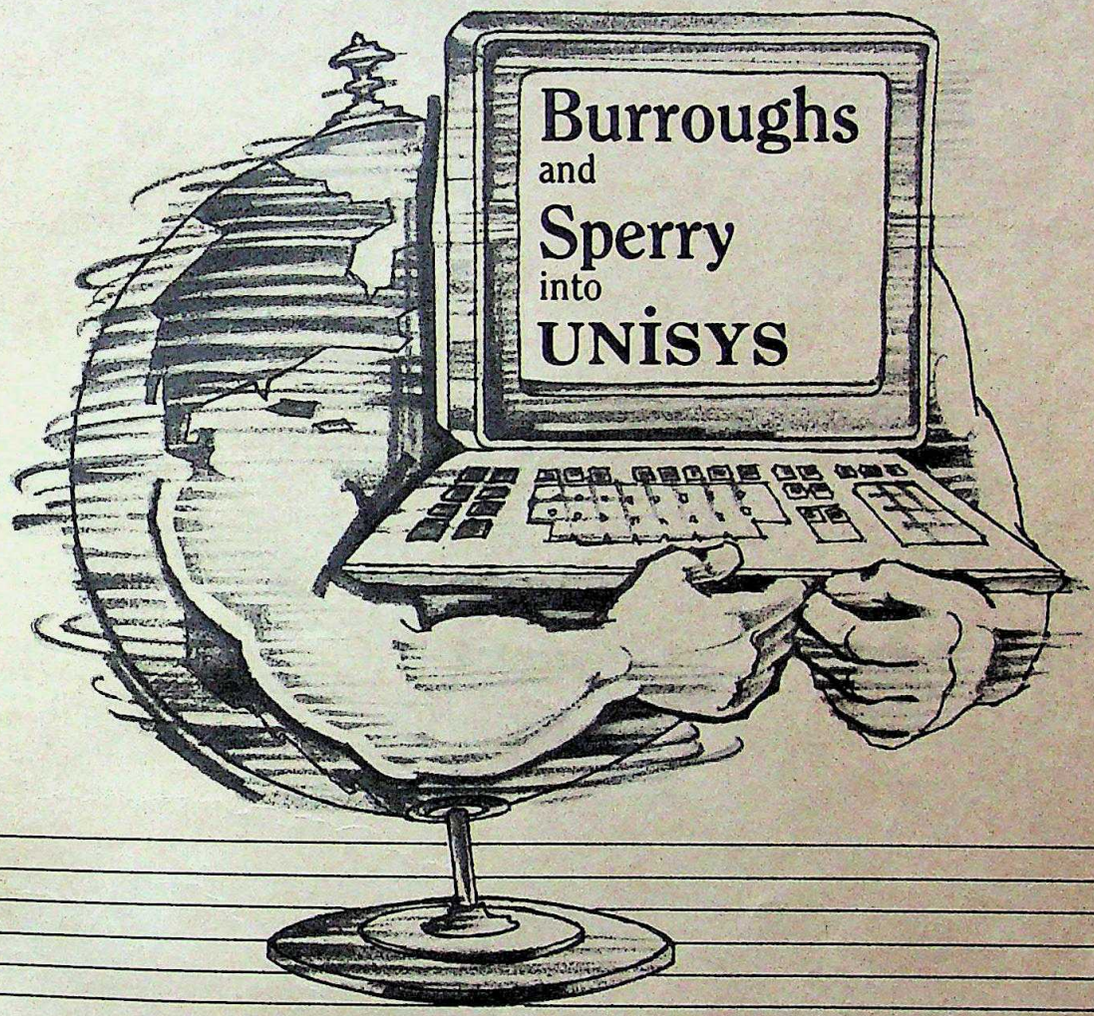
Following the merger of two computer giants



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The association with **UNISYS** would mean greater technical resources; a boost to our constant endeavour to provide products and services that are truly state-of-the-art; and access to new markets.

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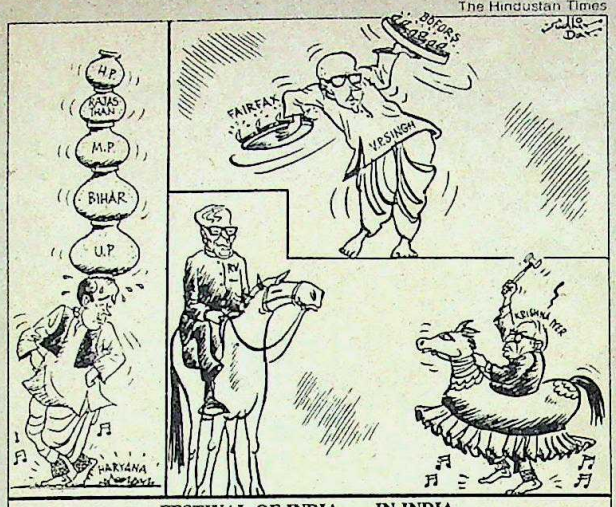
The Hindustan Times



FESTIVAL OF INDIA. . . IN INDIA.

● *The battle in Haryana has been won. Now it is the turn of Delhi.*
■ DEVI LAL, chief minister of Haryana, addressing the Victory Rally in Delhi

● *I lack the temperament for the electoral fray. I am a sad man.*
■ V.R. KRISHNA IYER, opposition presidential candidate, in *Patriot*

● *Gandhi begins to look like his testy and authoritarian mother, but without her cunning.*
■ COMMENT in *The New York Times*

● *The party is God.*
■ KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI in *The Times of India*

● *It (Rajiv's visit to Russia) should be called the festival visit. But given the Moscow-inspired volte face by the Left which wrecked the conspiracy to overthrow the Rajiv Gandhi Government in the last week of June, this might well be called the thanksgiving visit.*
■ M.J. AKBAR in *The Telegraph*

● *The Gorkhas are treated like animals in a zoo.*
■ SUBHAS GHISING in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *We have been trained in Parliament how to answer questions without giving away information.*
■ V.P. SINGH in *Indian Express*

● *You (Rajiv) have distracted yourself from the popular policy of secularism and compromised with communal and divisive forces.*
■ ARIF MOHAMMAD KHAN in a letter to Rajiv Gandhi published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *We also have brains. We understand our problems better than they (China and USSR) do.*
■ JYOTI BASU quoted in *The Telegraph*

● *People tell me that I have been too much of a democrat. They want me to be more strict.*
■ RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE in *The Week*

● *Terrorism cannot be wished away by giving us six months or one year.*
■ J.F. RIBEIRO in *Sunday*

● *For 40 years no one thought Rajiv Gandhi was good looking—the moment he became prime minister every girl thinks he's fantastic.*
■ AKBAR AHMED (DUMPY) in *Society*

● *I am paid to make faces before the camera.*
■ RISHI KAPOOR in *Sunday Review*

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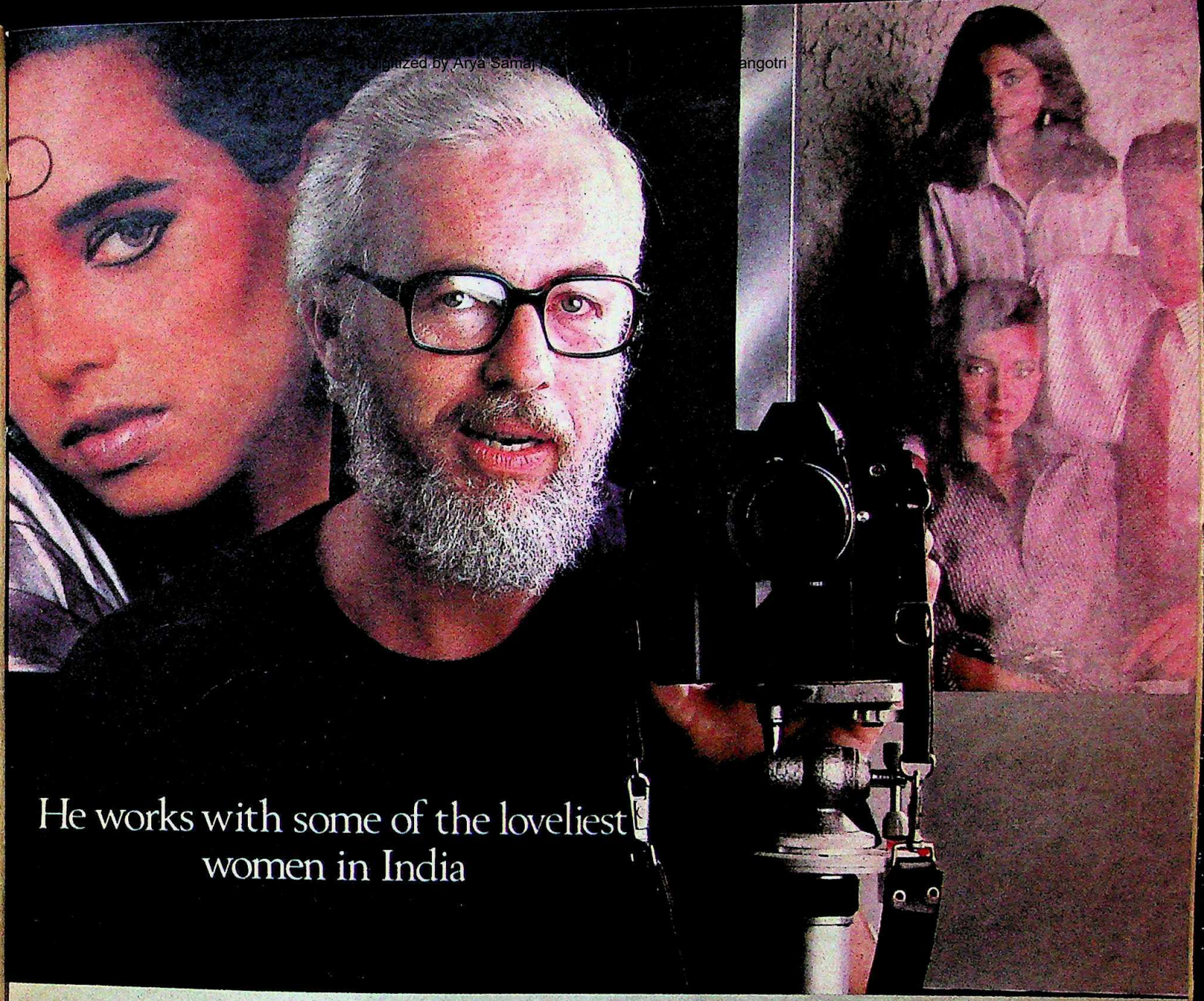

He works with some of the loveliest women in India

One photograph by Glamour Photographer Adrian Steven, says more about a beautiful woman than a thousand words.

Adrian transforms the fashion model from a mere clotheshorse to a warm, intelligent, exciting woman, one who celebrates the glamorous life. That she is beautiful to boot merely adds to her desirability.

With what does Adrian work his wizardry?

A battery of cameras, though his favourite format is the 35mm, which he says gives him the sharpest results.

I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica colour film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film, Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

Konica
SR-V 100
COLOR FILM & PRIN

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WHILE YOU'RE READING THIS MAGAZINE, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL RESOURCE COMPANIES IS HARD AT WORK AROUND THE WORLD.

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Australia's largest company is also one of the world's most active oil explorers. In Australia BHP satisfies over 30% of the country's oil needs and conducts an ongoing exploration programme. It is a joint venture participant in Australia's biggest natural resource project, the North West Shelf LNG Project, and created history with the establishment of the Jabiru mooring to supply oil from its Timor Sea wells.

BHP Petroleum is also one of the largest independent oil companies in the United States with production and exploration in fourteen states, and in the Gulf of Mexico. Its oil exploration is worldwide – Papua New Guinea, the North Sea, North Africa, Canada and South America.

In addition to petroleum, BHP produces copper and gold in Canada, iron ore in Brazil, and is one of Australia's largest coal and gold producers.

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Last year BHP lifted worldwide sales by 20% to US$5.5 billion, and profit by 30%.

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BHP

Australia's International Resources Enterprise

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In Hong Kong you can find more fun, more variety and more excitement packed into one cosmopolitan city than anywhere else on earth.

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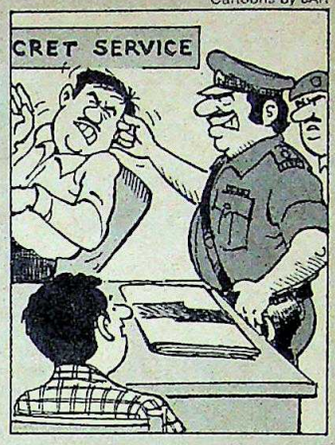
Cartoons by JAR



■ One man's meat is another man's poison. When one enterprising conman recently got clean away with the loot from a famous jeweller's shop in Bombay, others of his ilk thought they'd duplicate the act. Familiarity, however, not only breeds contempt, it can also excite suspicion.

A trio in Chickmagalur in Karnataka decided to cash in on the new wave. The kingpin, Krishnamurthy, had a fool-proof heist—but they needed more accomplices. Undeterred, he put out an ad in the papers to recruit local lads in the "All India Secret Services"—enticing them by the high ideals of defending god and country.

Fired by the thought of noble deeds, the recruits came for the "interview" in eager droves. But one fellow turned out to be rather more security-conscious than his prospective bosses. Puzzled by their shady demeanour, he decided he wanted no more to do with the racket.

Slinking away, he headed to the nearest phone and tipped off the cops. And while Krishnamurthy and Co were about to congratulate themselves on a well-screened afternoon, they found themselves picked up and put away by their own pistol-happy role-models.

FORTUNATE FATE

■ With the present government laying stress on state of the art technology and computer-culture, everywhere one would have expected miracle-makers and mystics to resign themselves to a fortuneless fate. But spiritual powers can still bring forth material gains, as a village astrologer recently exhibited.

Sarojkumar Acharya, a revered astrologer in a village in West Bengal, liked not only to predict the moods of the celestial powers, but also those of the earthly ones—especially in matters that could benefit his local co-inhabitants. Deeply distressed by the lack of health facilities in his village, he decided to undertake some psephological calculations—though in the traditional manner of divination—in the hope that the same could be provided.

Predicting that the communist party would win an absolute majority in the state elections, Acharya extracted a promise from the chief minister that should his forecast materialise, he would be rewarded with a medical centre for his village. Needless to say, the fates obliged with a landslide victory, and a brand new village health centre, courtesy the sooth-sayer.

TALL TALK

■ Silence is golden, they say, but speech is what makes a mark in the record books, as one gentleman from Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu's South Arcot district recently proved. Fifty-four years old, but as spritely as one considerably younger, S. Jayaraman demonstrated he was in fine fettle when he took off on an as yet unprecedented and titanic talkathon.

And it took him all of nine days to accomplish this tongue-twisting feat. For 200 hours, Jayaraman spoke—sometimes softly and sometimes loud—of mice and men, of cabbages and kings, of this and that. And through this long monologue, those who made the whole thing possible were the friends, Indians, countrymen, who lent him their ears, kept their patient counsel and listened.

Well, to cut a long story short, he managed it. To get into that Mecca of all record-seekers, the Guinness Book of Records. The speaking supremo recently received the ultimate accolade from the assistant director of Guinness, confirming that he would be soon starring as a certified record-holder. Now, Jayaraman is planning to make a trip to the US—this time for a 300-hour non-stop talk. Hope he gets enough listeners there as well.

SMELLY CHASE

■ Appearances may be deceptive—and so may be smells. Not, of course, in the case of the Bhopal gas leak disaster, where the spreading fumes spelt death. But after that horrific incident, the citizens of Bhopal have, understandably, acquired extremely sensitive smelling powers. The slightest unusual whiff has them crying foul fumes—most often in false alarm.

Consequently, the local cops have been on round-the-clock duty on suspected gas leak calls, and usually end up pacifying the panicky populace. Recently, the Kazipura police station was jolted awake at 1 a.m. when terror-stricken residents invaded it en masse, screaming of a smelly leak from a house nearby.

Smelling foul play, the sub-inspector on duty rushed his posse to the site. Clad in heavy suits and gas masks, and flashing torches, they gingerly began following their noses towards the strange odour. Holding their breath, as they got closer and closer, they all considered deserting the cause. Then, they came upon it—a rotting rat. Which just goes to show—the nose knows less than what it smells!

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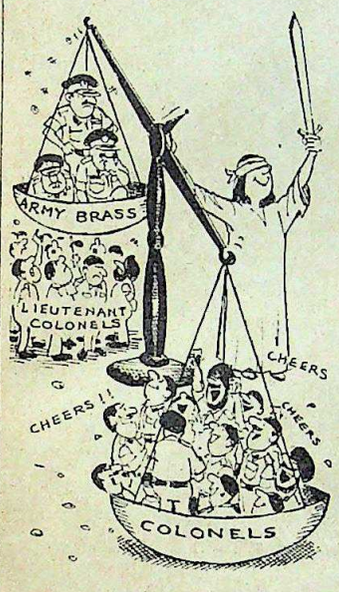
Scheme Backfires

● What looked like a sound management scheme for upper echelon army officers has backfired because of legal hurdles. A few months ago, army headquarters decided that it would classify officers of the rank of colonel and above into two categories—those fit for



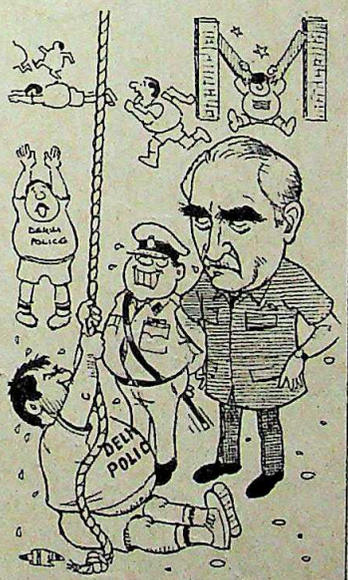
staff and administrative duties and those fit for field command posts. Accordingly, more than 100 officers were divided up and promoted into field and staff jobs.

But officers didn't know that, while the field jobs carried guaranteed future promotions, the staff jobs were a dead-end leading to early retirement. Senior staff officers filed a writ petition stating that the new policy amounted to a change of rules in the middle of the game, and that they hadn't anticipated it when they joined the army.

The Union Law Ministry advised the army brass that the official position was untenable and that all officers would have to be promoted according to rules. Meaning that the army will have to think of promoting all the more than 100 officers to even higher posts this year. This is way above the normal quota of about 25 promotions in a year in this category. If the promotions go through, the senior positions will be blocked for years. There is bound to be more demoralisation, as officers below the rank of colonel will now have to wait many years for promotion.

Trim Force

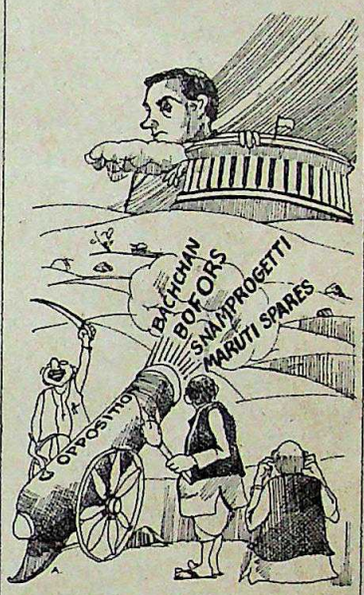
● Pot-bellies are out, exacting physical fitness is in, according to a no-nonsense circular issued to the capital's police force by none other than Lt-Governor, H.K.L. Kapur, a former air marshal who himself maintains a trim and dapper figure years after his retirement. He wants to ensure that there are no slovenly and overfed cops on Delhi's police force. "In the changing security environment, there is need to ensure that the members of our police force maintain the highest standards of physical fitness," wrote Kapur after a recent inspection in which he found much to his dismay that too many cops had become afflicted by rotund mid-sections.



Henceforth, all officers and men of Delhi police will undergo physical proficiency tests every March in which they will be assessed for both fitness and weight control. And the results will form a part of their annual confidential report. From now onwards Delhi police officials have to shape up or ship out.

Explosive Session

● A hubub of excitement, tinged with uncertainty and foreboding, has the nation's capital in its grip. The talk among politicians and in the cocktail circuit invariably focuses on the upcoming session of Parliament, scheduled to start on July 27, which promises to be explosive. Members of the opposition, leaders with the active help and support of Congress(I) dissidents as well as disgruntled senior bureaucrats are getting ready to fire volleys of embarrassing and incriminating barbs at Rajiv Gandhi and his government. Scandal upon scandal—Bofors, Gujarat Fertilisers, Maruti spares, the Bachchan brothers, Snamprogetti, Airbus Industrie—will pile up and Ram Jethmalani's questions will acquire an even sharper cutting edge. Even more ominous for the government, teams of *Indian Express* reporters, who have been sleuthing in Italy and Switzerland, will begin filing even more startling exposes on Rajiv's family and friends to co-incide with the parliamentary session. And the internecine battle within the Congress(I) now heating up will come to a bubble as the prime minister carries out the most comprehensive Cabinet and party shake-up in which ministers, chief ministers and important party bigwigs will be shuffled like a pack of cards at the Mad Hatter's tea party. In the capital, July will go down as the hottest political month of the year.



Come-back

● Just when many had virtually written off Sarla Grewal, secretary to the prime minister, as someone who didn't really count for very much in South Block, and as someone who was on her way out in September (at the end of her two-year extension), the lady has made a come-back. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is suddenly referring files to her that were previously routed past her. And more than ever before, he is relying on her abilities as a trouble-shooter.

Grewal herself has become a changed person overnight. From the nervous officer whose doubtful future was almost a subject of banter in the prime minister's office—and also a subject of frequent gossip in the press—she is now more her normal, assertive self. And everyone around, it would seem, has got the message. It now, however, remains to be seen whether she will stay on as secretary to the prime minister or will make way for someone else come September.

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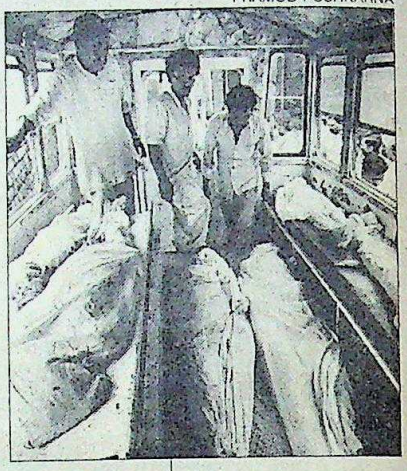
Unease and Uncertainty

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



The frightening toll in the bus massacres showed that terrorism has no borders.

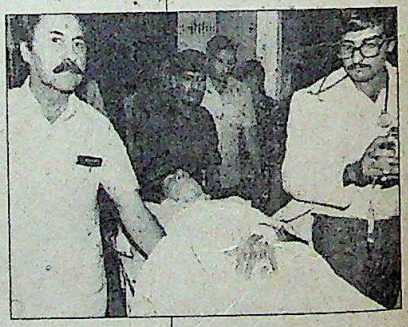
THE calamitous coils of terrorism circled the fortnight that was in constrictive embrace and brought the country face to face with the venomous fangs of its reality. The frightening toll of last fortnight's bus massacres in Punjab and Haryana—and the ease with which they were executed—was a sobering reminder that terrorism knows no borders. It was also, more importantly, a brutal demonstration of its capacity to undermine public morale and faith in the law and order machinery—the classic terrorist objective.

But what gave the fortnight a more nightmarish tinge was the other classic terrorist objective—the guilt-edged invitation to a violent backlash against the Sikh community. For the first time since the dark days of November 1984, north India trembled on the verge of that dangerous destructiveness as state after state shut down as an expression of its outrage. That the violence was sporadic and contained is, ironically, an indication that the national awareness of the terrorist threat has grown—and matured.

APN Photo

The Soviet response to the Festival of India was a message of support to Rajiv Gandhi.

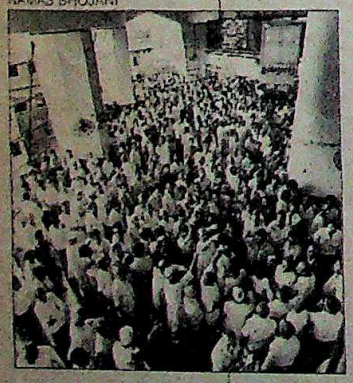
Tragically, the same cannot be said for the Government and the multiple anti-terrorist agencies under its control. The conditioned official response ("This is the desperate act of desperate men") no longer contains the clause of conviction. The barriers and check-posts that are now as common as street signs on Delhi's roads, the hastily-assembled inter-state conferences on terrorism are the knee-jerk reactions of a government undecided on what its response should be. And in Punjab under President's rule, the sounds of mourning are no less muted than before.



With Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan's slipping into a coma, a legend was coming to an end.

Meanwhile, the shadow of death stalked other corridors, but in respectful silence as the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, lay on a Delhi hospital bed, his frail link with life ebbing away with each passing day. There was sorrow and sadness that a legend was ultimately coming to an end, that a giant of a man should end his days in pain and immobility, surrounded by numerous strangers.

NAMAS BHOJANI



The take-over of the stock-market by the bulls was reason to cheer.

Strangers were eventually what endowed the fortnight with its brighter moments as the mammoth Festival of India bloomed in Moscow and thousands of Russians were given their first authentic taste of *biryani* and Bharatnatyam. But the dazzling diversity of India's cultural Woodstock and, more precisely, the official Soviet response to the festival was ultimately overshadowed by the powerful political message of support for Rajiv Gandhi from the Kremlin.

But in the end, the Mikhail and Rajiv show was a temporary interlude, quickly snowed under the snowballing problems that Rajiv faces back home. In communal flash-points like Meerut and Delhi's walled city, the outbreak of violence and tension showed that the situation was still at ignition point. And, in the once peaceful hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, the siren song of separatism seemed to be attracting a more militant following. The Gorkhaland agitation, in its increasingly violent manifestation, is fast acquiring the classic contours of yet another potential terrorist movement. And, in another hill resort, Shillong, the calling out of the army meant that the agitation against non-tribals led by Bull Lyngdoh is picking up menacing momentum.

Still, it was a bull that brought much-needed cheer as the stock-market finally extricated itself from the bear-pit and prices started climbing back to more normal levels. But that was, tragically, one of the few rays of sunshine in a fortnight clouded over with unease and uncertainty.

—DILIP BOBB

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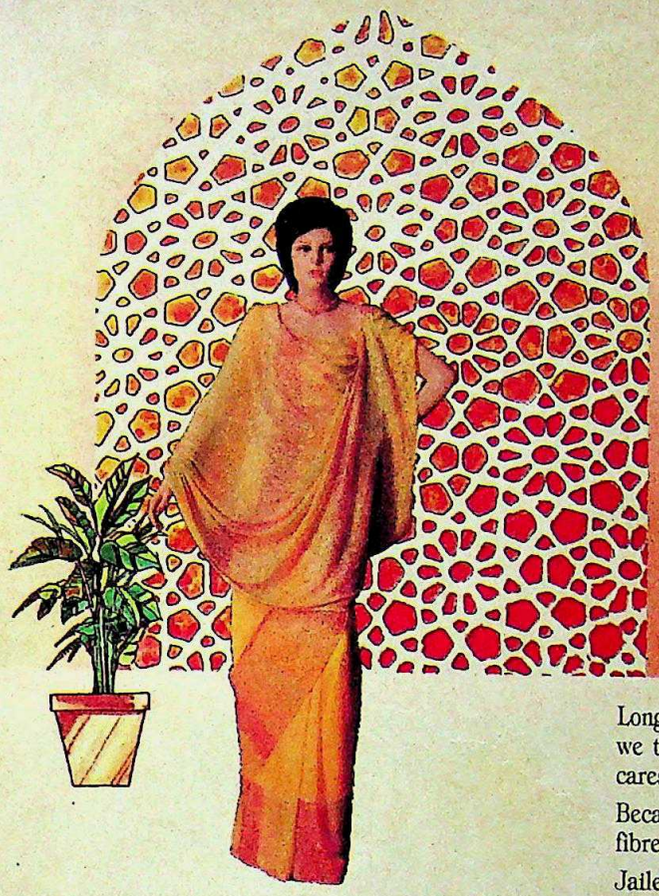

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FESTIVAL OF INDIA

Cultural Diplomacy

Last fortnight's Festival of India in Moscow was a unique event, in more ways than one. Despite the inevitable glitches, the dazzling range of India's cultural offerings gave the Soviet people a once-in-a-lifetime glimpse into an exotic kaleidoscope. But in the end, it was really from Russia with love. The Soviets pulled out all traditional stops to ensure the festival's success and to give Rajiv Gandhi an unprecedented welcome. In the bargain, they sent a powerful political message that has considerable significance for the bilateral relationship and India's domestic politics. Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN reports from Moscow.

Performers on the barge, in gorgeous colours, bring the Moskva river alive to the sights and sounds of India

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AROON PURIE

WHEN the Kremlin bells chime the hour of nine each night, 200 million Soviets turn to their television sets for prime time news—*Vremia*. On July 3, there was no *Vremia* at that hour. It had been advanced so that the mammoth inaugural opening of the Festival of India in Moscow's Lenin Stadium (capacity: 1,30,000) could be telecast live.

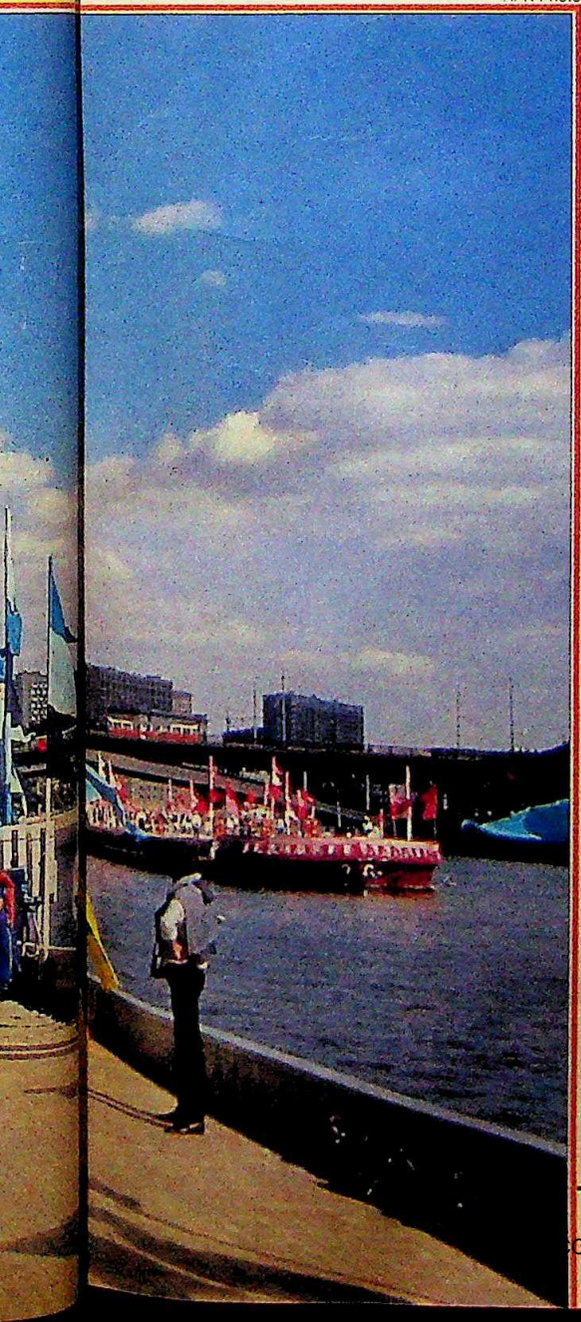
The message was loud and clear. The Kremlin has pulled out the stoppers, brushed aside previously unbreakable rules and set a dozen precedents which have left Kremlin-watchers gasping in disbelief and South Block patting itself on the back for the coup. Moscow is signalling to India and the world that India is a very special friend indeed.

It was a message literally straight from the heart. For the Soviets, the Kremlin is the heart of their country, a symbol of their patrimony almost. The significance of the unprecedented gesture of offering the Cathedral Square—perhaps the innermost sanctum of the Kremlin, where in Czarist times monarchs were crowned and the patriarchs buried—for the formal kick-off of the year-long festival would not be missed.

The live telecast ensured it did not. Rare is the look-in into this fairy-tale world with its onion-shaped, blindingly golden cathe-

Gorbachev and Rajiv, Raisa and Sonia in Cathedral Square (below), and Rajiv kisses a Russian girl: significant gestures

APN Photo



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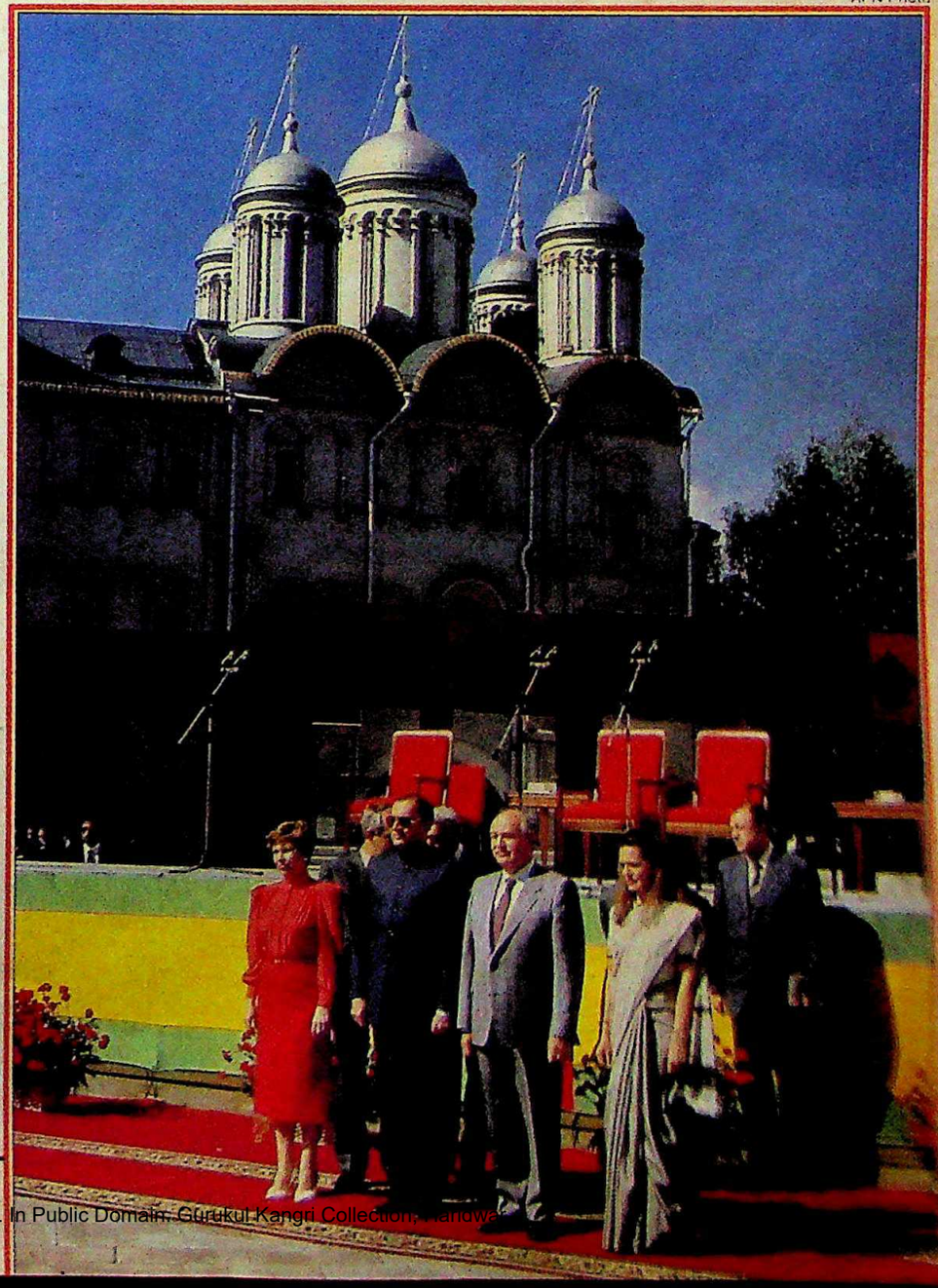

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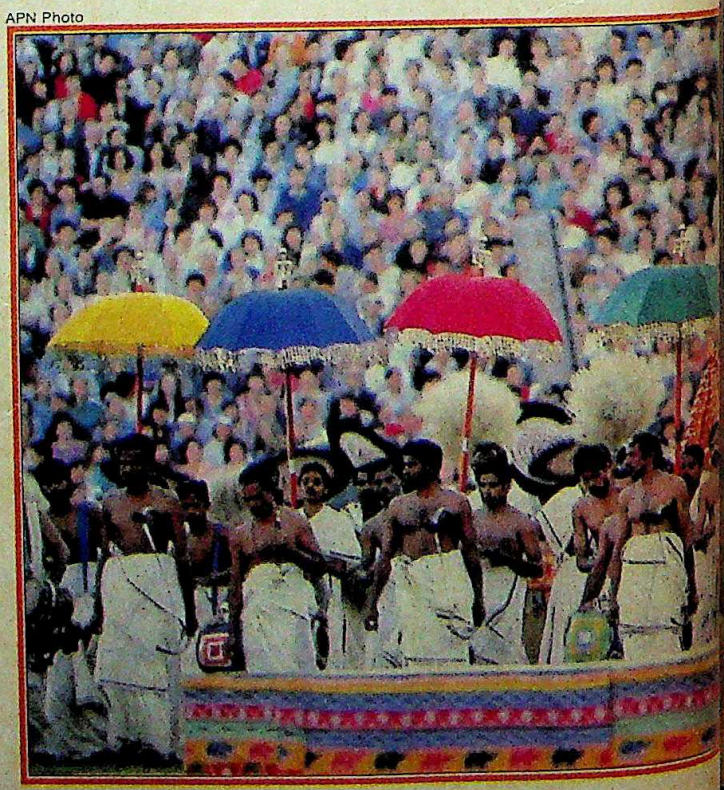

Overview of the Lenin Stadium; and (below right) close-up of the artistes: *Apna Utsav* in Russia

dral domes and the overpowering Ivan the Great bell tower and belfry framing a square in which time appears to have stood still.

The festival opening took off in two stages. Cathedral Square was the *Diwan-e-Khaas*: Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sat side by side on two high-backed red chairs on a podium, Raisa and Sonia on smaller ones to their sides, a bit like two royal couples being paid homage by the privileged courtiers assembled in that hallowed space (into which, incidentally, M.S. Subbalakshmi almost did not get in for lack of proper documents and sitarist Imrat Khan was turned back for the same reason). Purple, green and orange Kanjeevaram saris dominated the square while Sanskrit *shlokas* (verses) filled the air, and Subbalakshmi's voice rose toward the domes. The three little kisses Rajiv Gandhi pertly planted on the rouged cheeks of the beautiful blonde Russian girl after the bread and salt ceremony in Cathedral Square was the highlight of an otherwise solemn and precise ceremony.

The second stage was the *Diwan-e-Aam*, at the 'Indianised' Lenin Stadium, into which flowed the populace, all 1,00,000 of them in an unbelievably orderly tidal wave. Ostensibly, there appeared to be no real link between the hermetically sealed Cathedral Square and the stadium originally built in 1956 for the World Youth Congress.

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The real audience was television, the impulse behind it political. The only tenuous link between the two: the eight decorated 80-ft long barges with dancing performers, Republic Day floats, which leisurely made their way down the Moskva river to the Lenin Stadium, while thousands of people lined up along the banks to watch and cheer.

The festival really began when the barges landed. Until then it had been frozen in formality. When the barge with the Rajasthani women came to the bank, Soviet restraint and discipline suddenly evaporated. The Russians plunged into the middle of the performers and burst into dance. Others climbed the many statues and monuments in the vast gardens around the stadium to look at the barges. Over 50,000 people had gathered on the grounds for the *utsav*.

The enthusiastic crowd swarmed around the food stalls, the serpentine queues all hungry for *tandoori* chicken which ran out in a short while: only 23,000 people were fed. Strangely enough, the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), which supplied the *chana bhaturas*, *tandoori* chicken and *jalebis* to the food kiosks, manned by Russians, were not allowed to display the food: it is not done in the Soviet Union. The queues for Indian craft in beautifully-designed kiosks were only a little shorter. Leather bags (35 roubles for standard Janpath fare) and jewellery were among the more popular items.

Apna Utsav suddenly turned into *Unka* (their) *Utsav*, as the crowd swayed along with the drummers, pipers and dancers. The sprightly *Gidda* dancers evoked unbridled response, the men wanted them to come down and dance with them on the streets.

The great Indian bazaar had worked. The Soviets had never seen anything like it. And fortunately, the collective work of over 5,000 Indian craftsmen, coordinated by design consultants Raghunath Goswami and Archana Mehta, and orchestrated by designer Dasrath Patel, who organised the whole jamboree, managed to transplant a vibrant part of India to Moscow.

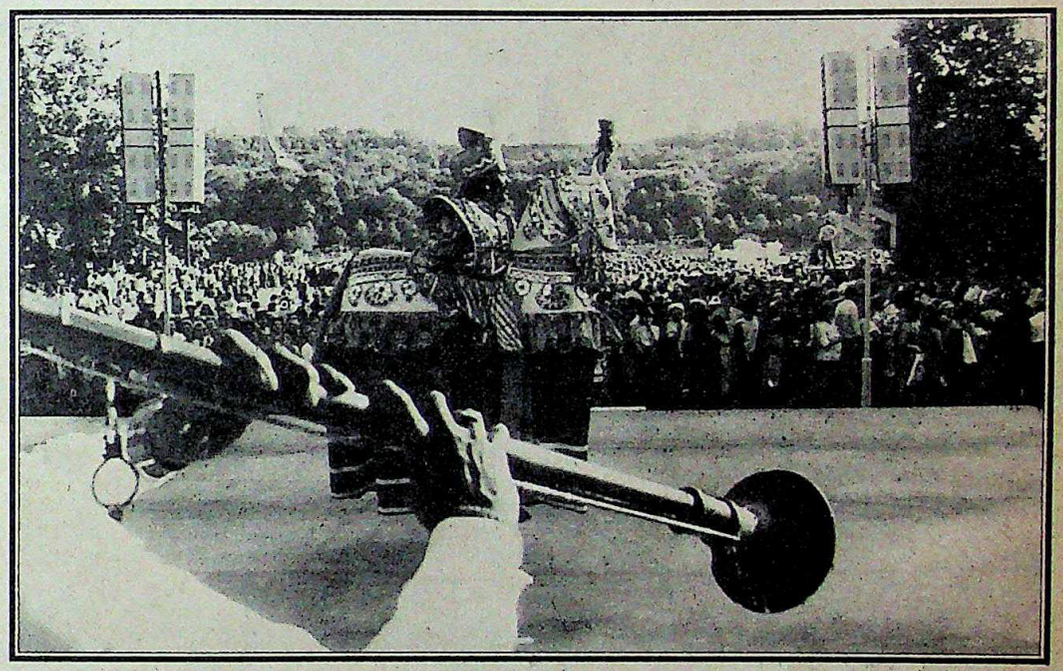
The Indians had truly conquered the Lenin Stadium and made it a part of India for a brief spell: 11 massive 27-metre high gates almost camouflaged the rather imposing but stodgy stadium. From a distance, the *Shola Peeth* bamboo or cloth-covered gates had created another world of colour and fantasy. But inside the stadium, it was another story. The Soviets remained rooted to their seats, the stadium was like a gigantic pointillist painting of an ocean of still, unmoving people. But the hour-long show, which was supposed to be the pinnacle of the inauguration—ended up a poor cousin to the Asiad.

Fortunately, the Soviets did not notice or pretended not to. The colours and percussion were, of course, exotic for them, and they are a polite race. But the fact that hardly anybody from that 1,00,000 left was proof enough that the show, watched by both Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi, was a success.

Unfortunately, the stadium was too large, the scale too grand for the 15,000 performers. Sadder still was the fact that backstage bickering had almost spoiled the show. Two of the three choreographers, National School of Drama Director Ratan Thiyyam, and Kovalan Panikker walked out of the show a few days before it began. Both said they could no longer work with their choreographer, Chandralekha, who had also choreographed the Namaskaram dance inside the Cathedral Square.

GRUMBLED an angry Thiyyam: "They asked me to cue like a cue master. I have never worked in my life under such pressure, being ordered: do this, do that." Panikker was more annoyed: "They sent me out of the stadium, they only wanted me to look after the *Utsav* outside. We were made to work with strait-jackets and performers treated like guinea pigs."

The grumblings reverberated outside as well. It is a miracle that the show went on at all. Designer Dasrath Patel was beside himself with anger about the arrangements and the odds he had to fight against. The performers came as late as July 1: two days before the opening, some did not even have passes to get into the stadium for rehearsals. Nor, he complained, did they get the stadium to give them enough time to practise.



A folk-dancer in Moscow: enthusiastic reception

The biggest problem was to fit Indian spontaneity into the rigid confines of the stadium and its sound and lighting systems. "We wanted six sound systems and varied lightings, but they only had uniform systems. They told us that if we had two kinds of music there would be cacophony. Here, whether the dancers are Ukranian or Armenian they can dance to the same tune." Obviously, the Russians were not playing our song.

The worst casualty was film director G. Aravindan's 17-minute film, which was cut to about six minutes by the Soviet organisers. The film, with its beautiful images of festivals and people would have—had it been properly projected—provided what was missing. It begins with the sun following people travelling to festivals and ends with the moon. But the giant eight-ft screens only succeeded in dwarfing the performers, nor were the screening and the sound right. In Moscow, there was still daylight at 11 p.m. and the images lost their depth, poignancy and colour. Sound is obviously not a good meeting ground for the Soviets and the Indians, for the magnificent voice of the *sutradhar* which resonated throughout the stadium

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at the start was disembodied and nobody could see him. Nor could anybody hear the variations of the garba or the ghungroo.

But in the end, all's well that ends well. The prima donnas of what was supposed to be the greatest show on earth were Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi, both at their histrionic best. With great elan, Gorbachev lifted Rajiv's hand and raised it along with his, *Hindi-Russi bhai-bhai* style. And when the Russian salute, used only on May Day and for the October Revolution, went off at the end of the show, the green, red and blue stars which blazed high into the sky, lingering before they faded, sent a thrill through the audience. The imperfections, frayed tempers and static choreography were quickly forgotten.

Vadim, 19, was ecstatic: "It is wonderful. I like everything." His eyes lit up the most, however, when he saw the decorated old truck in Aravindan's film. Vladimir, 22, thought it a "bright celebration". "I have always wanted to go to India, but could not. So I came here. And I like it." Boris liked the *sutradhar* and the procession: "For us, it is very curious, exotic, as you say."

For Nadia, an electrical engineering student, the fact that these were all folk artistes and not professionals was most interesting: "We have never seen so many Indians together." Ira, with her family of eight, had come from Azjerbijan to Moscow for the festival. "We love India. We are Muslims too. When I saw Raj Kapoor, I fell in love." But tastes have changed. Her grandson, Mohamad, 10, likes Dharmendra: "*Samrat*, nice film. I also like Hema Malini and Mithun Chakraborty."

What most Russians liked about the festival was its diversity. Despite the political closeness, Soviet exposure to Indian culture is largely limited to films. The inaugural events showed them folk culture and art. Says Deputy Chairman of the Regional Council of Odessa, the Black Sea resort, Vladimir Cherasski: "I did not know how rich and diverse your folk music and art are."

Fortunately, the best was yet to be. The inauguration of the exhibition of classical art of India from 3,000 B.C. to the 19 century A.D. at Tvz Tretyakov Gallery went down well: 100 paintings and 90 pieces of sculptures sent by the National Gallery were beautifully displayed; arches and walls and alcoves had been created to give an Indian ambience.

THE concert at the 6,000-seat Kremlin Palace of Congresses was filled to capacity, and enthralled the Moscow audience with a dazzling range from M.S. Subbalakshmi to Bismillah Khan's *shehnai* and the Manipur dances, choreographed by the Jawaharlal Nehru Academy of Manipur dance. The concert went off without a false note. The elegantly-decorated stage provided a perfect backdrop.

But behind the show there had been some hard bargaining. Says National Museum Director Dr Laxmi Sihare: "I was like a *bania* arguing with another bania. I started with the Rublev icons and the Michelangelo in the Hermitage. If they sent them, we would send the Didarganj Yakshi and other masterpieces." In the end, Sihare simply refused to dispatch the items until the Russians signed on the dotted line. They are now sending Raphael's *Holy Family*, a Botticelli, a Titian and some of the Kremlin jewels.

Even the opening of *Delhi*, a new Indian restaurant and the first joint venture in the USSR, in uptown Moscow on July 4 was an unbridled success. Obviously, post-festival, food is going to be the music of better relations.

The festival was also a Trojan Horse of sorts. Smuggled inside are significant political messages. When Indira Gandhi Square was inaugurated in 1985, Gorbachev did not accompany Rajiv. For the unveiling of the little over 2 metre high bronze statue of Mrs Gandhi, not only did Gorbachev and his wife escort the Gandhis, but he paid a warm tribute to the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Gorbachev stole the show again when he was introduced to Bismillah Khan who later played an enchanting *Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram*. Said the gregarious Gorbachev: "Of course I know. I have his tapes and they transport me to another world."

MOSCOW

A Tighter Bear Hug

IT was as if a troubled nephew had come to his uncle for solace. And the uncle didn't disappoint him. In a display of overweening avuncular solicitude during the 36-hour visit, he closed his shop (which is the greatest power centre in the world), had almost every meal together and attended every function with his young guest. Russian supremo Mikhail Gorbachev and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hit it off like a house on fire. Their chumminess flew in the face of the well-known dictum of diplomacy that countries have no permanent friends, only permanent interests.

They spent over six hours together in one-on-one discussions—a record. Gorbachev admitted he had not done this with any other foreign leader. Then there followed an unprecedented invitation to Rajiv for a private dinner at Gorbachev's dacha. An Indian spokesman had said that the talks were marked with 'unusual warmth and openness'. Perhaps they were too open, as Gorbachev demonstrated at an impromptu press conference. When asked whether they had discussed India's internal situation, he replied; "We discussed everything on earth," thereby lending credence to the theory that Rajiv had gone to Moscow to seek support to tackle his domestic woes. One accompanying journalist dubbed the trip a "thanks-giving visit" in return for the role played by India's communist parties in sabotaging the efforts of the combined opposition to make Zail Singh their presidential nominee.

Rajiv had obviously anticipated these barbs. He went out of

Enjoying a joke together: friends in need

APN Photo

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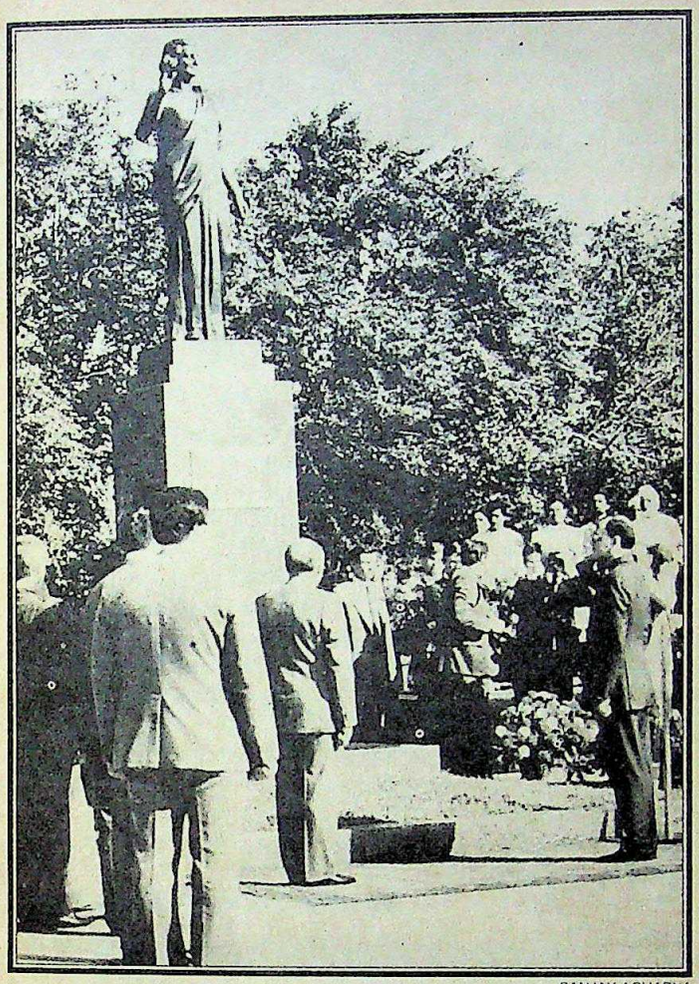

SANJAY ACHARYA

Gorbachev and Rajiv unveil Mrs Gandhi's statue: paying tribute

Rajiv Gandhi, away from the heat of Delhi, political and otherwise, did not do too badly, basking apparently in the effusive warmth and special gestures Gorbachev laid out during Rajiv's 36 hours in Moscow. There were many firsts in this festival, things the Soviets had never done for any other country. But political significance is being given in informed circles to the fact that a lunch was hosted for him at the multi-faceted chamber in the Kremlin. The gesture is important because it has never been opened to a foreign dignitary like this. Moreover, present at the lunch, for which the invitation went out from the Soviet leadership and not Gorbachev alone—was the entire politbureau and the alternate politbureau. The collective invitation was a message to indicate that the Soviet Union would back the young Indian prime minister through the turbulence ahead. The significance of the special gestures was not lost on the Soviets. For Vladimir Cherasski, it confirmed that "now we are at the peak of the friendship". As for the people, Rajiv Gandhi has found top billing on the starry horizon. "He is so beautiful," gushed Nina, whose heroes include Amitabh and Mithun Chakraborty.

Moscow is only the beginning. Some 130 cities and small towns will be covered by the Festival—the cliche India of maharajas, poverty and bullock-carts, Raj Kapoor and Amitabh Bachchan is to be superimposed by a modern India and a modern youth. Trains will take 'youths' (a new buzz word) all over.

Even the gods did not fail the Indians and the Soviets. Dark, clouds sat menacingly over Moscow in the two days before the inauguration, but suddenly, almost mysteriously, it cleared up. The Soviets joked, but only half in jest, that rockets with crystals had been sent to shoot them away. The joke is not an empty one: this was done before the last Olympics and the youth festival. For a while, at least, Gorbachev also succeeded in shooing away the dark clouds looming over Rajiv's political horizon.

his way to protest that no discussion on India's internal situation had taken place. In a midnight press briefing, on the plane during the return journey, he said: "Mr Gorbachev spent more time telling you about it than we talked." He reaffirmed this on landing in Delhi. It did little good. Political pundits were already drawing parallels between the current situation and Moscow and the left's support to Mrs Gandhi in 1969 and how India's self-respect and sovereignty had been compromised by such discussions. Rajiv had landed himself in another sticky situation. An otherwise successful trip had become suspect. Just how this forceful gesture of Soviet support will save Rajiv from his domestic troubles—defence payoffs and party dissidence—is debatable. More likely, it will blunt the criticism from the left and retard his economic liberalisation thrust.

More significantly, the Russians have obviously assessed that Rajiv Gandhi, despite his problems, is there to stay. This evaluation cannot be taken lightly as the Soviets are the best-informed foreigners about India. Their sources of information are not only widespread in India but extensive internationally coupled with awesome covert muscle. If there were any doubts about Rajiv, their reception of him would have been correct and formal and not as personally effusive and extraordinary as it was.

There is, too, a commonality of interests. The Soviet Union needs India as a friend—it doesn't have any major independent countries left in this category. And its recent attempts at a more even-handed policy in Asia have taken a knock with Pakistan's cold-shouldering of its move to discuss a political solution in Afghanistan. Pakistan does not seem inclined to ditch its traditional coziness with Uncle Sam. So, it is in Russia's interest, even if temporarily, to re-emphasize its special relationship with India. Similarly, India, faced by American intransigence on the supply of sophisticated weapons to Pakistan and tacit support of its nuclear programme, has little choice. Plus it suits both parties to talk about "destabilising forces", hinting darkly but surely at America. At a luncheon for the prime minister, Gorbachev sounded suspiciously like Rajiv: "We can see how without scruples in the choice of means, pressure is being put on India, how attempts are being made to destabilise the situation inside and around the country."

Amidst the speculation about the political implications, the enormity of the science and technology agreement signed during this visit was almost lost. It covers a wide array of subjects and is effective till the year 2000. Rajiv characterised it as a turning point and compared it to the Soviet assistance to India in the early '50s in setting up India's basic industries. But the most visible upshot was that Rajiv came back cheered, a bounce in his step, smile on his lips, and confidence on his brow. The Russian black magic seemed to have revived the beleaguered prime minister. The Moscow air even seemed to agree with the normally stiff Sonia who was unusually relaxed. And the best joke in the accompanying press party was: "Next time we come to Moscow, it will probably be for the signing of the Warsaw Pact."

—AROON PURIE in Moscow

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THE SPECTRE OF TERRORISM

At the heart of every terrorist action, there is a cause, a political goal, a perceived injustice or denial of liberty that is as concrete to the activist as any prime minister's notion of justice or freedom.

No political rhetoric can disguise this fact. No opponent of terrorism should forget this.

—STEPHEN SEGALLER
Invisible Armies, Terrorism into the 1990s

IN the mind's eye, he still stalks the land. The hawk nose, the brooding eyes, the silver spear, the priestly raiment and the pistol belt. And above all, the measured voice commanding the death-givers to go forth and destroy life and liberty. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale now belongs to terrorism's bleak and bloody history, but his image is still reflected in the others that continue to numb the Indian soul—the silent shrouds, the wailing widows, the uncomprehending orphans, blood on bus seats. All this, the legacy of one man, one distorted mind, one political Frankenstein.

For five years now, since the illiterate village preacher started delivering his sermons of hate, the lengthening shadow of terrorism has invaded the Indian consciousness like an invisible army and held it hostage to its feral ferocity. Yet, for most Indians outside Punjab, it has remained a distant disease, the only proximity being the daily body count in newspaper headlines. Last fortnight changed all that in large measure. The slaughter of 70 bus passengers in Punjab and Haryana in swift succession, suddenly brought Sikh terrorism into infinitely closer focus and exposed the real dimensions of the beast.

Last fortnight's incidents were easily the most destructive in the Indian context, but terrorism's toll has now gone beyond numbers, beyond rhetoric, beyond the expressions of sorrow and outrage, beyond Lone Rangers like Punjab Governor Ray and Director-General of Police Ribeiro. Not only were the massacres in Lalru and Fatehabad an outrageous example of the ease and enormity with which terrorists can strike, but a chilling reminder of the hair-trigger on which an even more destructive backlash really rests.

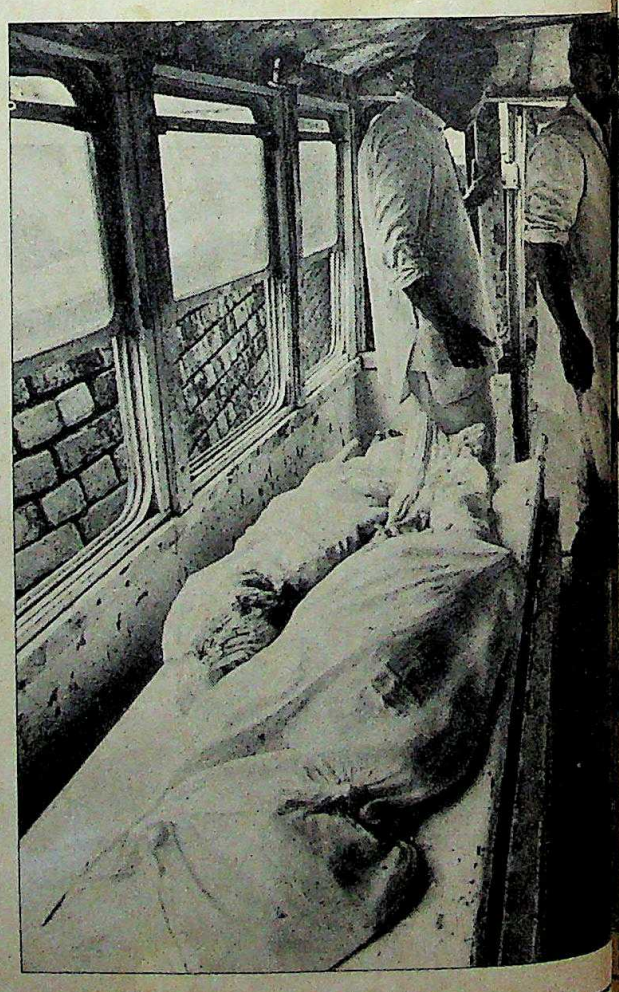
For two days after the massacres, northern India resurrected the ghastly images of November 1984, as state after state shut down in protest. In Himachal Pradesh, the army moved in to keep the lid on the boiling public mood. That the anti-Sikh violence was sporadic and quickly contained is no longer any consolation. The threat is now more terrifyingly real than ever before. More significantly, terrorism is no longer boxed and boundaried. Till last fortnight, the frontline responsibility lay with Ray and Ribeiro. Now, it lies with Rajiv Gandhi.

Whether that message has gone home forcefully enough is difficult to say. The day after the massacre in Haryana's Hissar district, Union Minister Bhajan Lal accused the new Lok Dal(B) Government in Haryana of encouraging terrorism, a message that was also conveyed by Home Minister Buta Singh. The urge to make political capital out of the incident is reprehensible—and revealing. Ribeiro's bullet-for-bullet campaign is only one weapon in the battle against terrorism. The bigger battle is the political one. As Segaller says: "Despite the best intentions of governments, action against terrorists is substantially hampered by every state's own network of political alliances."

The inevitable rhetorical condemnation of the massacres is as conditioned a response as the equally familiar line that any excessive terrorist killing occurs only because the terrorists are 'desperate' and on the run. But, as Professor Franco Ferracuti, adviser to the Italian Secret Service, SISMI, and one of the world's leading authorities on terrorism has warned, government assurances of having the terrorists 'on the run' and public statements that they will be crushed are seen by the terrorists as a challenge to their ingenuity. "Terrorists are not at all deterred by 'firm stands' taken by the state," he warns.

However, top-rung Indian officials dealing with terrorism seem outwardly convinced that the latest bus massacres were a response to the large number of

The slaughter of bus passengers exposed the true



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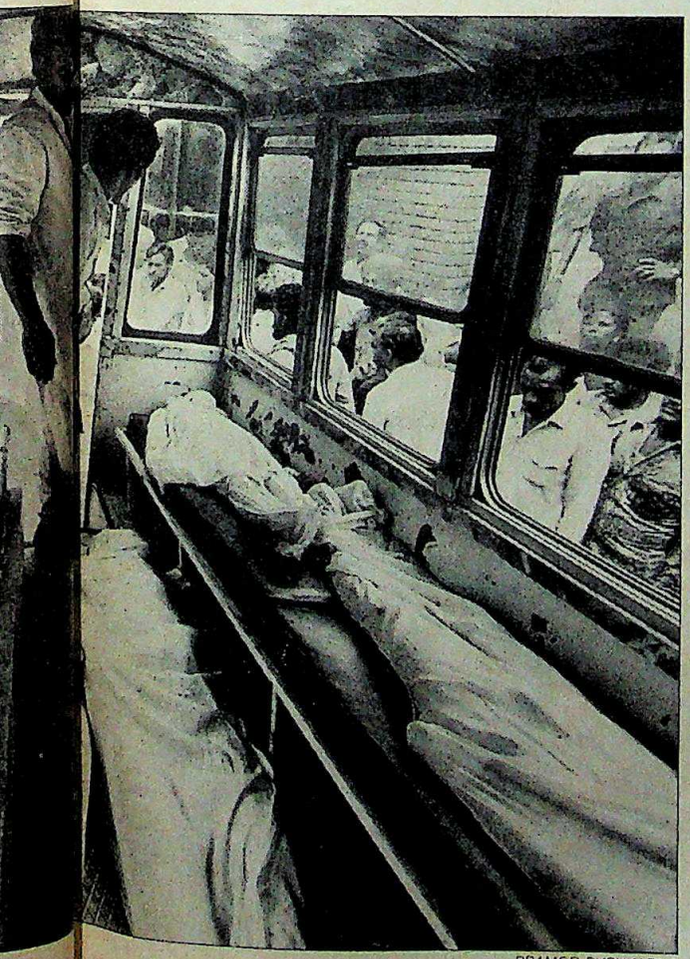
Terrorist acts have two levels of objectives. Tactically, the goal is publicity, and recognition of a purported goal or claim. For the terrorist with a cause to promote, the advertiser's apocryphal saying holds true: all publicity is good, and bad publicity is better than none.

suspects who have been arrested or killed in Punjab after the imposition of President's rule last May. According to one source, the number of people arrested for interrogation in the last two months is close to 2,000. Ribeiro claims that in the first month since President's rule, "We have killed or captured 404 terrorists."

But the numbers game is turning out to be a distorted propaganda exercise that, shorn of its political fur, cuts both ways. In the last 30 days, 223 persons have been killed by terrorists, an average of seven every day. One of the most convincing reasons given by the Centre for the dismissal of the Barnala government was that the number of terrorist killings had risen to 80 in April, the month before President's rule was enforced. But between May 11, the day the Barnala ministry was dismissed, and June 12, terrorist killings rose to 146, thus diluting the Government's argument.

On May 25, Ribeiro told a newspaper that there were only 100 armed terrorists left in Punjab. Three weeks later, on June 16, he stated: "In Punjab, the police has killed or captured 3,318 terrorists in the last 14 months. In one month since President's rule, we have killed or captured 404 terrorists." How 100 terrorists increased to 404 reflects either a total failure of police intelligence or the killing of suspects who obviously had not been previously identified as terrorists.

exposed the true dimensions of Sikh terrorism.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Clearly, the terrorist threat—and the Government's response—is a complicated minefield of options. So far, Sikh terrorism has evolved along classic lines, starting with selective targets, symbols of authority or government or representatives of law enforcement agencies (in the Indian context, the obvious departure has been the selective targeting of Hindus). The initial objective is what Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher terms "the oxygen of publicity" for the cause. This is followed by an extreme escalation in demands, and an attempt to terrorise the local population into covert support within the community for fear of retaliation. The next stage is fund-raising—through bank robberies and external sources, usually expatriate members of the community, as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has done so successfully through NORAID in America. As one international terrorist expert says: "The existence of this wider theoretical community often allows terrorists a (misplaced) sense of legitimacy; that they are taking up the cudgels on behalf of others whom opportunity or lack of courage prevents from doing so." The subsequent stage is the setting up of a parallel administration to settle local disputes, dispense "justice" and collect "taxes". This is followed by random, indiscriminate killings to pressure the "state-enemy" into some sort of compromise.

That the Khalistanis have reached this final stage is now evident. According to the classic patterns of international terrorism, any terrorist success immediately encourages similar or even more spectacular attempts. Senior intelligence officials are now convinced that the next logical targets will be outside Punjab and will include crowded buildings like airports, bus terminals, railway stations, cinema halls, shopping centres and auditoriums. As Minister of State for Internal Security P. Chidambaram stated last week: "The new phase in the terrorist campaign constitutes the gravest threat to our polity since Independence."

In acknowledgement of this, and in response to the bus massacres and the public outrage, the Government last week hastily convened an inter-state conference on coordinating anti-terrorist activity. The meeting, chaired by Cabinet Secretary B.G. Deshmukh, was attended by senior police and intelligence officials of seven north Indian states (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) and the two Union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh. Among the recommendations:

- the setting up of special anti-terrorist cells in the nine states and Union territories.
- upgrading of existing intelligence systems and more effective coordination

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with neighbouring states.

► increased highway patrolling and speedier methods of communication.

► tightening up of security at power stations, railway stations, airports, hospitals and cinema houses. Provision of armed guards on all buses plying at night in the entire northern region.

But in the face of the increasingly daring and high-profile killings by terrorists, most notably the recent massacre at an outdoor party in an exclusive South Delhi colony, the Government's reactions seem knee-jerk, after-the-event reflexes. Chidambaram himself has confirmed that the Indian Government was warned by an informer in Canada that terrorists were planning to attack a residential area in New Delhi on the eve of the Haryana elections. The warning, from a Sikh moderate who overheard the plot being discussed at a gurudwara in Ottawa, was conveyed to New Delhi by the Indian consulate. But by the time the coded message was deciphered and passed on to the Home Ministry, it was too late—the massacre had already taken place.

The result: Delhi today resembles a city under siege, with sandbagged police check posts and barriers on almost every road. That, paradoxically, only gives the terrorists added inspiration in the misplaced belief that they are winning their chosen war and have put the Government on the defensive. An international seminar on terrorism in 1984 pointed out: "If the terrorists survive the security response to their use of random violence, they will begin to enjoy a grandiose sense of their power, believing themselves to be the enemies and equals of the state."

That may already be the case. The tragedy of India's response to terrorism is that, so far, not a single Sikh extremist has been killed while committing an act of terrorism. Without that deterrent factor, the battle against terrorism will be one-sided and will encourage passive sympathisers to become active participants. "Why has the Government not agreed before this to post plainclothes policemen on buses, the logical target for terrorists? Even if the terrorists kill 10 people but get killed themselves, others will think twice about making a similar attempt. The action against terrorism has to be visible and a high-risk proposition for them," says a senior intelligence official. Unfortunately, so far, every so-called terrorist killed has been gunned down in an "encounter", which only adds weight to allegations about state terrorism and discrimination.

The battle against international terrorism has shown that the prevention of a terrorist act is of the greatest psychological value. That means the existence of a streamlined and sophisticated intelligence-gathering system. As Jean-Pierre Bourdier of the anti-terrorist French Intelligence Brigade says: "It's not by putting a guard in front of the door that you're going to stop the bomber from letting off his bomb. The thing is to infiltrate the terrorist network and to stop the terrorist before he plants his bomb."

The French Intelligence Brigade was set up at the end of 1985 precisely for that reason, and most states affected by the terrorist scourge have increased and sophisticated their intelligence-gathering and data collection capabilities in an attempt to create a net of information by which they can catch or identify a terrorist on the smallest tit-bit of forensic evidence. The best example is the West German Bundes Kriminal Amt (Federal Crime Office), whose computerised information database in Wiesbaden is a model network. Similarly, America's Fed-

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

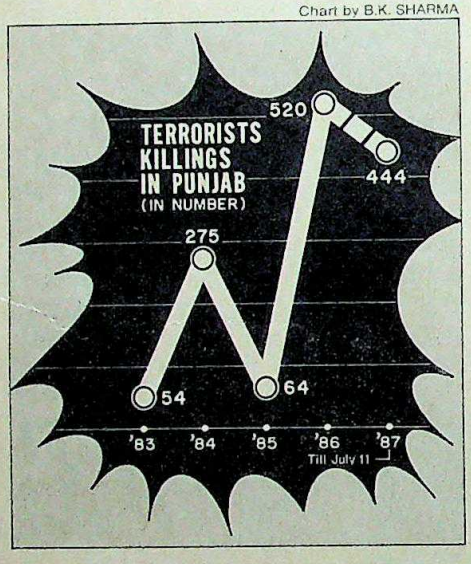
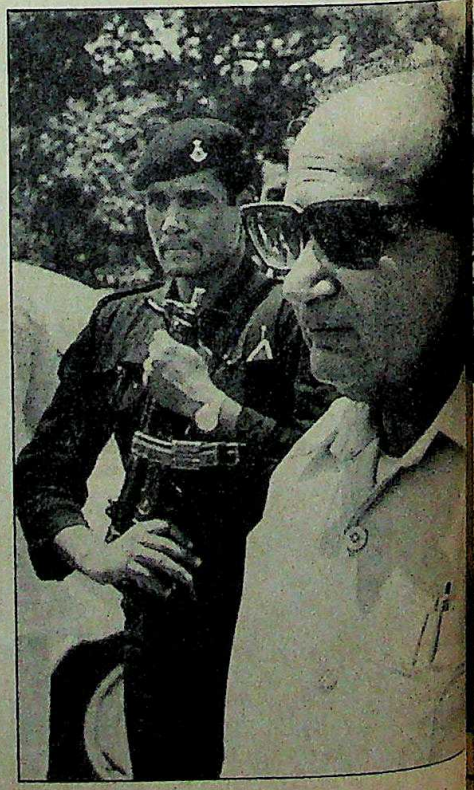


Table by RAJEEV MADAN

MAJOR KILLINGS

DATE	EVENT	DEAD
May 10, 1985	Delhi and parts of north India rocked by bomb explosions.	42
June 23,1985	Air-India's Boeing 747, Kanishka, crashes off Ireland following bomb explosion.	329
July 25, 1985	Terrorists gun down bus passengers near Muktsar, Faridkot district, Punjab.	15
November 30, 1986	Gunmen shoot down bus passengers near Khuda, Hoshiarpur district, Punjab.	24
June 13, 1987	Terrorists strike at several points in South Delhi residential localities.	14
July 6, 1987	Bus hijacked and travellers shot near Lalru, in Punjab's Patiala district.	38
July 7, 1987	Gun attacks on passengers of two buses near Fatehabad in Haryana's Hissar district.	32

Intelligence agencies are obsessive



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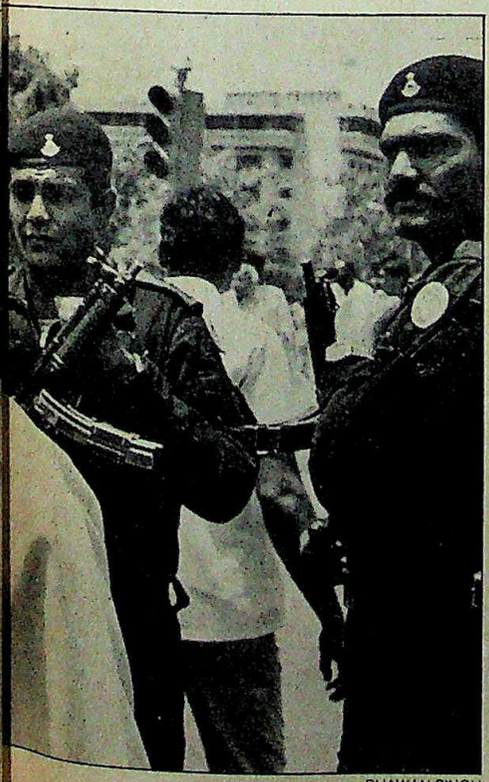
City terrorism cannot assume any decisive role, but it is subordinate to the fundamental struggle being carried out in the countryside. It has from the military point of view a strategic value: it immobilises thousands of enemy soldiers in unrewarding tasks of protection.

eral Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has a Terrorist Research and Analytical Centre (TRAC) whose chief, John Harley, explains: "Our job is to build up a persecutable case and put them (terrorists) in jail," adding "and throw away the key". The FBI's anti-terrorist cell has done commendable work in infiltrating Sikh terrorist organisations in America and putting key terrorists behind bars.

Unfortunately, a similar situation in India is still a pipe dream. Coordination between the multiple intelligence agencies involved in tackling terrorism in one form or another is virtually non-existent, mainly because of inter-departmental jealousies and wranglings about turf rights. The Central Bureau of Investigation, the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing, the Special Services Bureau, the Aviation Research Centre, the state Criminal Investigation Departments and the state police still have no lines of communication or coordination. The obsession, and priority, is still, as intelligence officials admit, protection of the prime minister and other VIPs.

preoccupied with protection of VIPs.



BHAWAN SINGH

FURTHER, the fact that hardly any terrorist plots have been nipped in the bud indicates that the intelligence on and infiltration of terrorist groups by Indian intelligence agencies is negligible. Home Ministry officials admit as much when they confess that the local police stations are where the real intelligence failures are occurring because of lack of information at the grassroot level. Without information at that basic level, it is little surprise that terrorists can strike at will. Further, on no less than four separate occasions, various agencies have claimed the capture or death of the legendary terrorist Jinda (Harjinder Singh).

The Jinda case is a classic example of the confusion in priorities that exists. He was captured in February 1986 and, less than a month later, escaped from his three-man police escort in Ahmedabad. Despite being the most wanted terrorist, he was taken to court by three ordinary constables who stopped for lunch at a roadside *dhaba* where Jinda, on the pretext of buying them some fruit, coolly walked away. He has been stopped three times since on suspicion, and each time has managed to give the police the slip.

Paradoxically, the only force tutored specifically in anti-terrorist operations, the commandos of the Special Protection Group and the National Security Guards, who have been given training in Italy and equipped with sophisticated weaponry along the lines of West Germany's GSG9, are used exclusively for VIP protection, while the forces tackling terrorism in the field are basically the Punjab Police with help from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and, in the border areas, the Border Security Force. As one terrorist expert states: "As a rule, terrorism does not succeed in terrorising the chiefs of government, who are usually well protected."

In that context, it is debatable whether the Government is really treating terrorism as "the number one priority", as Home Minister Buta Singh claims. On the day after the bus massacre, Rajiv was inaugurating the Prakrit Bhasha Bhavan where he talked tough on terrorism and the Government's resolve. He would have done better to visit the site of the killings and reassure the victims' families. That one act would have symbolised the Government's resolve more than any empty rhetoric. Even a televised statement of intentions would have at least given the appearance that the Government cares enough about the problem.

Conversations with intelligence officials seem to confirm that the emphasis is still largely on the combination of Ray and Ribeiro in Punjab. But increasingly, more so in the wake of President's rule, the duo are being seen in their true colours. Ray, as a dilettante, whose intellectualising of the psyche of "the boys", as he calls them, is becoming counter-productive, and Ribeiro, a heroic John Wayne figure, who has painted himself into a corner with his Wild West dialogue and (falsely) optimistic predictions.

Any democracy, by its very definition, poses its own restrictions on the battle against domestic terrorism. The challenge to a democracy is to find effective measures without an unacceptable diminution of civil liberty, or as FBI Director William Webster puts it, "without creating the Orwellian police state that civil libertarians have warned about". The danger is, under President's rule that could easily happen in Punjab.

Ribeiro now runs Punjab. He has more than the "free hand" he had always sought. In addition to being director-general of police, he is also secretary for internal security, in which position he can order transfers and postings as well as overrule any civil bureaucrat. He can detain people under the Arms Act and the

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Prevention of Terrorism Act without trial for as long as two years. Even under British rule, the police was not given such sweeping and overriding authority over civilian command. In addition, 200 extra CRPF and police companies (15,000-20,000 personnel) have been made available to Punjab.

Now equipped with the absolute power he had earlier sought, Ribeiro and his police force have got down to what he calls "business". But, in the bargain, the police raj has destroyed whatever public accountability and grievance mechanisms had remained. As one senior Punjab official put it: "Civil service consultation, caution, restraint, intervention and checks have been eliminated. Unbridled and unchecked power has percolated down to the level of the constable through favoured district police chiefs."

In the absence of anyone other than the police to complain to, and with MLAs clearly told not to interfere, the people who feel the police pressure will increasingly turn to terrorist groups for protection. As a former district commissioner, with extensive experience in Amritsar and Tarn Taran, put it: "There is no question that there have been hundreds of false arrests under the Arms Act alone. When we used to review the evidence, we used to find that nearly 90 per cent of the cases were faked. But now, there is no such review. The Sikhs now believe that they are a suspect population as a whole."

IN this vitiated atmosphere, the battle is between Ribeiro and Gurjit Singh, the wanted terrorist who heads the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) faction named after him. And Sikh sympathy, in this polarised atmosphere, may well be lost for the police.

This is a key and significant shift, Punjab-watchers say, during the last two months. For all its faults, the representative Barnala government had stationed committed cadres in towns and villages, who would stand as buffers and attract anti-terrorist sentiment towards their side in the battle for the hearts and minds of the uncommitted or moderate Sikhs that was being waged between Barnala and the extremists. Even more important, Barnala's politicians could intervene on behalf of people who said they were being unjustly harassed by the police. It is, of course, true that some of the politicians were in fact protecting terrorists and interfering with police work, but the relevant point today is that a channel for redressing grievances has been blocked.

Indeed, hundreds of Akali Dal supporters have now been arrested by the police and their political cushion has now disappeared. This is particularly true of the Akali youth wing, whose leader, Prem Chandumajra, was arrested and allegedly tortured. This wing was one of the most important political counterforces to the Gurjit and Manjit factions of the AISSF. But its leaders have been arrested and the group has more or less disbanded.

As a former minister put it: "This was

BUS KILLINGS

A Cold-blooded Operation

IF never before has the horror of terrorism been so cruelly demonstrated, neither has police helplessness. After killing 38 bus passengers near Lalru, district Patiala, Punjab, on July 6, terrorists struck 24 hours later near Fatehabad, district Hissar, Haryana, to kill another 32 travellers.

Passengers of the packed Haryana Roadways bus HYE 1735 from Chandigarh to Rishikesh recall seeing the Fiat at a railway crossing about 20 km out of Chandigarh. About 5 km later, driver Hari Singh told the police, when the Fiat had suddenly pulled up horizontally in front, he had assumed that the driver was drunk. Before he could react, four armed men materialised, a Sten gun was shoved against his chest, and a gunman had taken the wheel.

The gunmen reassured the cowering passengers as the bus started again along the Grand Trunk Road that they were only going to be looted. As the travellers handed over their jewellery and cash, the bus travelled about 8 km. Just short of Lalru police station, the last point in Punjab, at about 9.30 p.m., it turned off the main road onto a link road.

The gunmen started taunting their hostages: "Where is your Ribeiro now? You people laugh when Sikh youths are killed but look at you, all sitting like jackals." They then insisted that everyone start chanting *Sat Naam Wahe Guru* (Truth is the name of God). The only one to make a break for it was passenger Kalawati, who saved herself by jumping out clutching her three small children.

The bus halted between Jamalpur and Hasanpur villages and according to Abdul Ghafoor, one of the 33 injured: "They made everyone get into the middle and started shooting from both ends." Fear-struck passengers give varied versions but what is known is that a gunman, clean-shaven and safari suit-clad, was also accidentally shot dead—and the firing stopped. He was later identified as Gurmit Singh, alias Tony.

The killers got off and carried his body to the Fiat which was parked alongside. They drove along the Ghaggar river and then tried to set the car on fire with the body inside. Villagers say they gave up their attempt when it began raining and escaped in a truck that was parked nearby.

The police arrived over an hour later when Hari Singh—the driver and the only Sikh on the bus, who was spared—got to Lalru police station. They reached the site of the slaughter to find women and children among the dead. Also waiting for them was a note in the bus from the Khalistan Commando Force. It said that the flower of Sikh youth was being killed in Punjab and therefore a hundred Hindus would now be killed for every Sikh.

Few could have suspected that they would dare to make good their threat so quickly. At 7.10 p.m. the next evening, as people boarded the Ferozepore-Delhi bus at Sirsa, in Haryana's Hissar district, a jeep hired from Hanumangarh in Rajasthan was already on their trail. When the bus was about a dozen kilometres short of Fatehabad, the jeep overtook it and blocked its path. Even as three gunmen poured out of the jeep, two of their accomplices, who had boarded the bus at an earlier stop, also pulled out their weapons. Conductor Ram Phal escaped by squeezing his way out of the window but the driver, Jagdish, was killed.

The ghastly drama that followed was similar to that of the evening before. According to Ram Swaroop, lying in the 60-bedded Fatehabad Government Hospital: "They drove the bus slowly towards Fatehabad and asked us to hand over our cash and valuables." After a couple of kilometres, the bus came to a halt near village Dariyapur. Seconds later, the firing started and Swaroop, in what is now time-honoured fashion,

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No government can protect everything and everyone, everywhere and constantly. The terrorist can strike at anyone, anywhere and at any time.

Terrorism makes every incident seem like an exception to the rules that ought to apply.

the most mindless and foolhardy thing that has happened under Ray and Ribeiro. Certainly, a great deal of the Akali youth wing will simply become idle spectators. But, at least a third of them will quietly join the AISSF. With all the killings and arrests that have taken place, I can guarantee that there must be many more armed people and terrorists in the state than before." One intelligence estimate puts the number of armed terrorists in the state at over 1,000 though, officially, Punjab and Home Ministry officials insist that the hardcore is just over 100.

And they are a dangerously committed and motivated lot. According to one example given by a police source, a terrorist with a Chinese-made Sten gun was recently captured near a border district. Despite being subjected to intense interrogation and third degree methods for two days to determine how and from where he got the weapon, the terrorist simply kept repeating: "I will not tell you. The only thing I will tell you is that we have hundreds of such weapons."

One of the most experienced deputy commissioners of an important district recently wrote to the Punjab chief secretary: "The air rings today with the cries of absolute and unfettered power to the police. What one reads in the papers today gives a swollen head to the police personnel at the

saved himself by lying still under the dead and the dying. Twenty minutes after the terrorists had fled, the injured started rising. Jale Singh, 19, one of the passengers, using his experience of driving a tractor, finally drove the bus to Fatehabad to provide the police the first information of the tragedy.

Meanwhile, the killers were already moving towards Fatehabad. They stopped an Ambassador car, shot dead the driver and after about a kilometre, halted another Haryana Roadways bus travelling towards Sirsa. According to the police, they were obviously in a hurry to leave for, though they had the passengers at their mercy, they fired from outside, killing only four. Recalls Om Prakash, a schoolteacher, who was in the overcrowded second bus: "It all happened so quickly that nobody in the bus knew from where the gunfire had come."

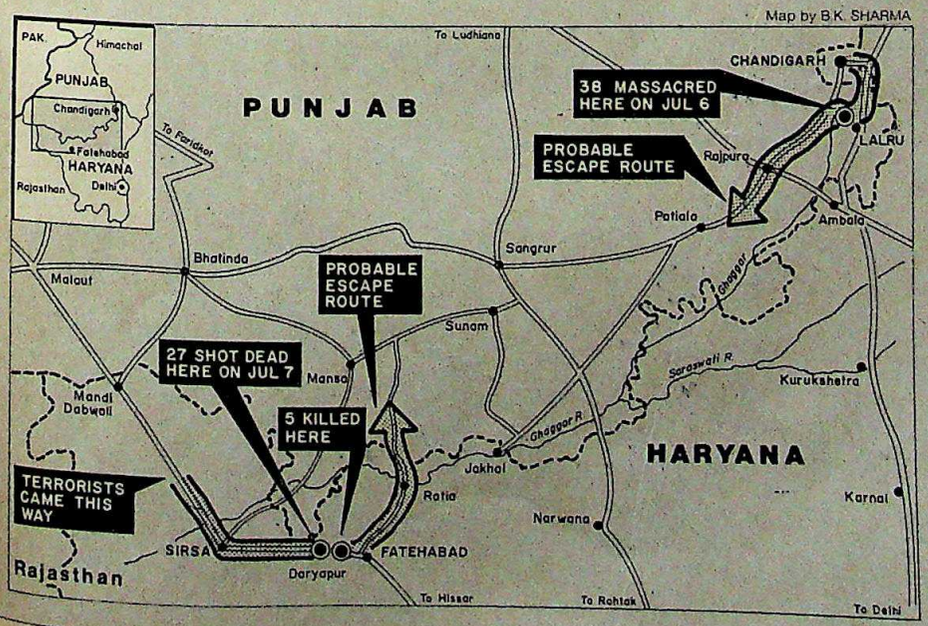
The terrorists then commandeered a truck, ditched the Ambassador, and drove through Fatehabad, via Ratia, also in Hissar district, towards the Punjab border. The truck was found later in faraway Marianwala village, near Batala in Punjab's Gurdaspur district. Mysteriously, when found, it had been stripped of engine, dynamo, tyres and other vital parts.

There are many similarities between the incidents of the two days. In both the Punjab and Haryana killings, terrorists numbered about half-a-dozen, most of them clean-shaven. All accounts indicate that the men were in their early or mid-20s. In each case, passengers were first looted. In both crimes, a vehicle was used to block the bus, a modus operandi never used earlier in similar killings. Police officials of both states say that Chinese automatic rifles were used. And, in both crimes, the killers made their getaway in a truck.

Why then should the police of both states play down the possibility of it being the same gang? Perhaps because it would mean admitting that even 24 hours after the first massacre, they hadn't put their act together, that their intelligence was abysmal. It would also indicate how porous the Punjab-Haryana border was. The Punjab police assumed that the Lalru killers had escaped towards Chandigarh, and curfew was imposed on its outskirts, in Mohali, to find them. The Haryana killings indicated how wide off the mark they were. The battering the police image has taken only establishes that a cover-up involving 70 bodies is never easy.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Fatehabad and TAVLEEN SINGH in Lalru

Map by B.K. SHARMA



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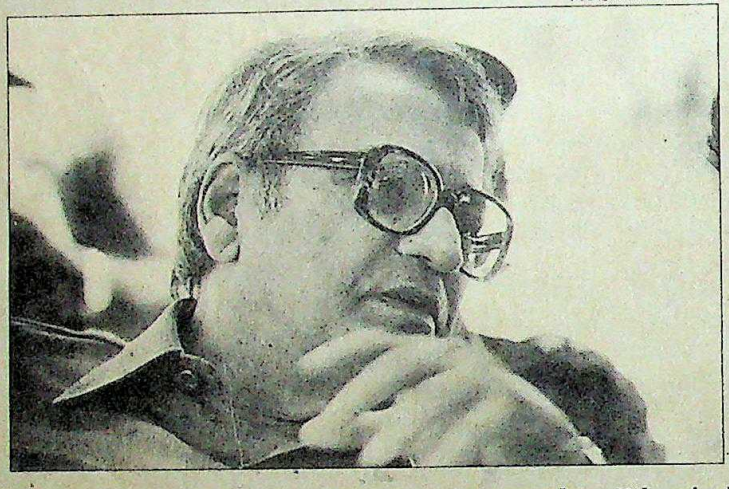
SIDDHARTHA SHANKAR RAY

"We are in control"

The record of President's rule in Punjab came under sharp nation-wide questioning following the gruesome killings of bus passengers in the state and in Haryana. Suddenly, Governor Siddhartha Shankar Ray who had recommended dismissal of the Barnala government on the ground that it had failed to cope with law and order, found himself in the hot seat.

On the day after the killings the bespectacled, boyish-looking Ray was besieged by phone calls from Delhi and swamped by emergency meetings. He was interviewed by Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *in his commodious office in Chandigarh's Civil Secretariat. Excerpts:*

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Q. *You have been given the free hand that you wanted since your recommendation of President's rule was accepted. How do you explain the latest bus massacres?*

A. I have to admit that this has been a set-back. But it has made us more determined and dedicated and we shall fight on.

Q. *But don't these incidents reflect on your sources of intelligence?*

A. Our intelligence was zero when I came here. It was deplorable. But it has improved considerably. In fact, shortly before the massacres we had penetrated a secret internal meeting of Gurjit Singh and Labh Singh of the Khalistan Commando Force where they decided that they were going to do something big. In fact, on July 6, I told a meeting of newspaper editors that some big terrorist action was in the offing. But we could not determine just where it would come.

Q. *So it continues to be the same problem as it was before President's rule was declared?*

A. Actually, what we had to deal with was two types of terrorism—terrorism caused by fundamentalism, and the old terrorism that's still going on. Within the first 21 days of President's rule we wiped out the fundamentalist-inspired terrorism. As a result all schools are open, liquor vends are functioning, and meat, cigarette and barber shops are all open. We were also faring well against the other type of terrorism. Many gangs had been busted. Dreaded terrorists like Gurdev Singh had been shot. And we did not allow terrorist groups to hold pro-Khalistani meetings. They were under pressure and determined to show they still existed.

Q. *But the main terrorists, people like Gurjit, Manochahal, Sukha Sipai, Labh Singh, Vasant Singh are still at large. We read their names in the papers as having been eliminated but they surface again.*

A. They are quite cunning. I have to admit that while we've dealt with a number of people, most of those we have arrested or killed are the shooters and not the real planners. There are about 19 terrorist groups now like the Bhindranwale Tigers, Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Liberation Army. But despite this we're in control of the situation.

Q. *There are complaints that innocent people are being killed in police encounters. What exactly is an "unidentified terrorist?"*

A. Well, he could be someone with a gun, someone killed in an encounter who could not be identified then, but is subsequently identified.

Q. *There are also complaints of the Government being inaccessible to people with grievances.*

A. We do not allow political interference. I allow my secretaries to function like independent ministers. People with complaints, not politicians, but people like village sarpanches are encouraged to go directly to Ribeiro if they have complaints. In fact, when President's rule was proclaimed people distributed sweets and welcomed it. No one complained.

Q. *But has it been successful?*

A. To have President's rule is one thing, to make it successful is something else. It has to be short to be sweet and long enough to be effective. Out of 24 hours, there may be no incident for 23 hours and 59 minutes but in that one minute if a killing takes place then the whole picture gets distorted.

Q. *You now have virtually all you asked for. What are your needs now?*

A. We've ordered 175 more jeeps but we'd like more cars for patrolling. Ideally, I'd like a police or CRPF picket in all our 12,200 villages, but that may not be possible.

Q. *You said that you would use a mixture of firmness and compassion to deal with Punjab. Where's the evidence of compassion?*

A. Well, during the first few days of President's rule we arrested more than 800 people and we have released more than half of them. We have worked on farmers' problems and have now ensured at least 10 hours of water supply to them.

Q. *But what about a better rapport with the people?*

A. I have visited every district and met people of all shades. In fact, I have three notebooks of handwritten notes about this experience. I am going to mention in my will that these should be published after me to give people an idea of what Punjab was like. Besides, because of my involvement in the *Apna Utsav* festival, I've also become very close to the students.

Q. *But terrorism seems even worse now.*

A. The mere fact that there's President's rule doesn't mean that terrorism will vanish overnight or within a matter of days. Terrorism doesn't die suddenly. Its death rattle is also very ugly and horrendous and it is a long death rattle. We may succeed or fail but we shall try our best to succeed.

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By retaining faith in its established democratic institutions, even at the cost of failing to extinguish terrorism altogether, the state reinforces public confidence in its system of government and publicly asserts its moral and practical superiority.

cutting edge level and emboldens them to go their self-willed ways. Thus, absolute and unfettered power to the police only means more power to the police constable, who is already armed to the teeth against the common man, and is scarcely known for probity and proficiency."

In a recent instance the police suspected 10 terrorists were hiding in Tarn Taran. Soon 500 policemen were despatched there to search the houses and to interrogate some 10,000 residents. The fact that not a single terrorist was found only adds to the feeling that the local Sikh population is being harassed and victimised. Similarly on June 25, suspecting that terrorist Gurjit was hiding somewhere in the Golden Temple complex, the entire area was sealed off on a day that one lakh pilgrims were to offer their Amavasya prayers. Again, no terrorists were caught. Gurjit himself surfaced the next day in Jalandhar and held a telephonic press conference condemning what he called "state terrorism". This only emphasises the urgent need for top-grade intelligence on terrorists.

All over Punjab, the issue of fake encounters and "state terrorism" has become an overriding and emotional one. A police officer said: "Sometimes, of five people killed in an encounter one may be known, while the others are unidentified or at best suspected. If you kill one terrorist, there will be some resentment in his village and family, but they will soon reconcile themselves to the fact that this was a fate he was destined to meet. But if you harass or kill even one innocent person, you will create a thousand sympathisers." As former CIA director, Stanfield Turner said, "What we may think of as justifiable counter-terrorism is someone else's terrorism."

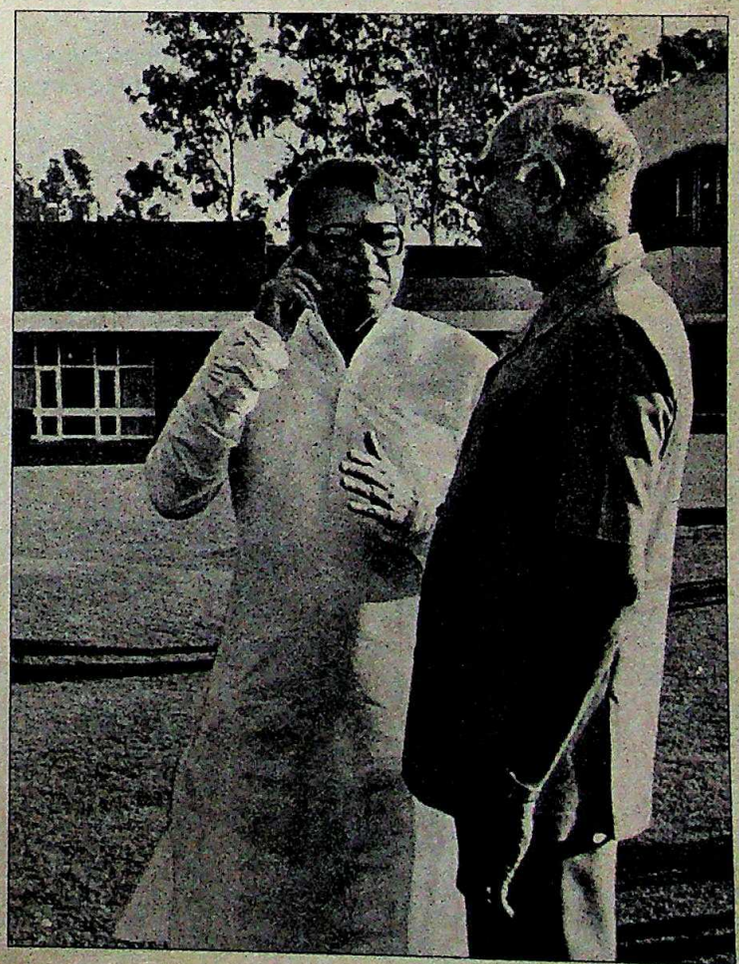
Ribeiro emphatically refutes such charges, adding: "No one has come forward to give any details of fake encounters so that investigations can be held." He has also stated that he would publish a detailed list of all those killed in police encounters along with their crimes, but no such list has been published so far.

Police officials in Punjab admit that though there is now a group of dedicated officials at the top, it is more of an emotional commitment rather than the setting up of a proper apparatus to fight the terrorists. One startling example: till a few weeks ago, policemen had not even been properly trained in the use of Sten guns and even now are being sent off in batches for training.

But Ribeiro and his police force today have the power—and the image—of an occupation army. Following Operation Bluestar, and during Operation Woodrose, repression was at least accompanied by a somewhat misguided but nonetheless genuine programme to pacify Sikh sentiment—the *kar sevas* and the rebuilding of the Akal Takht. Today there is no such effort and even the Congress(I) MLAs who had supported President's rule are disillusioned. As state Congress General Secretary Gurbir Singh put it: "Police rule has become total repression. Because of the widespread resentment of Sikhs against the police, it is the governor, rather than the extremists, who stands isolated from this community. The cabinet subcommittee on Punjab, along with MPs, should visit the state and make an assessment of the situation."

Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal, following a recent all-party meet, struck at the heart of the problem when he said: "The solution to Punjab can never be bullets. There can be no solution without a representative government." Yet, to all intents and purposes, the parallel political dialogue that all textbooks on terrorism advocate to go

Having discarded the political option, success in Punjab now depends entirely on Ray and Ribeiro



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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hand in hand with the police option, is non-existent. By alienating the Akalis and their various factions, the Centre has eliminated the only people that it can legitimately negotiate with.

Having discarded the political option, it is debatable whether the Ribeiro option will work. By the latest massacres, the terrorists have shown that they are more daring than before, and certainly more coordinated. Intelligence sources have identified 19 separate terrorists groups operating in Punjab:

▶ The main terrorist group is the Khalistan Commando Force headed by Chief General *(sic)* Labh Singh, a former policeman who deserted and is deeply committed to the concept of Khalistan. Jinda is his closest associate. The gang is also closely linked to the Gurjit faction of the AISSF and the Damdami Taksal, and often uses the Golden Temple as a rendezvous point. It is said to have about a 100 hardcore killers, plus several teenagers who are also prepared to kill for the cause.

▶ The Khalistan Liberation Force is an umbrella organisation which includes the Khalistan Armed Police, the Khalistan Security Force, the Tat Khalsa of Avtar Singh Brahma along with other groups. It is linked politically to the AISSF (Manjit) and the Panthic committee. But after most of its key leaders—Sher Singh Sher, Kamaljit Kambha, Durga Singh, Nishan Singh, Swaran Singh and Manjit Singh Khajala, Satwinder Bhola and General Sardul Singh—were either killed in encounters or jailed, the group has split up into various factions. One faction now functions under the banner of Bhindranwale Tigers of Khalistan.

▶ The Babbar Khalsa is the largest group, but so far it has concentrated mainly on killing specific targets rather than innocent people. They have not so far been involved in any massacres.

▶ The other terrorist groups are much smaller and operate in isolation, robbing banks and post offices or collecting 'ransom money' to finance themselves and purchase arms.

Intelligence officials dealing in terrorism say that if Punjab is to become India's Ulster, the Government has to impart specialised training and equipment to the Punjab Police, just as Britain has done in the case of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), who are backed up for specific operations by the crack Special Air Services (SAS). They also recommend that the army be used for patrolling the border and handling infiltration from Pakistan, which will release the BSF forces for patrolling and surveillance in the countryside, where the terrorists have virtually set up a parallel administration.

Most officials dealing with terrorism criticise the Government's strategy of providing the best training, motivation, equipment and financial remuneration to the 5,000-odd personnel of the NSG and the SPG, reserved strictly for VIP security in the capital, while the bulk of the Punjab Police, the force dealing with terrorism in the field, is essentially poorly-trained, poorly-paid, physically unfit, mentally unmotivated and vulnerable to corruption, political interference or plain fear.

CLEARLY the need of the hour is a major reorganisation of the anti-terrorist forces along the lines of the GSG9, one of the most successful anti-terrorist forces in the world. The GSG9 was mainly responsible for crushing the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group and was raised from the Federal Border Patrol, the West German equivalent of the BSF. More important, in the Indian context, it was raised by a mere colonel, Ulrich Wegener of the border patrol after the 1972 Munich massacre and he still remains in command. In comparison, the NSG, which was supposed to be modelled on the GSG9, has two army generals, three policemen of inspector general rank and an army of brigadiers, colonels and DIGs to command a force that is not yet fully trained and has so far seen no action. Today, far from being the elite, effective anti-terrorist force, the NSG is a hotbed of politics, intrigue and constant rivalry between police and army officials.

All GSG9 personnel undergo a 22-week physical and mental course and only one out of five volunteers finally make it into the force. Indian officials suggest that either the NSG or another elite force, not so large as to be unmanageable, be culled from the paramilitary organisations like the BSF, the CRPF, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Special Frontier Force to act as the spearhead of the fight against terrorism in Punjab. The Punjab Police, especially at the lower level, can be better utilised for the collection of information and infiltration and providing security for high-profile targets.

Without the proper motivation, mobility, physical fitness and equipment, the Punjab Police can never eliminate terrorism from the state. "Even a simple thing like providing them bullet-proof vests will greatly improve their ability to counter terrorists. It gives them greater confidence and protection. Right now, most of them will not risk their lives unless they are in a large group," says a policeman.

The Punjab Police, poorly trained, poorly paid, and vulnerable to political interference is totally unsuited to counter terrorism in Punjab.

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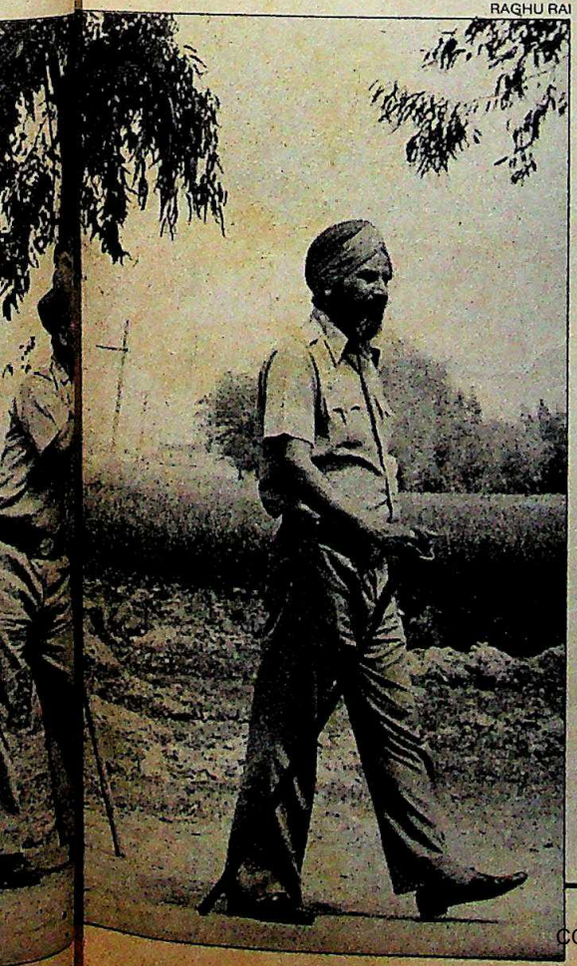
Statecraft combines moral, political and financial considerations in a complicated game of compromise; and the operations of compromise allow terrorists to feel they have a chance of creating change through their armed propaganda and violent persuasion.

The organisational break-up of anti-terrorist forces most copied around the world is that of the British SAS, whose Special Projects Teams are broken up into four operational squads of one officer and 15 other ranks. Each of these teams is further broken up into four-man operating units. For assaults, the four-man teams operate in pairs, backed up by the SAS's highly efficient Operations Research Unit, which is constantly developing special purpose devices for anti-terrorist usage, the most well-known being the stun grenade used so effectively in Operation Nimrod, the rescue assault on the Iranian Embassy in London. They also have specialised high-tech equipment and vehicles including vans with hinge-mounted ladders for swift second-storey entry and a dazzling paraphernalia of night optics and surveillance items like thermal imagers and endoscopes.

RAGHU RAI



The equipment used by the SAS, widely acknowledged as one of the world's finest anti-terrorist forces, is an object lesson to Indian security agencies handling terrorism. They use ballistic vests, anti-flash hoods with gas masks and stun grenades, CS gas cannisters and their favoured weapons, the Heckler and Koch MP-5 or the Browning Hi-Power. They are also masked to protect their identities against reprisals.

IN India, only the NSG and the SPG have somewhat similar equipment, which they are unlikely to ever use, while the Punjab Police have only just started receiving training on the Sten guns they have been issued with to replace the ancient .303 Enfields. A Home Ministry note released last fortnight proudly points to the fact that the Centre has released Rs 70 lakh during 1986-'87 for the purchase of 60 jeeps by the Punjab Police. To fight terrorism effectively, they need closer to 600. Highway patrols, mobile patrols in the countryside and in the cities, all linked by sophisticated communication systems and connected to a Central Operations Command centre, will obviously restrict the movement of terrorists and prevent a situation like the bus massacre in Lalru, where it took the police over 90 minutes to actually receive the news and arrive at the spot. Unfortunately, the Government continues to pour money into the NSG and the SPG and not, proportionately, into the forces physically fighting terrorism.

Other intelligence officials point to the desperate need for a sophisticated computerised data base system in Punjab, instead of in Delhi, linked to all major police stations in the state where every bit of terrorist-related information can be fed and stored, and, more important, cases built up against terrorists. "Instead of crying 'Jinda' every time a major terrorist strike takes place, we should have personality profiles, history, peculiarities, fingerprints, physical characteristics, preference of weapons, details of friends and family on every suspected terrorist, all retrievable within minutes, and all essential towards building up individual cases against most of them," says a top official. According to unofficial estimates, all this equipment would cost between Rs 70 to Rs 80 crore, the cost of two Mirage fighters.

What is clearly urgently needed as a first step is a major overhaul of the intelligence and communication systems, much greater mobility and a better trained, equipped and motivated force to deal "bullet for bullet" with terrorists. As a former inspector general of police P.R. Rajgopal pointed out: "Patrol cars should have a pick of officers in the age group of 20 to 25, specially trained and toughened for taking on the terrorists, and not the general run of policemen who are old in age, physically too bulky and immobile to respond to a situation where minutes if not seconds make all the difference. These men should be at least the rank of sub-inspectors who can be expected, with their education and training, to act with initiative and purpose in a crisis situation."

But the key to eventually overcoming the terrorists is the network of informers, currently negligible, that any anti-terrorist strategy is doomed without. Terrorist groups are normally tightly-knit organisations that look upon any outsiders with excessive suspicion. Thus, the chances of infiltration are greatly reduced. But all terrorists have family, friends, acquaintances, people they buy their weapons from and entire villages where they hide out. They, specially the newly-recruited teenage terrorist, also have an irresistible urge to boast about their exploits. Thus recruiting informers and even, as the British have done in Ireland, paying handsomely for the information, is bound to increase the effectiveness of anti-terrorist strategy. There is also a strong case, though the Government has cold-shouldered the idea, of handing over control of

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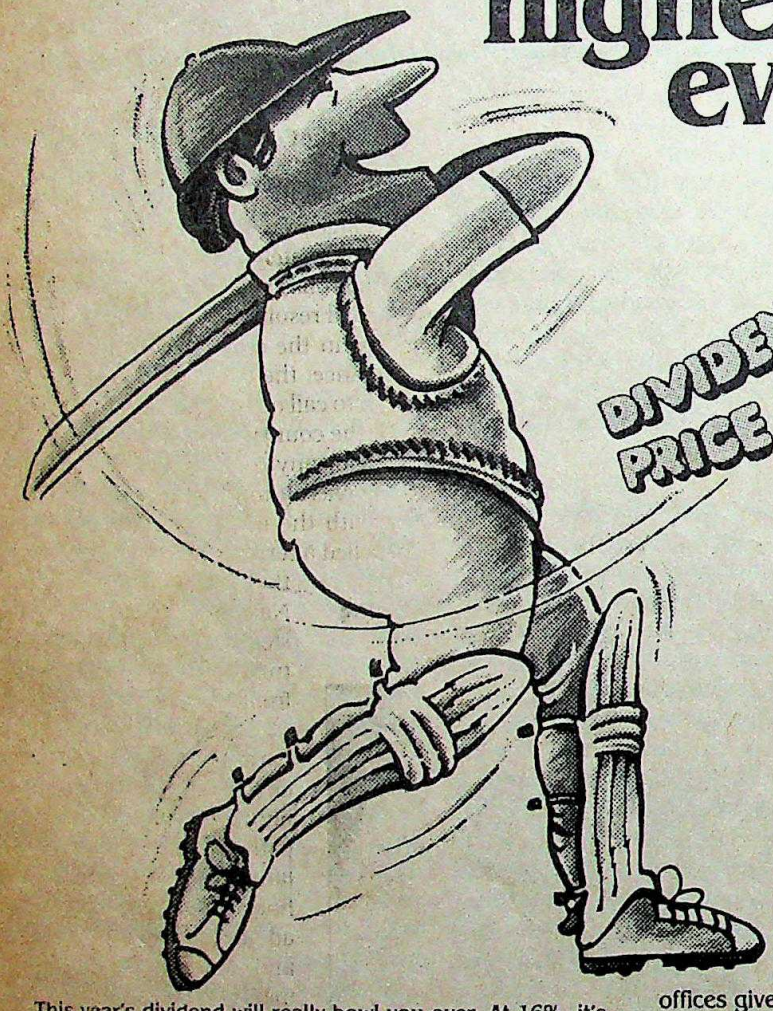

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Most governments prefer to explain terrorism backwards—taking the carnage and destruction as evidence of psycopathic tendencies. Instead, they should regard terrorist acts as a logical step, even if one that inspires revulsion, towards tangible political gains.

Punjab's international border to the army. The Pakistan border is obviously where most of the Chinese-made AK 47 submachine guns—currently the most popular Sikh terrorist weapon—and ammunition is coming from. The army can not only police the border more effectively but release at least 3,000 additional BSF personnel for patrolling duties in the Punjab countryside. Officials say that thanks to India's smuggler-syndrome, weapons and ammunition are also coming in from the normal smuggling routes along the Gujarat coastline which will require added surveillance by the Coast Guard.

But all that is of no use unless the political will exists—and is seen to exist. The Home Ministry admits that coordination has all along been a major flaw, and only after the bus massacres has an effort been made to improve inter-state coordination between the Home Ministry's Punjab Cell and the Joint Intelligence Cell, where all terrorist-related information is pooled. The Government also has very tentative plans to impart better training and give better equipment to the Punjab Police, another indication that terrorism is not yet, as Buta Singh claims, the number one priority.

Neither can the Government afford to abandon the political option, as it seems to have done. Politics created the problem (Bhindranwale was deliberately built up to split the Akali movement), and continues to do so—the Congress(I) thought at one stage that it could use Subhash Ghising to destabilise the Jyoti Basu Government. There could be another Frankenstein in the making here. In the end, it is only the political option in tandem with the police option that can bring terrorism in Punjab to heel.

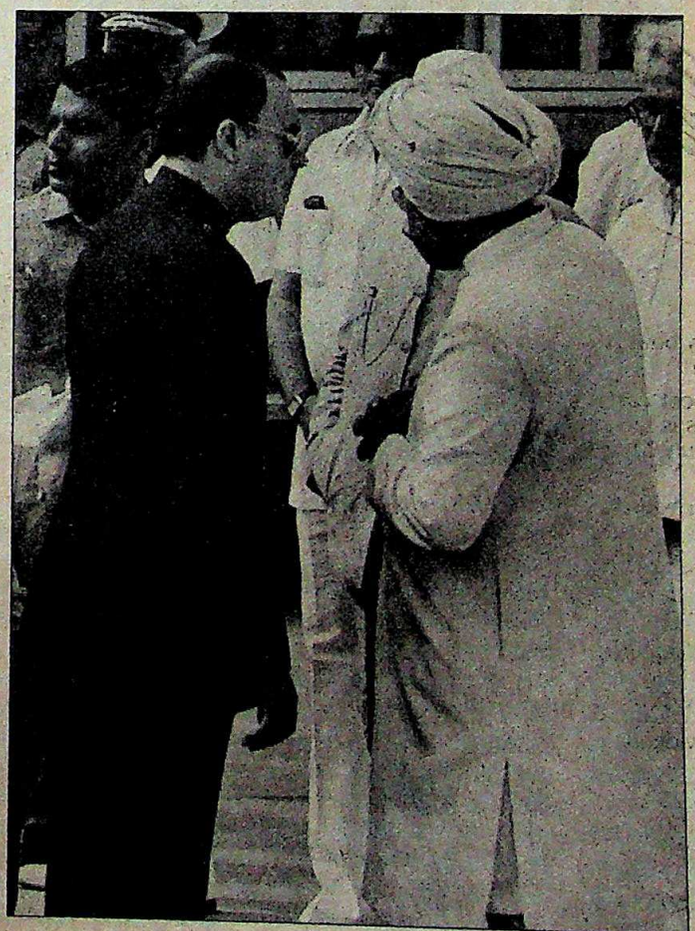
The more perceptive intelligence officials realise that Khalistan is still in essence a vague, negotiating posture, and not the end objective of the struggle. Neither does Pakistan want an independent Khalistan, just as India does not want an independent Marxist Eelam. Unfortunately, the political will and statecraft so necessary for tackling terrorism are nowhere in evidence. Instead, the Centre has placed all its bets on Ribeiro. "We are treating the ailment and not its cause," is how a senior intelligence official described it.

Ultimately, it was not guns alone but numerous political factors too that yielded results in former terrorist situations in the country. In Telengana for instance, the CPI made a political decision to call off the violence because they felt the country was still not objectively ripe for any revolution. Mizoram however was ultimately negotiated politically with the man the Centre had once labelled a terrorist and who now sits in the chief minister's chair. The Naxalite movement lost steam the moment the extremists divorced themselves from a mass movement.

Sikh terrorism, in comparative terms, is still an inchoate movement with possibly thousands of passive sympathisers and only a relatively small number of hardcore activists. The bigger advantage is that the Sikh and Hindu population is still more or less evenly divided. To ensure that the Hindu population remains in Punjab, they will have to be reassured that their lives and property are safe and the terrorists do not get out of control. That is the Ribeiro option. But to ensure that the Sikh population and those who are becoming increasingly sympathetic to the terrorists form the ultimate buffer of public opinion, they will have to be mobilised and won over. That should be the Rajiv option.

—DILIP BOBB with INDERJIT BADHWAR and TAVLEEN SINGH in Punjab, SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington and RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

The Government's reactions to the increasingly daring killings are knee-jerk after-the-event reflexes.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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CONGRESS(I)

Rumblings of Revolt

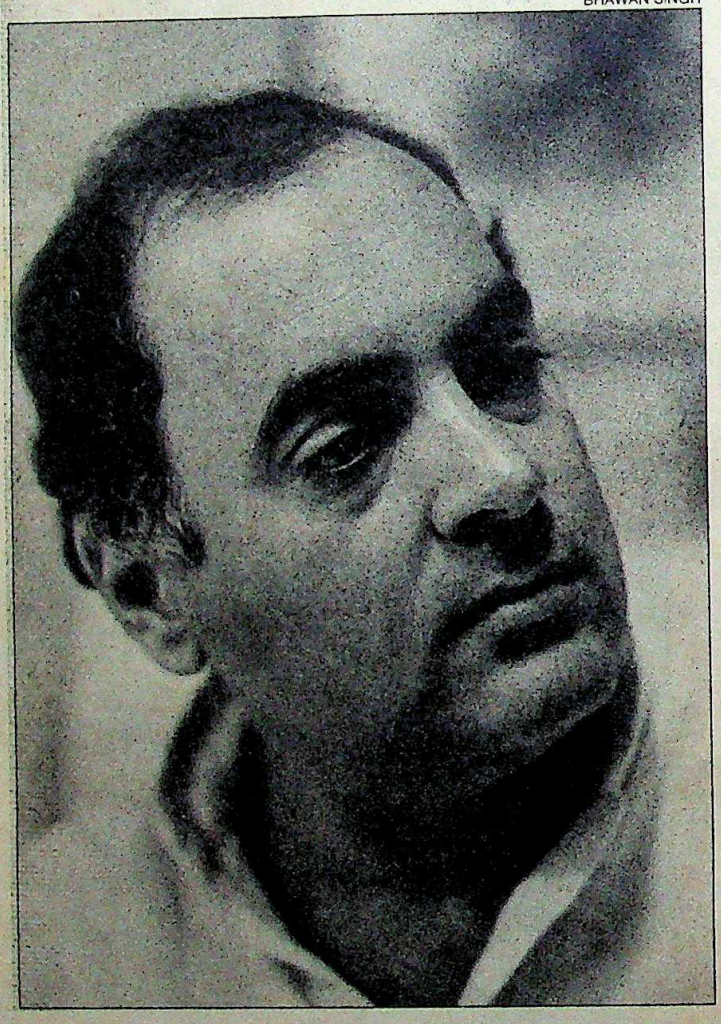
THE countdown has now started within the ruling Congress Party. It will be long-drawn and debilitating. And Rajiv Gandhi and his closest aides know it. While the prime minister faces no immediate threat from the party's rank and file, his advisers are now preoccupied counting the heads of partymen suspected of disloyalty to the leader. No longer does the threat to Rajiv emanate from Rashtrapati Bhavan only. It now comes from an additional source: a newly-formed block led by ousted cousin Arun Nehru and former defence minister V.P. Singh.

The emerging rift has caused panic in the party. This was clearly reflected in the emergency meeting the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party held on the eve of the presidential poll. Even before the meeting formally began, Professor N.G. Ranga, the oldest member of the Lok Sabha, sprung to his feet and proclaimed: "We express our thanks and confidence for...." And before he could complete his sentence, the Central Hall of Parliament was filled with the noise of party MPs clapping and cheering the incumbent prime minister. It was, at best, a forced show of solidarity. The reality is something else.

It lies in the emergence of the Nehru-Singh combine, which began a cautious flexing of its muscle this month. In the last three weeks, Singh, Nehru and former Union minister Arif Mohammed Khan met at least half-a-dozen times at various places. During these meetings, the troika held consultations with more than 100 MPs, 500 MLAs, half-a-dozen PCC(I) chiefs, and more than two dozen ministers from various states. Said Nehru: "We are all Congressmen and we have the right to meet and discuss what is wrong with the party and how can it be improved."

But Rajivists within the party were unwilling to accept these innocent explanations. Disoriented by the frequency of the meetings, they detect a simmering revolt. The meshing of the troika was not altogether unexpected. The three see themselves as victims of Rajivists' manoeuvrings. They had fought back individually, in their own styles, within the party and through the media. The humiliating Haryana defeat and the rapidly eroding credibility of the prime minister brought them together on a common platform. They have now openly embarked on a plan to expand their collective base within the party and outside it.

BHAWAN SINGH



Rajiv Gandhi: new threat

Singh and Nehru have always had cordial relations. But the initiative of bringing them together was Khan's. The timing speaks of their political finesse. They began their series of meetings only after the last date for filing names for the presidential nomination had expired. They did not want to face the opprobrium within their party of having helped sabotage the party's nominee. They were first seen together at Khan's house where they celebrated Singh's birthday. This high-visibility confab was followed by a series of other sittings at Nehru's residence and in Lucknow. Says Khan: "I feel most of the Congressmen have realised that we are interested in the welfare of the party and in its future, and therefore more and more people are coming and discussing the issues with us." Though Khan refused to divulge the names of the MPs who have attended their meetings regularly, one such gathering at a lunch hosted by Nehru last fortnight included more than 20 MPs, mostly from Uttar Pradesh.

If the speeches delivered by Singh and Khan are any indication, it is clear that they are working in terms of a long-term strategy. According to an MP, the group has formalised the issues on which they plan to mobilise public opinion and the Congress(I) workers. Says Khan: "Our purpose is not to destroy the party and embarrass the prime minister. Our endeavour is to save the party from destruction and drift." The unspoken part of that more likely reads, destruction and drift caused by the current leadership.

The dissident group received a shot in the arm when Ram Dhan, a powerful Harijan leader from Uttar Pradesh and a former AICC(I) general secretary, joined their ranks last fortnight. He sent out his war signal during a Home Ministry Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting when he lashed out at the Government for its failure to contain communalism in the country. Others expected to enter the dissident fold are former chief ministers Madhavsinh Solanki of Gujarat and Vasantrao Patil of Maharashtra.

Their strategy will be to pick holes in Rajiv's administration and to demolish its standing on the ground that the prime minister and his henchmen have distorted national and party priorities. They will capitalise on the criticism that Rajiv has failed to contain communalism and corruption and that his policies are "pro-rich and anti-labour".

Singh is the group's undisputed ideologue. He has already prepared a platform containing political and philosophical ar-

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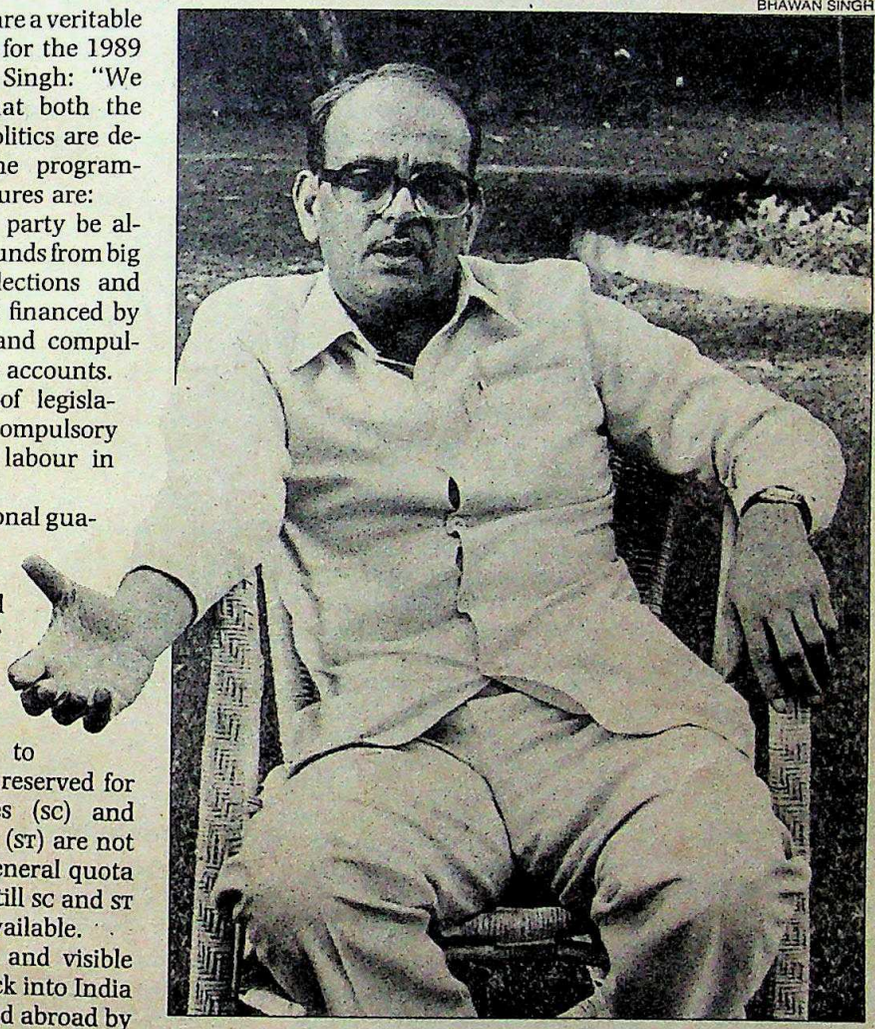
BHAWAN SINGH

(Clockwise from top left) Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammed Khan, V.C. Shukla, Ram Dhan and V.P. Singh: growing challenge

guments which are a veritable party manifesto for the 1989 elections. Says Singh: "We must ensure that both the economy and politics are democratised." The programme's salient features are:

- ► No political party be allowed to collect funds from big industrialists. Elections and the parties to be financed by public funding and compulsory audit of the accounts.
- ► Enactment of legislation enabling compulsory participation of labour in management.
- ► A constitutional guarantee for holding panchayat and zilla parishad elections under the supervision of the Election Commission.
- ► Legislation to ensure that jobs reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are not converted into general quota and kept vacant till SC and ST candidates are available.
- ► A concerted and visible effort to bring back into India the money stashed abroad by industrialists and politicians.



Singh has also reiterated, defiantly, that the Government ask Bofors to refund the Rs 50-crore paid as kickbacks. And much to the chagrin of the Congress(I) leadership he has also demanded that the HDW submarine deal be referred to the parliamentary committee appointed to probe the Bofors deal.

The group's most immediate moves will be made in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where it will demonstrate its numerical strength. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh will be its first target. Already, within a span of 10 days, Singh has managed to rally around him some 90 MLAs. Last week, when Singh visited Lucknow, Forest Minister Zafar Ali Naqvi organised a dinner for him. A panicked chief minister directed ministers, whose constituencies covered 10 divisions, to host simultaneous dinners for all the MLAs in order to prevent them from attending Naqvi's dinner. Even then, about 70 MLAs skipped the official dinners while 30 others landed at Naqvi's residence. In Bihar, the group enjoys the solid backing of former chief minister Jagannath Mishra. Declared one member: "Our effort is to force the leadership to mend its ways and ensure that the party is not wiped out during the next elections."

The dissident strategy is to convince partymen that Rajiv is not only incapable of attracting votes but is also a liability to the party, and that it will be in their interest to ditch him and select a new leader who would be able to ensure them victory in the next election.

Rajivists, their heads apparently in the sand, still contend that the dissident group doesn't have the power to create any major upheaval in the party. In fact, instructions have gone out to party MPs not to attack Singh. Said a senior cabinet minister close to Rajiv: "The V.P. Singh factor is very important and we can't ignore it altogether. But we are doubtful about his ability to ignite any major political fire in the country. While Nehru will never strike at his cousin, we can handle Khan without any problem." According to Congress(I) sources, Rajiv is planning disciplinary action against Khan to begin with and later against Singh. The prime minister's countermoves will be reflected in the upcoming cabinet and party reshuffle. His political advisers believe that once Singh is out of the party he will be reduced to a non-entity, as were Pranab Mukherjee and Gundu Rao. But Singh and Nehru are cut from a different kind of cloth, and the bets are that they will emerge as the catalysts for a major party upheaval.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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Shri G.N. Khaitan, Executive Chairman

THE RAMPUR DISTILLERY & CHEMICAL CO. LTD.

Regd. Office: Bareilly Road Rampur—244901 (U.P.)

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Dear Shareholders,

I have great pleasure in extending to you a hearty and cordial welcome to the 45th Annual General Meeting of your Company. The Annual Report and Audited Accounts for the year ended 31st December, 1986, have already been circulated. I am sure you would have had time to read these in detail and would be eager to offer your valuable comments and suggestions. With your permission, I shall take the same as read.

1. Business Environment

I think it would be appropriate to briefly review the performance of the country's economy before I come to the affairs of the Company. It is gratifying to find that India has been able to come out of its annual growth trap of 3.5%, at which level it had been stagnating for some years. The period 1985-86 has witnessed an annual growth rate of 5%. Both the agricultural and industrial sectors have shown good performance during the last few years. In the industrial sector, the performance of the key industries was better compared to the previous year. The production was stepped up in steel, aluminium, fertilizer, cement and other industries. The power situation has also improved substantially. The favourable changes in the economic climate have been caused by the pragmatic policies initiated by our Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

Before discussing the Company's performance, let me explain the agricultural scenario in the country with which your Company is very much connected.

Agriculture occupies key position in the Indian economy because of its high contribution to the National Income and high level employment provided by it. Though India has achieved self-sufficiency in the food grain production but we still import substantial quantity of edible oils to meet our domestic demand. The Planning Commission, in its aim to achieve self sufficiency in oil seed production, has fixed ambitious targets for the Seventh Five Year Plan, which can only be achieved by increasing productivity of our agricultural land. The consumption of fertilizer plays a key role in increasing the per hector yield. According to the Planning Commission, the consumption of fertilizer will increase from the present level of 8 million tonnes to 14 million tonnes of nutrients in 1989-1990. Single Superphosphate, which our Company is producing, besides containing nutrients in terms of phosphates also contains sulphur, an essential nutrient for increasing production of edible oils. Indian soil is deficient of sulphur and, therefore, Government is encouraging the use of Single Superphosphate.

2. Performance Review

Your Company's performance during the year under review has been very encouraging. Excellent progress have been made on all parameters of performance.

- The turnover for the year was Rs. 1,124 lacs, representing a 47% increase from the previous year.
- Profit before depreciation and tax increased substantially from Rs. 64 lacs to Rs. 107 lacs — an increase of 67% from the previous year.
- I am further pleased to announce that the Company proposes to maintain its annual dividend at 15% despite a significant increase in share capital.

3. Distillery Unit

The distillery division has performed well during the year and has shown all round improvement in its operations. Almost all the products of the Company have recorded encouraging growth during the year. The Company always lays emphasis on technological upgradation and reduction of cost. In its continuous efforts in this direction, the Company is further implementing a scheme of distillery modernisation involving a capital outlay of over Rs. 240 lacs.

4. Fertilizer Unit

The Company successfully commissioned its Single Superphosphate and Sulphuric Acid Plant during the year in a period of less than 12 months. The excess import of DAP by the Government coupled with the recurring failure of monsoons in the last 2 years has resulted in a severe glut in the fertilizer market. The Government has since responded to the situation and besides freezing the imported materials has also stopped import of fertilizers. The Company looks forward to a better market situation during the ensuing Rabi season under the changed policy.

5. New Project

The Company's Rs. 221 lacs Bio-gas Project being set up in technical collaboration with Aqua Technos Co. Ltd., Bangkok, is scheduled to be commissioned during this year. This project, apart from virtually making the distillery unit self-sufficient in energy and improving its profitability, will also play a vital role in fulfilling the Company's social obligations towards improving the environment as a whole.

The Company has also established a project division, which is exploring new investment opportunities.

6. Public Issue and Rights Issue

In October 1986, the Company entered the Capital Market. The response from the Public was encouraging and the issue was subscribed three times.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all my colleagues on the Board for rendering valuable guidance and assistance.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all members of our staff for the valued contribution extended by them during the year. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, financial institutions, banks and business associates for the support and confidence extended to the Company.

Let me also offer my sincere thanks to all of you for sparing valuable time and giving us the benefit of your presence at this meeting.

Thank you,

NOTE :
This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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ANDHRA PRADESH

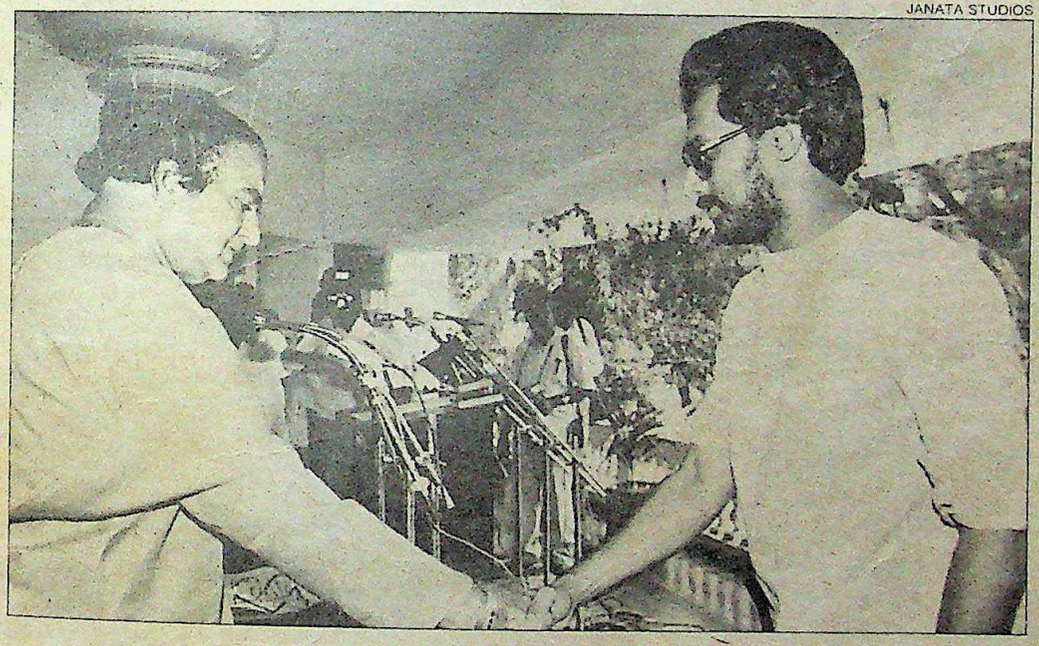
Surprising Shuffle

THE timing had a theatrical touch. It was the start of the six-week budget session of the state Assembly when ministers generally present the demands of the departments in their charge for money sanctions and announce new programmes and plans. But, on the eve of the session beginning on July 11, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao decided to reshuffle his ministry. As many as 15 ministers were sworn in and nine ministers were dropped in an unusual hurry. And, to make the swearing-in ceremony possible, the start of the Assembly session was advanced by two-and-a-half hours to 11 a.m.

The changes themselves raised many an eyebrow. Among the notable inclusions were: Rama Rao's elder son-in-law Dr Daggubati Venkateswara Rao, 34, who was allotted the portfolio of medical and health services, evidently on his own request; the chief minister's long-standing astrologer B.V. Mohan Reddy, 38, who was given charge of municipal administration; and G. Muddukrishnama Naidu, 40, who was allotted the forests portfolio, though he had requested for one in which there would be "no pressures from politicians and contractors". Equally interesting was the induction of P. Siva Reddy, 48, as labour minister and Dr K. Siva Prasada Rao, 40, as home minister, both Telugu Desam legislators who have earned themselves unedifying police records.

But the most significant inclusion was that of Venkateswara Rao, which was seen largely as part of the *alludu* (son-in-law) struggle within the Rama Rao household. One of the active founder-members of the Telugu Desam, Venkateswara Rao has been credited with planning many of Rama Rao's tours before the Telugu Desam's first electoral triumph in the 1983 Assembly elections. However, Venkateswara Rao had not been very keen to acquire a slot in the Cabinet until Rama Rao's younger son-in-law, N. Chandrababu Naidu, a former Congress(I) minister, jumped onto his father-in-law's bandwagon.

JANATA STUDIOS



Rama Rao greeting Venkateswaro Rao

Naidu's entrance sharpened considerably the conflict for control between the two sons-in-law. Their tussle for supremacy even fell out on to party forums. But even as Venkateswara Rao waxed eloquent on the issue of founder-members and loyalists being given a much greater importance than late entrants—implying that Naidu or others from the Congress(I), such as old Naidu friend Irrigation Minister K.E. Krishnamurthy wielded undeserving influence—Naidu quickly gained Rama Rao's confidence. His position was strengthened even further following the enter-and-exit drama of Nadendla Bhaskara Rao in 1984. Then again, Naidu's adept handling of the legislators at the Mysore Hotel during the 1984 crisis also helped him score several vital points over Venkateswara Rao.

Gradually, Naidu, who assiduously built up the party set-up from the village level became—by virtue of his present position as general secretary—the number two man in the party. But now, the induction of Venkateswara Rao as minister, with a portfolio of his choice, against the wishes of Naidu, marks the emergence of a rival power centre in the party hierarchy. Also, the return of former education minister Muddukrishnama Naidu from Chandrababu's native Chittoor district is considered by many to be a setback in the strength and clout of the party general secretary. As an editorial comment in *Newstime*, Hyderabad's leading newspaper, said: "If the appointment of Chandrababu Naidu has betrayed that Rama Rao considers the party to be his private estate, the choice of Dr Venkateswara Rao shows that the Government can also be made to serve the same purposes as the party."

The other changes were no less significant, though in a different way. The choice of Mohan Reddy was a classic example of the chief minister's unpredictable ways. For many years, Rama Rao has hired the astrologer to fix the most auspicious time for the *muhurt* of his films and for domestic events. He has now been rewarded with the important municipal administration portfolio.

And while the technical education minister Ayyanna Patrudu was dropped for his intemperate behaviour with the bureaucracy, the past performances of Siva Reddy and Siva Prasada Rao as Telugu Desam legislators have also not been entirely unblemished. Siva Prasada Rao, who has been entrusted with the plum portfolio of home, is alleged to have organised a raid on Congress(I) workers. He is also considered to be responsible for the clash between the Kammas and the Reddis in Dechavaram, in Guntur district, on June 26—a charge that was levelled against him

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before he was made a minister. Another old case against him is one regarding an assault on an IPS officer.

And in the case of Siva Reddy, perhaps the only justification for his elevation to the post of labour minister is that he became president of a cement factory workers' union in his native Cuddapah district in 1985. But his police record in the district reveals that he is, in fact, a highly militant leader. In 1983, he raided the police station in Jammalamadugu in Cuddapah to free his followers who had been booked on a gambling charge. The next year, during a bandh, he opened fire in full view of the police, killing a man in the process. And in 1985, a case was registered against him when he handed over his rifle to a follower.

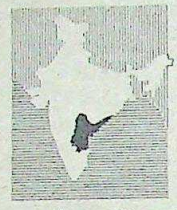
Rama Rao obviously seems to have found the present inductees the best available. Explaining the reason for the sudden reshuffle, the film star-turned-chief minister remarked: "I believe in rotation and giving young blood a chance." However, there was much cynicism in political circles at such justification. His critics felt that by rotating ministerial berths like administrative assignments, he will do incalculable harm to policy planning and implementation. But, if the reshuffle was intended to reaffirm the fact that the Telugu Desam Government is a one-man show, he had proved his point once again. Said a bureaucrat wryly: "If ex-chief minister Anjiah had an Airbus ministry, Rama Rao can boast of the Telugu Shuttle."

Though the ministry is not even halfway through its five-year term, the fallout of these changes are sure to be felt in some districts. The decision to drop R. Rajagopal Reddy, B. Ratnasabapathi from Cuddapah and K. Mahipal Reddy from Nizamabad will affect the party's prospects. But Rama Rao is banking on the fact that the Assembly elections are still more than 30 months away. All 23 districts are now represented in the ministry and the caste-wise composition puts the backward classes in the lead with nine, followed by seven Reddys, six Kammas, four Harijans, two each from the Kapus and the Kshatriyas and one each from the Brahmins, Muslims, Scheduled Tribes, Velamas and Vyasyas. All this, however, does not overshadow his efforts in piggy-backing his sons-in-law to higher seats of political power. That such obvious promotion will only damage his own image in the long run apparently does not bother the Telugu Desam strongman.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

ANDHRA PRADESH

A Freak Disaster

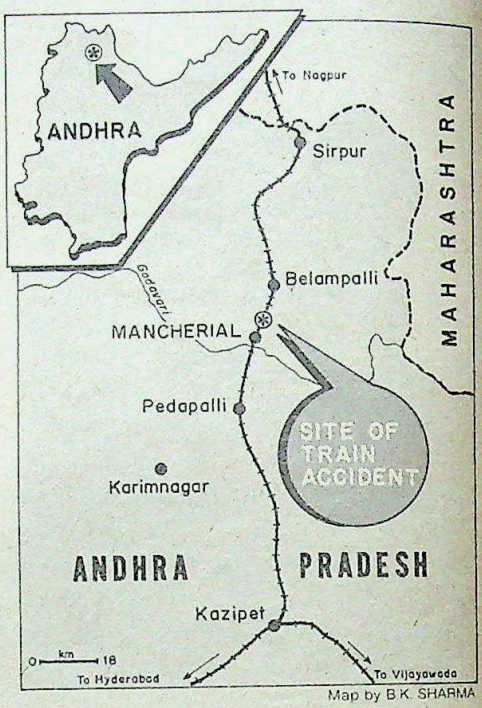


IT was a bizarre accident even by the long record of rail disasters. A small tank breached its mud bunds and the gushing torrent of water washed away the foundations of a railway line, twisting about 250 metres of rail, just as a late running train was passing over it. Two coaches were swept by the rushing waters up to 45 metres away, four others were turned on their sides and another eight were left precariously perched on a loose embankment, leading to a loss of 70 human lives.

Tragedy struck the Dakshin Express minutes after it pulled out of Mancherial station, 258 km north of Hyderabad. The driver of the Express, Syed Ismail, due to retire in a year, saw water flowing on the tracks as soon as the diesel locomotive of the 18-coach train reached the culvert of the narrow Ralavagu stream which flows into the Godavari river in the northernmost Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. It was around 4.30 a.m. and dawn was just breaking on that tragic July 9 morning. The train, at that time, was coursing at a merry 40 kmph. Ismail applied the brakes but the vacuum broke, indicating that something had gone wrong.

Finally, when the train stopped, and Ismail jumped out to survey the damage, he was stunned. The brake van attached to the engine and several coaches behind it were tilting and in danger of falling into the fast flowing stream. There were shrieks for help as the lights went out. And though many passengers wriggled out of the coaches to safety, those trapped inside the fourth and fifth coaches were swept away by the muddy waters. Most of them met a watery grave.

The deaths may have been fewer if the bleary-eyed passengers in the other coaches had not jumped into the water in panic to be drowned or washed away 3 to 4 km downstream. About 25 jawans of the 14th Sikh Light Infantry, travelling in the military coach at the rear—one of four coaches unaffected by the disaster—showing remarkable presence of mind, saved some passengers from drowning and helped pull out others from the derailed bogies. And S.H.R. Krishna Rao,



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Coaches washed away (right); and bodies recovered: tragic toll

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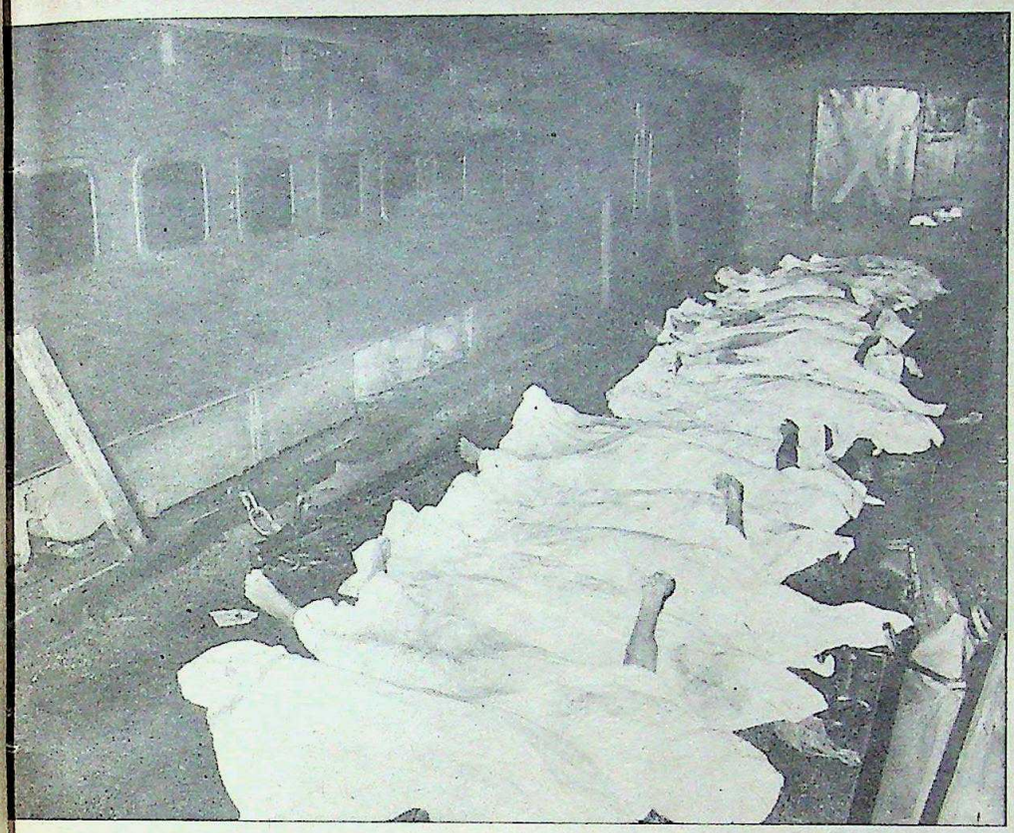

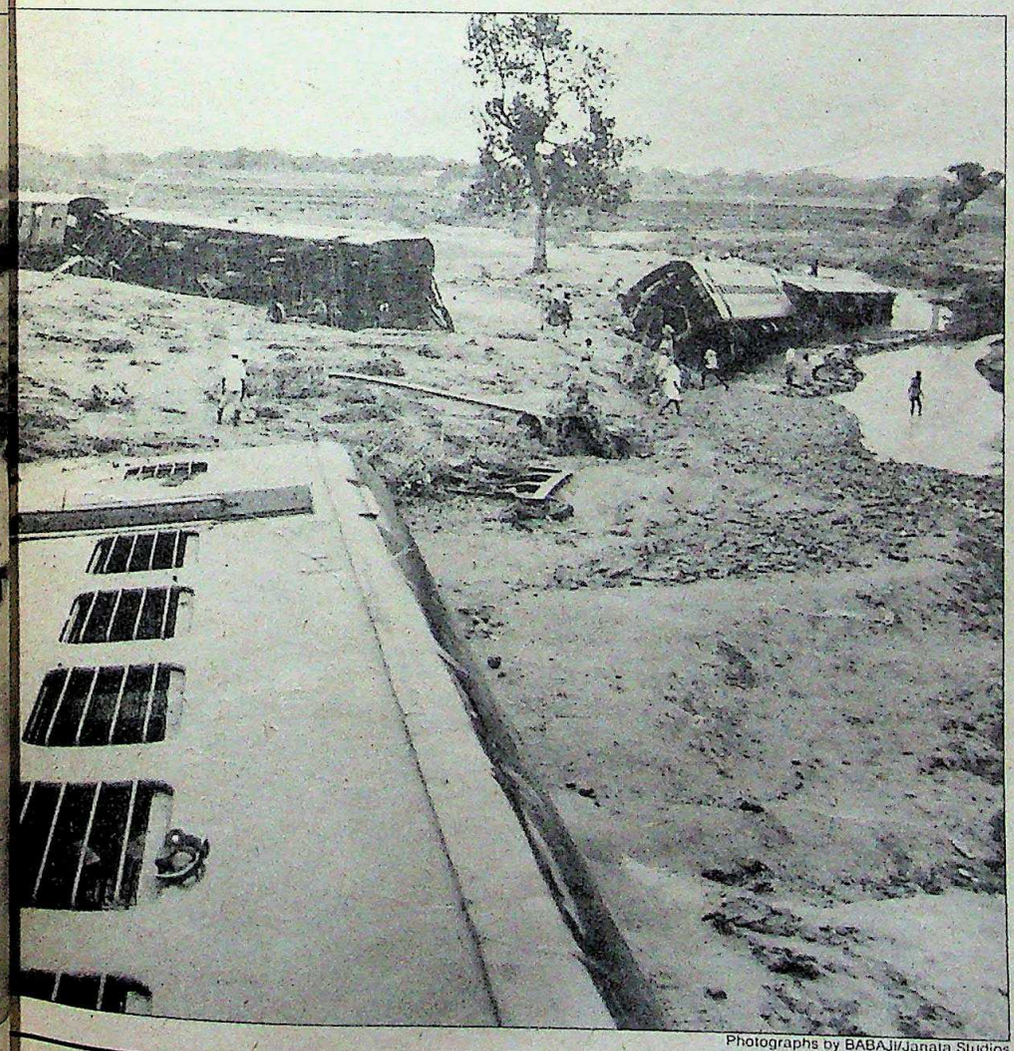

Photographs by BABAJI/Janata Studios

chief engineer (construction), South Central Railway, also travelling in one of the four coaches, trekked back to Mancherial station to seek help. But it was five hours before the first railway disaster relief team arrived. Till then, workers of the Associated Cement Company factory located near the accident site, miners of the Singareni Collieries and local volunteers tried to rescue the trapped passengers.

Twelve hours later, the 700-odd stranded passengers of the ill-fated train were despatched towards Delhi or back to Secunderabad by special trains. But they were far from grateful, charging the railway officials of being slow in helping the families of the dead. A 12-year-old Hyderabad school boy, Jagdish Varma, who swam to safety while his parents were drowned and his uncle, S.R.K. Raju, had to get the District Collector C.V.S.K. Sharma's help for a jeep to go to Chandrapur, headquarters of the contiguous district of neighbouring Maharashtra, to inform relatives and bring them to Mancherial. And though the railways brought relatives of those travelling by the two worst-hit bogies from Visakhapatnam to Mancherial, no railway officer was on hand to help them complete the formalities and take the bodies.

"Even among accidents it is a freak," observed the Andhra Pradesh Relief Commissioner S. Santhanam. More than 200 mm of rainfall during July 7 and 8 in the Mancherial area had filled the virtually-empty Amaravada tank, 3 km east of the accident site. And by a strange quirk of fate, the tank, intended to store water to irrigate 40 hectares, breached just a short while before the train passed. Railway officials state that even if the permanent way inspector, the railway staffer who inspects tracks, had gone past 15 minutes earlier, he could not have suspected trouble. Remarked Railway Minister Madhav Rao Scindia: "It is the kind of strange accident that will never happen again."

In Secunderabad, however, when the special train carrying the survivors steamed in, Andhra Pradesh showman N.T. Rama Rao took over. Anxious relatives were held back as the chief minister consoled the disembarking passengers in front of clicking cameras. The weary passengers were offered idlis and vadas "on behalf of Rama Rao". But while the saffron Caesar tried to hog publicity, the closed circuit television on the railway station was featuring a cartoon film, epitomising the general insensitivity displayed by the railways to the mood of the distressed passengers.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Mancherial

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LAKSHMI CEMENT

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

At the 48th Annual General Meeting

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 48th Annual General Meeting of your Company. You will observe from the Director's Report and the Audited Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st December, 1986 that the Company has maintained sales and other income at Rs. 115 crores under generally sluggish and difficult market conditions. Profit before interest and depreciation amounted to Rs. 15.48 crores. Your Directors have recommended maintaining the dividend at 20 per cent on the equity capital.

MODERNISATION, EXPANSION & DIVERSIFICATION

J.K. Paper Mills, which has 25 years of distinguished record is celebrating its Silver Jubilee this year. The paper produced in your Mills continues to enjoy market preference on account of its consistent high quality. J.K. Paper Mills has embarked upon an ambitious programme of modernisation involving a capital cost of Rs. 25 crores. Energy efficient Double Disc Refiners, Spreader-Stoker type Coal Fired Boiler and most of the process equipments have already been installed. A new Recovery Boiler and a Turbo Generator Set are under installation. In addition, it is proposed to widen our product base of superior quality papers which will augment profitability. For this purpose, a new Paper Machine for producing speciality and light weight paper is being installed at a cost of Rs. 11 crores, which is expected to be commissioned by the third quarter of 1988.

Despite the highly competitive market situation, Lakshmi Cement has been able to maintain its hold on the market on account of its quality. Constant efforts are being made to bring about improvement in productivity and cost reduction. To augment these efforts, the Company has entered into a consultancy agreement with Messers Blue Circle Industries, U.K., who are one of the leading cement producers in the world.

The Polyester Staple Fibre Project of Orissa Synthetics Ltd. promoted jointly by your Company and Industrial Promotion and Investment Corporation of Orissa Ltd.,was commissioned in March 1987. This is the most modern plant for production of Polyester Staple Fibre in the country having continuous polymerisation and adopting the latest Du Pont technology.

As part of our continuous search for new investment opportunities, we are setting up a Magnetic Tape unit in technical collaboration with a Japanese Company. Besides, a project for manufacturing Electronic Private Automatic Branch Exchanges (EPABX) in technical collaboration with the world-renowned Japanese Company, OKI Electric Industry Company Ltd. is also being taken up. On the horizon are proposals for the manufacture of some Chemical and Petro-chemical items including Linear Alkyl Benzene for which necessary applications have been submitted to the Government.

EMERGING ECONOMIC SITUATION

As I mentioned in my speech last year, significant policy initiatives were taken by the Government headed by Shri Rajiv Gandhi in economic management with a view to accelerate industrial development. Consequently, the process of new investments and creation of large new capacities which had begun during the Sixth Plan got a big spurt. The transformation envisaged — from a sellers' market to buyers' market — has started materialising. This transition understandably is not without problems and pains. Capacity has come to outstrip demand, in some cases substantially, in a number of important industries. Inefficient management of imports of items under import control, together with the policy of freer imports, has added another dimension. The result has been substantial under-utilisation of capacity and unremunerative working of a number of industries. To name some, fertilizer, synthetic fibres, cement, light commercial vehicles, two-wheelers, paper, industrial machinery etc. suffer from this phenomenon. The resulting widespread poor corporate performance is eroding investors' confidence as reflected in the slump in share prices and increasingly poor response to new capital issues. Some of this was unavoidable during such a basic transition, but a great deal could have been anticipated and avoided through proper understanding and management of change. To my mind, it is as much in the buyers' interest that the industry and specially new investment remains viable and profitable, as it is to have plentiful supply of goods.

Demand has not grown at the rate envisaged. It points to the need for framing and projecting realistic estimates of demand. Three below-average monsoons resulting in slow rate of growth in agricultural production, inadequate rise in government's developmental outlays in real terms and high costs of industrial production have contributed to the sluggish growth in demand. Last year, I had mentioned that efforts should be made to increase demand to achieve rapid industrial growth. I would once again emphasise its importance. With capacity overstripping demand in many industries, measures such as consumer credit would be helpful in stimulating demand without inflationary spill-over.

A bold and imaginative policy for the reduction and containment of costs is called for. Reduction in indirect taxation such as excise, customs, sales-tax etc. on finished goods as well as on inputs, which account for a sizeable proportion of the cost of industrial products will help push demand. It is my belief that their reduction will actually increase revenue through higher sales volume, rather than bringing about a reduction.

Take energy and services, items like coal, power, oil and transport are priced very high. Interest rates, both long and short-term, are double the rates prevailing in many countries of the world. These will have to be brought down to make our industry efficient and competitive. Modernisation, technology upgradation and upscaling the unit size of production are all of critical significance. Last but not the least, we cannot ignore the enormous costs on account of delays built in our capital and running costs. Formalities under Industrial Licensing, M.R.T.P. Act, Companies Act, and various other Central and State laws continue to be time-consuming and absorb lot of managerial time. These will have to be drastically cut down.

Another problem which plagues most of the new units is that of high cost of new investment. Investment costs have been mounting and are invariably high even in relation to new units elsewhere in the world. As a result, capital related costs work out substantially high for new units as compared to existing ones. This in turn affects their viability. The impact of this factor is felt particularly in India because we are rapidly building large new capacities, mostly on green field sites. The result has been that a number of newer units and investments, far from being remunerative, are making losses. This unsatisfactory state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. Remedial measures are urgently called for in the direction of containment of investment costs as also ensuring their viability. For continuing the process of the healthy growth of industry, it is of real importance that new investment is nurtured for an initial period till it is put on an even keel.

In the newly emerging situation of competitive growth, management is a vital input. It has to play its due role by lifting itself from old mores and modes of functioning to higher plateau of effort and endeavour. The challenge of industrial growth calls for regular monitoring of rapid changes in technology and environment and adapting to the same. There has to be proper mapping of market opportunities, careful assessment of the same and seizing them on time. This will call for efficient management team, motivated workforce and development of work ethos in tune with the demands of the day.

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PRODUCTS LTD.

Shri Hari Shankar Singhania

PAPER INDUSTRY

The Paper Industry in the country today is in none-too-happy a situation. The rate of growth of demand for paper has been slow and the capacity utilisation of the industry low. About 15-20 per cent of the installed capacity is defunct, being uneconomic because of obsolescence, lack of modernisation, sub-optimal sizes and excessive labour. Looking to the future needs, the capacity would need to be augmented by putting modern and large units. This calls for a serious look by the Government at the viability of new investment in Paper Industry, about which I have spoken in the past, on more than one occasion. In my view, measures are urgently called for to induce such investment in this vital field. Paucity of cellulosic raw materials is also a major problem for growth of the industry. Incentives for use of bagasse is a right step towards mitigating the raw material situation. But the ultimate solution lies in development of captive plantations on an urgent footing.

A welcome event of the year was the repeal of the Paper (Regulation of Production) Order 1978 and Paper (Control) Order 1979 in respect of White Printing Paper, which had forced the industry to sell sizeable portion of its production at below cost. The Paper Industry has been brought under the MODVAT scheme which has resulted in some benefit to the industry but it has been more than neutralised by the increase in excise duty by Rs. 100 per tonne of paper.

Cost effectiveness, technology upgradation and product diversification are the instruments available to us to maintain viability. It is therefore only in the fitness of things that I should record some of the significant achievements of your Paper Mills on this front and also our long term plans. Encouraged by the successful working of a water reclamation scheme installed some years back, we have embarked on a few schemes for further conservation of water, preliminary results of which are encouraging. These water conservation schemes by stages have removed a major constraint in the existing operations. The total water consumption per tonne of paper has come down from over 70,000 gallons in 1983 to about 66,000 gallons in 1986, and is expected to further reduce to 60,000 gallons in 1987.

In keeping with its social responsibility for pollution control, the Company has taken steps for further strengthening the Effluent Treatment Plant at J.K. Paper Mills by addition of efficient aerators and installation of Andritz Filter. As a result of extensive research, in collaboration with Pulp & Paper Research Institute, Jaykaypur, it has been established that Water Hyacinth, a fast growing wild weed, is very effective for treatment of industrial waste waters.

The concept of energy conservation is being imbibed at all levels and an Energy Conservation Cell is constantly monitoring and reviewing energy consumption patterns regularly. The Modernisation and Renovation Scheme currently under implementation has its major thrust on the efficient operation of the utility blocks like Soda Recovery Boilers, Turbines and Boilers. The various measures under execution are likely to yield energy saving of about 10% on an average. In terms of total energy, it has come down from 12,250 K.cal. to 11,100 K.cal. per kg. of paper. With full implementation of Modernisation Scheme, further energy conservation is expected.

Development of captive plantations by the paper mills is an important factor which needs urgent attention. These plantations could be taken up on land which is not being utilised for agricultural purposes. Industrial plantation of fast growing species should also be encouraged. It is necessary that the Government provide land of this kind to the industry. Your Company has taken necessary steps in this direction and captive plantation has been taken up on a small area of land allotted to us by the Government of Orissa. We are pursuing with the State Government for allotment of additional areas of land in order to ensure availability of raw materials on long term basis.

CEMENT INDUSTRY

Cement Industry made history during this year with the installed capacity crossing 50 million tonnes from 22 million tonnes in 1977. During this period, the production rose to 36.5 million tonnes from 19 million tonnes. The pragmatic policy announcement of September 1977 ensuring 12% post-tax return on the net-worth for new investment in the Cement Industry followed by partial decontrol in February 1982 has resulted in big spurt in cement production, transforming this almost stagnant industry into a dynamic one. By the end of the 7th Plan, the installed capacity may go up to 62 million tonnes and at the end of the 8th Plan to as much as 82 million tonnes.

However, it is unfortunate that disturbing symptoms have appeared in the scenario of cement industry. On the one hand, there has been slower demand growth than estimated and on the other substantial increased availability of cement has resulted in steep decline of the non-levy prices to unremunerative levels. Besides, input costs, especially of administered price items like power, coal and freight have been constantly going up. As a result of these factors and high investment costs, the new cement plants which have come into production since 1982, are unable to recover even the investment related costs like interest and depreciation, what to say of the return. The situation is such that corrective action is immediately needed to ensure that the industry gets reasonable return on investment; otherwise it will become sick and new investment will not be forthcoming.

The cement industry is losing almost Rs. 300 crores per annum on account of levy supplies only. It is necessary that the Government grants escalation in retention prices of levy cement on six monthly basis and fully compensates for the increase in input costs. Moreover the new cement plants with high investment cost which have come into production since 1982, like yours, require adequate relief in the form of reduction in excise duty to meet their higher capital related costs. The relief announced by the Government on 29th April 1987 of Rs. 20 per tonne in excise duty along with reduction in levy obligation by 10% to such new units, is too meagre and needs revision urgently.

In view of easy availability of cement, it is right time to give thrust for stimulating demand of cement. Massive house construction activities both in rural and urban areas, building of concrete roads, concrete lining of canals and irrigation channels to save seepage of water, making concrete railway sleepers and cement silos for storage of foodgrains should be launched on national basis. Such programmes will also generate large additional employment. This thrust brooks no delay and should be taken up on top priority basis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all workers, staff and officers for their painstaking efforts and team spirit for improving quality and competitive strength of the Company. I also appreciate the cooperation extended by the Financial Institutions, Banks, State Governments and Members of the Board of Directors and thank them for the same.

This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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DELHI

Death-Traps

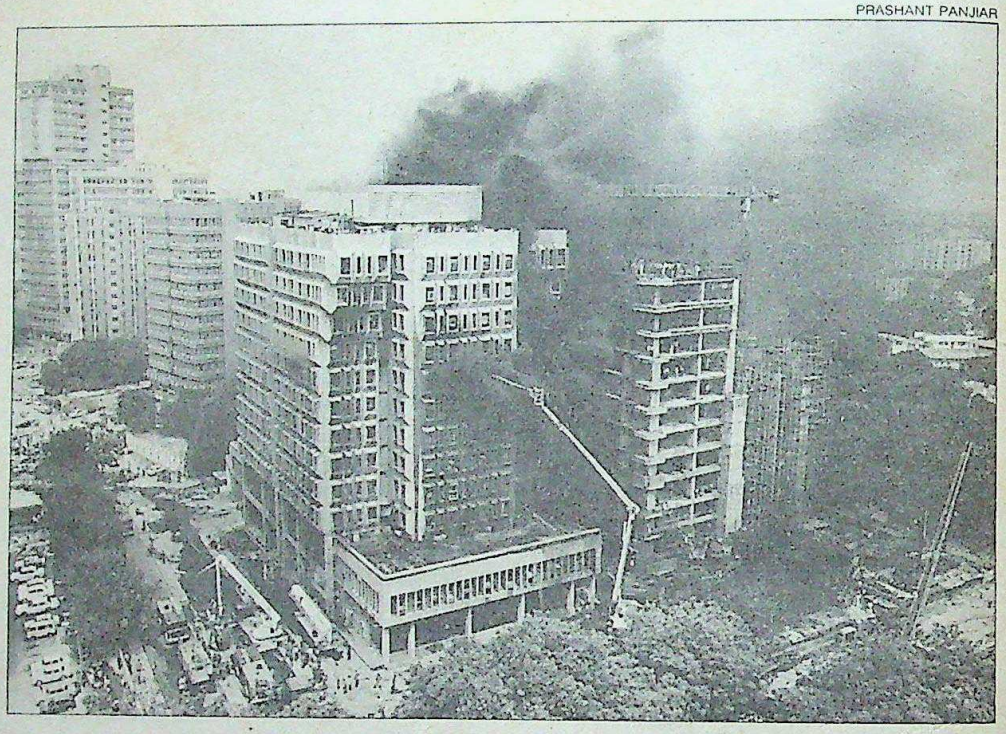
THE fire in Ansal Bhavan, a high-rise office building in Delhi, last fortnight, in which three persons were killed, was yet another tragic illumination of gross neglect and violation of safety laws by money-grubbing builders, the total lack of coordination between administrative agencies, and the appalling shortage of modern fire-fighting equipment and trained personnel. It was Delhi's 2,400th conflagration within the last three months. Said a distraught H.K.L. Kapur, the capital's lieutenant-governor: "I noticed that there was no coordination at the scene of action. There was no single commander whose orders were followed by all the agencies involved in putting out the fire from anywhere in the city." Kapur was not off the mark.

Ansal Bhavan, like many other high-rise buildings, is a veritable fire-trap—no smoke detection equipment, no functioning warning system, no emergency exits. The buildings were allowed to be occupied without proper fire-safety provisions. And as the fire raged and trapped inhabitants screamed for help, fire-fighters took a full half an hour to arrive. But all shades of politicians and high officials were already there and proceeded to give conflicting direction to the police, medicos and the firemen when they arrived. They included Home Minister Buta Singh, his two deputies P. Chidambaram and Chintamani Panigrahi, Chief Executive Councillor Jag Pravesh Chandra, and the chiefs of the army and the air force.

And they were soon joined by top police brass led by Commissioner Ved Marwah and a dozen deputy commissioners. But all the king's horses and all the king's men were unable to devise a plan to evacuate some 1,000 people trapped in the building. What saved them was not the officials or the shiny fire equipment but the genius and alertness of a few semi-literate labourers who constructed a makeshift bridge over which the hapless inhabitants were able to make good their escape.

From preliminary evidence available, the cause of the fire was attributed to an electrical short circuit. The electrical fittings in the building were found to be woefully below standard. But what made matters worse was that the building managers and relevant governmental agencies knew this. An official report issued earlier had warned that just about every high-rise building in Delhi faced this potentially explosive problem. The report was ordered by Lt-Governor Jagmohan in 1983 when he appointed a three-member committee to take stock of fire hazards in Delhi's 200 high-rise buildings. The committee's report, completed last year, found that every building was unsafe and without proper fire-fighting equipment. Among the buildings judged

PRASHANT PANJIAR



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Fire at Ansal Bhavan (top); and rescue work: utter chaos

to be dangerously unsafe and which were served notices were: Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) Vikas Minar, Hansalaya, Akashdeep, Nirmal Towers, Life Insurance Corporation-owned Jeewan Prakash, Central Revenue Buildings and Rohit House on Tolstoy Marg. None of these buildings has an alternative emergency escape route. While the Government blamed the builders for cutting costs at the expense of safety, the builders blamed the Government. Said Gopal Ansal, joint managing director of Ansals': "We took the no-objection certificate from the fire service and now they want to update these arrangements. It should be the collective responsibility of the owners and not the promoters alone."

The lt-governor's commit-

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tee, aware that promoters and users of the building would simply blame one another and pass the buck on the safety issue, had asked that the Delhi Administration be given regulatory powers with teeth to them so that it could take punitive action against law-breakers. Yet the Union Government took more than 15 months to arm the Delhi Fire Service with a comprehensive Fire Safety Act. In March 1987, the lt-governor framed rules under the new laws. The notices had been issued under the new law. The Delhi Fire Service spent Rs 5 crore procuring gas masks, fire resistant suits, high pressure pumps, portable pumps, better hydraulic platforms, turn-table ladders, and public address systems, and sanctioned five more fire stations, including one in the Nehru Place concrete high-rise jungle.

But the major limitation for improving the safety system is the problem of encroachments in corridors of buildings and lack of proper trained staff. Most of the buildings have unauthorised structures like canteens and even stair-wells are lined by cabins. In fact, an unauthorised cycle-stand in the Ansal Bhavan complex blocked easy access and prevented fire-fighters from entering the building in time. And the operator of the automatic fire-fighting ladder was not even trained and bungled its handling for a while. The upper portion of the ladder struck a wall and broke during the operation.

However, the fault lies with the civic bodies like the NDMC and DDA who are responsible for enforcing the building laws. Not only have they been negligent in granting completion certificates to the builders, even after they found safety defects, but have also ignored the dangerous encroachments in these buildings. Since commercial space in New Delhi is very expensive, real estate owners operate in a sellers market. Even space officially allocated for overhead tanks, parking, and power generators has been obtained by builders for unauthorised and hazardous constructions upon payment of bribes to civic officials. Of the thousands of fires in Delhi, the Ansal Bhavan blaze was the third in a high-rise building which can be directly attributed to neglect and mismanagement by civil authorities. After each such fire there is the usual hand-wringing, but the authorities go back to their ways once the heat has died down. The only solution, it appears, is constant and unrelenting public pressure on officials to enforce the fire laws and prevent the next towering inferno from taking even a bigger toll of human life.

—TANIA MIDHA and PRABHU CHAWLA

MADHYA PRADESH

Strange Twist

EVERYTHING about the B.V. Karanth-Vibha Mishra case has been dramatic so far. And last fortnight also witnessed perfect court room drama. In a surprise move, the Madhya Pradesh Government summarily sacked its special public prosecutor in the case in which theatre director Karanth, 57, is being tried for attempting to set stage actress Mishra on fire. The Law Department, which had hired Bhopal advocate Ram Chandra Dubey, 57, six months ago, wanted to humiliate him, it would seem. "I learnt of it only in the court room even as I was about to start examining the witnesses," said Dubey.

Vora (top) and Dubey: sudden sacking

On the morning of June 30, two government pleaders reached the court of Bhopal's Additional District and Sessions Judge D.S. Choudhary as he was on the verge of beginning proceedings. They told him that the Government had appointed them to deal with the case, replacing Dubey. "We received telephonic instructions from the Law Department this morning," they intoned. Dubey said he was ignorant of the new appointments or of his dismissal. By the time people in the court room could recover from the shock, a messenger from the Law Department arrived and handed over a sealed envelope to the judge, containing Dubey's dismissal order. An embarrassed Dubey left in a huff.

Dubey's sack-order came a day after he appealed for permission to summon Chief Minister Motilal Vora as a witness "in the interest of justice". The first task of the new lawyers was to withdraw the application. Said Dubey: "People will naturally speculate that I was removed because I tried to summon the chief minister as a witness."

The case has taken amazing twists and turns ever since Karanth was arrested on May 25 last year. The state Government has changed its lawyer five times, underlining the lack of decisiveness that afflicts its stand.

Law Department sources say Dubey was removed for committing a "grave misconduct" by trying to summon Vora. Quips Dubey: "When in the court room, I am not an agent of the Government. I am an advocate." Vora insists he does not have personal knowledge about the case but asks: "Is it proper for a public prosecutor to summon a chief minister to court?" But leader of the Opposition Kailash Joshi argues: "The sky would not have fallen if the chief minister had given evidence."

The Bhopal bar reacted sharply to Dubey's unceremonious removal. Many lawyers described it as an attempt to influence the judicial process. Even Dharmendra Verma, Karanth's defence counsel, was forced to say: "I've never seen such a thing in my life. Removing one lawyer after another is a humiliation of the entire fraternity." Joshi said that the changes indicated that Vora was trying to shield the culprit "under pressure from someone".

In his application, Dubey alleged that Karanth had had several facilities extended to Mishra through the Government to prevent her from giving evidence against him. Vora personally called on Mishra when she was in hospital and provided the state aircraft to fly her to Delhi for treatment. The Government also paid her huge medical bills—Mishra received the best treatment money could buy—and arranged for her and her family members' stay in Madhya Pradesh Bhavan, the state guest-house in New Delhi. And, though the evidence of many key witnesses has gone against Karanth, his greatest consolation is that Mishra has steadfastly denied that he tried to set her on fire and insists it was an accident.

Contends Dubey: "Mishra is not so great an artiste as to merit such VIP treatment. Obviously it was done at somebody else's behest." Vora says that he helped the stage artiste on "humanitarian grounds". Says Dubey: "Every day, scores of women are burnt in the state. In how many cases has the chief minister provided the state plane?" He alleges the state

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Karanth (left); and Vibha: complex case

Government did this to shield Karanth at the behest of "a powerful political leader connected to Bharat Bhavan", the government cultural complex at Bhopal.

The sacked lawyer said he found the Government's attitude towards the case "strange" from the start. "I've a feeling that they want to suppress the facts," he alleged. In fact, at one point, the officer investigating the case filed two affidavits—one supporting Karanth's bail application and another opposing it, attracting, in the process, adverse comments from the high court.

Both the protagonists are, meanwhile, trying to piece together their shattered lives. While Mishra resumed her duties—designing costumes and writing—at Bharat Bhavan last May, Karanth, bailed out two months ago, has started going out on assignments for films, TV and theatre. There must be few occasions when the drama in real life is so close to pure theatre. —N.K. SINGH

MEGHALAYA

Xenophobia

TENSION continues to stalk the scenic hills of Shillong where the agitation against non-tribal "outsiders", spearheaded by the Khasi Students Union (KSU), has shattered the peace. On July 9, for the second time in the past month, the army was called out when violence and arson directed against non-tribals, spread further and sent shock waves through the state of Meghalaya. It caused intense insecurity among non-tribals who number 2.55 lakh as against 10.8 lakh tribals. Nearly 4,000 students, after closing down all schools and colleges in Shillong—and defying prohibitory orders—demonstrated daily before the secretariat, waving banners that proclaimed "Non-tribals get out".

The KSU anti-foreigners' agitation—launched almost two years ago, but which gained fervour only recently—has not only struck panic among the Nepalis and the Bangladeshis here but also among non-tribal Indians who dominate trade and commerce in Shillong. Last fortnight, numerous incidents of verbal abuse, stone-throwing and assault led to the closure, for long periods, of shops owned by Bengalis, Marwaris, Punjabis and Gujaratis.

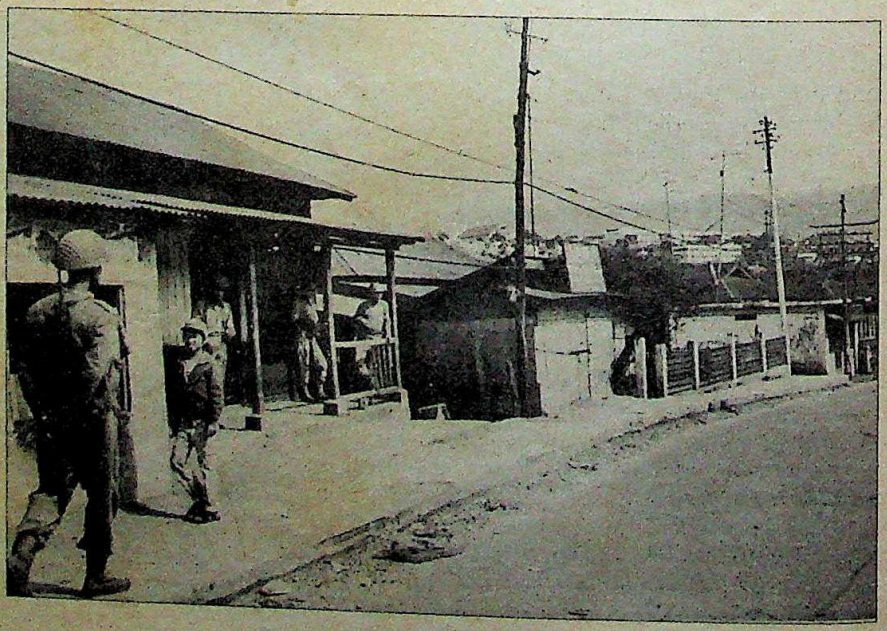
A move by non-tribal shopkeepers to organise themselves in the face of increasing intimidation was quickly aborted as threatening phone calls poured in daring them to do so in a land that was not theirs. In another incident, where a Nepali-owned cowshed was burnt down by a Khasi mob, roasting alive 16 cows, a local resident fired at the mob, killing a local taxi-driver. And with student groups continually marching around town, shouting "foreigners go back", the streets remained empty of regular tourists as well.

NON-tribal families began vacating residences from tribal-dominated areas—either voluntarily or because landlords served them notices—and moved to mixed localities like Laban, Riblong, Bishnipur and Laitumukhrah. Over a thousand Nepalis and Biharis from Khasi-dominated areas like Mawlai, Pynthorumkhrah, and lower Mawprem fled to the hills to take shelter in three relief camps that had been set up by Nepalis, aided by voluntary organisations. Said Krishna Chettri, a Nepali from Mawprem, who was attacked by Khasi youth: "We are being hounded for no reason. Where can we go? We were born here."

The violence also spread outside the town to Cherrapunji, where a non-tribal was stoned to death. In Nongstoin, about 90 km from Shillong, over 100 non-tribal families fled in the face of agitators to mixed localities.

Realising that the situation might degenerate even further, last fortnight, the East Khasi district administration asked for 30 companies of paramilitary forces—but received only six. Normally, only 10 companies are deployed in the whole of Meghalaya. Meanwhile, D.N. Joshi, Congress(I) MLA and AICC(I) member, shot off desperate telegrams to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Union Home Minister Buta Singh and Sikkim Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari, pleading for steps to halt the exodus of Nepalis from their residential areas immediately.

The main KSU demands include regulation of the entry of outsiders to the state—as in Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh—and the reservation of all 60 seats in the state Assembly for tribals. "We must have the inner line permit (which restricts the inflow of outsiders)," asserts KSU President Bull Lyngdoh, "otherwise outsiders will come and dominate the innocent tribals." He also demands that the Khasis in particular must get greater reservations because they are more enterprising. At present, Meghalaya has 85 per cent reservation for tribals. Forty per cent of the total goes to the Garos, 40 per



Curfew in Shillong: growing tension

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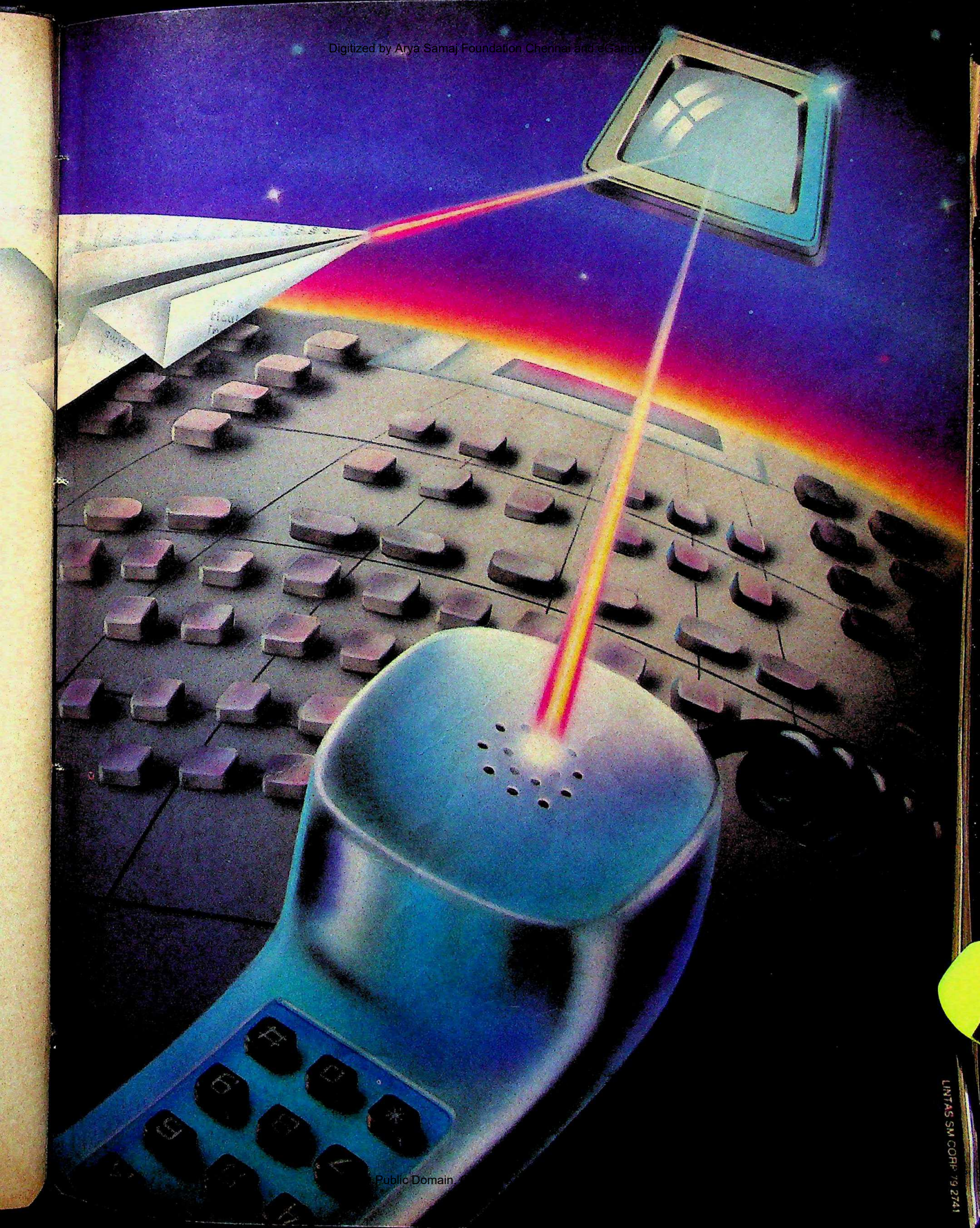

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cent goes to the Jayantias and Khasis, and the remaining 5 per cent is left for other tribes.

Though the tribal leader maintains that the agitation he is spearheading is not anti-Indian and is focused against Nepalis and Bangladeshis alone, his stance is belied by KSU agitators who mouth anti-non-tribal slogans. Many, not surprisingly, see this as the beginning of yet another virulent agitation against "outsiders"—those from other states—in the North-east. Echoing this view, District Magistrate Neeraj Prasad says the administration will never permit the various communities to be harassed by antisocials.

By pandering to local sentiments and focusing on the issue of exploitation by other Indian communities, the KSU has been able to garner the support of the local Khasi organisations. Says Paul Pde Lang, a local businessman: "Tribals fear that they will be dominated by outsiders if there are no controls." "No detection, no election" has become a popular slogan and refers to the detection of foreigners before the Assembly elections scheduled for early next year. The Williamson A. Sangma Government is likely to have a lot of problems on its hands in the coming months before its term runs out.

—RAMESH MENON

TAMIL NADU

Left Divide

IT all finally came to a boil last fortnight. Dissensions within the CPI in Tamil Nadu, which had been simmering for nearly a year, finally led to a virtual split in the party. The CPI's central secretariat issued a stern warning to M. Kalyanasundaram, the 78-year-old veteran leader of the party in Tiruchi, to immediately stop his "disruptive activities". The reference was to the near-revolt of Kalyanasundaram and his supporters against the authority of P. Manickam, the CPI's state unit secretary.

Unperturbed, Kalyanasundaram wrote to General Secretary C. Rajeswara Rao, appealing to the central leadership "to reconsider its attitude to the Tamil Nadu problems". He reflected: "The national leadership can still save the situation. But if the party decides to expel me, I will maintain that I am the real communist and CPI man. I don't need an identity card signed by Manickam to testify to my communist beliefs."

The state unit, however, was not in a relenting mood. Under Manickam's leadership, the CPI's state council suspended 16 of its 136 members for six months. All those suspended are considered close to Kalyanasundaram and were among the 36 who had boycotted a recent state council meeting. Among those suspended were D. Pandiyan, former assistant secretary of the CPI's state unit; K.T. Raju, former MLA and also a former assistant secretary; and R. Karuppiah, a former legislator. The state council also recommended Kalyanasundaram's suspension to the party's central leadership. Kalyanasundaram is not only one of the 117 full-time state council members but is also on the central committee. Therefore, only the national leadership can suspend him.

P. Manickam

The clash between the two prominent leaders may well lead to an irrevocable split in the CPI's Tamil Nadu unit.

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

M. Kalyanasundaram

The CPI's state leadership had also dissolved during the last four months, four district councils over which Kalyanasundaram held sway. The veteran leader, however, puts the number of such councils at 10. Manickam argues that the action was taken because the bodies were either totally inactive or were blatantly flouting party norms. "Only when their violation of party discipline reached an intolerable level did we finally act," he says.

Last fortnight Kalyanasundaram, in a display of strength, presided over a two-day special invitees' conclave in Tiruchi which was attended by 284 party members. Among them were 34 state council members—including the 16 who were suspended. The invitees questioned the state leadership—particularly Manickam's. While the gathering appealed to the party bosses to intervene, it also came close to resolving to act independently in future.

The dissension has its origins in a two-year-old event. New Century Welfare Society, an offshoot of the New Century Book House—operating under the CPI banner with People's Publishing House—availed of a Rs 48-lakh fund, which was to have been disbursed before September 1988, from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The money was to run a hospital and organise health services in Ambattur, near Madras. Kalyanasundaram immediately protested as "accepting USAID funds was an affront to the communist movement". "The Marxists also began to ridicule us after that," he says.

Subsequently, at a state council meeting six months ago, 91 of the 136 members voted for a resolution condemning the acceptance of the money. Kalyanasundaram who is still exultant about that decision recalls that even Rajeswara Rao felt that the aid was a blunder. However, his detractors point out that the state council resolution was in fact moved by Manickam who says: "After that meeting I asked eight party members who were on the managing committee of the welfare society to withdraw, which they did." Kalyanasundaram claims, however, that Manickam has done the reverse. He says the party secretary asked his New Century people to quit the party and continue in the society. "Manickam still retains indirect control of the society," he charges.

There are plenty of other issues for the two leaders to squabble over. Manickam's alleged leaning towards the DMK line, and Kalyanasundaram's reported veering towards the AIADMK is one such. The conflict between the two also appears to be a clash of personalities. With both the CPI's central committee and national council scheduled to meet towards the end of this month to discuss the matter, it has begun to appear as if individuals are beginning to matter more than ideology in this left party.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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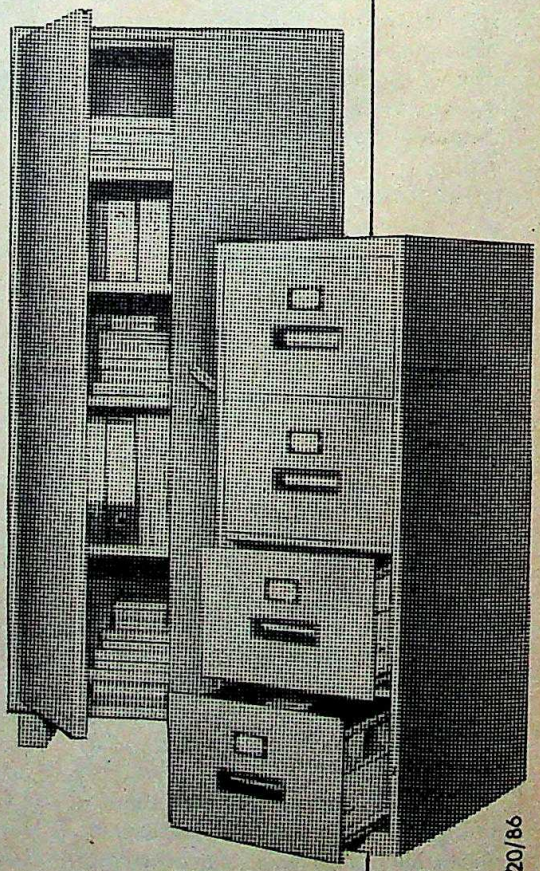

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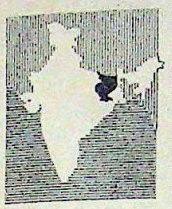
BIHAR

Police Hunt



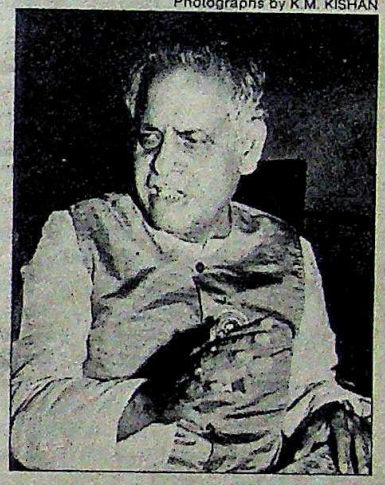
MUCH of the starch has gone out of their uniform. Following the Dalelchak-Baghaura massacre, Bihar's policemen, pressured by repeated caste carnages, once again find themselves victims of a political witch-hunt. Many heads have already rolled and many more may roll soon. The touted reason: toning up the administration. The actual reason: political expediency.

Bihar's experienced director general of police (DGP) S.B. Sahay has been stripped of his post and shifted to a strange assignment—chairman, Sports Authority. The post of inspector general of police (law and order), which was created last year, has been scrapped and its incumbent L.V. Singh transferred to the obscure post of inspector general of police (provisions). The young superintendent of police (SP) of Aurangabad district, Satish Chandra Jha, in whose area the Dalelchak-Baghaura massacre took place, has been shunted as commandant (home guards), Patna, and if the police grape-vine is to be believed, much worse is in store for him.

The force's only consolation was that Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey replaced Sahay with S.N. Roy, widely respected in the force as a capable officer with vast experience in crime and intelligence. Dubey also created three new posts of DGP, to accommodate the powerful old guard which wanted the plum police chief's post, but turned the department top-heavy in the process. These included: DGP (home guards), DGP (Bihar Military Police) and DGP (civil defence), which was to carry the designation of commissioner, civil defence (Earlier this post was held by an IAS officer). But, soon after, in a whimsical action, the post of DGP (military police) was reduced to its earlier status of IG's level. A new post of DGP (vigilance) was also created. Strangely, the Government revived the post of deputy inspector general of police (Naxalites), that was abolished only last year.

That politics clearly was behind the shake-up could not be concealed. Senior police officials even suggest that the exercise was carried out to appease the powerful Rajput lobby. They point to the case of Jha, who, they believe, suffered because he had antagonised the Rajput lobby in the Congress(I). He had refused to arrest Ram Naresh Singh alias Lootan Singh, a Janata Party leader and Rajput strongman, under the Crime Control Act, though the then Aurangabad collector, Jogendra Prasad, had told him to do so in writing. The letter, dated May 1, 1987—and marked 'top secret'—stated that Lootan Singh be arrested as this was the 'desire' of the chief minister. Jha, however, wrote back saying there was not enough ground to arrest Singh under the Act and the "mention of the honourable chief minister in your letter was unnecessary and uncalled for".

Photographs by K.M. KISHAN



Dubey (top); Sahay (left) and Roy

For reasons of political expediency, the Bihar police has had another shake-up following the recent caste massacres.

Evidently, the Congress(I) leaders have not forgotten the slight. Jha was not even allowed to meet Home Minister Buta Singh and explain the situation when he visited Aurangabad. The fact that Jha had intimated police high-ups—as also the chief minister's office—about the tension building up in the area at least 20 days before the May 29 massacre, also has been deliberately pushed under the bureaucratic carpet.

Even more interesting is the case of Sahay. Barely a month before the massacre, in which 42 perished, Sahay had sent a 15-page analytical note to the Chief Secretary, R. Srinivasan, describing how some politicians in that region had criminalised politics and were inflaming caste passions. The letter, however, was not received favourably by Congress(I) leaders and was one reason, according to senior police officials, for Sahay's inglorious exit. Sahay's joint effort with L.V. Singh to streamline the police administration also met with little enthusiasm. Even his proposal to strengthen the middle-level force by posting 90 more deputy superintendents of police came a cropper.

Not surprisingly, the morale of the force is on the downswing. Police stations are understaffed and most have no buildings of their own. Criticial policing auxiliaries like jeeps and phones are not available. Poorly trained officers, with political patronage, rule the roost, turning the state, as a senior Congress(I) leader says, into a "*daroga* raj".

Worse, transfers, most often on caste lines, have become an accepted fact of police life. In the last two and a half years, the average tenure of an SP in a district has come down to a bare six months. Police officials state that it normally takes three to four months for an SP to get acclimatised to a district. However, by the time he is ready to begin his work he is 'routinely' transferred. Many officers fear that the new police chief, Roy, may also face the same fate as Sahay, if politicians continue with their favourite sport of looking for scapegoats among policemen to atone for their own sins.

—FARZAND AHMED

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A COMPANY CHAIRMAN SPEAKS TO HIS SHARE HOLDERS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad I have got yet another opportunity to meet you all at this the 31st Annual General Meeting of your Company, held two days ahead of what we did last year. I most heartily welcome one and all of you. I especially welcome revered Dr. N. Mahalingam, the Chairman of our Group and Founder Chairman of this Company. It is extremely kind of him to have been able to be present here amidst his multifarious activities.

METEORIC GROWTH :

The Report of the Directors and the Audited Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 1987 have been with you for quite sometime now and with your permission, I shall take them as read. The detailed Directors' Report, with certain special charts added this time, and my letter of the 11th May have clearly brought forward the various highlights of the working of your Company during the year. It could vividly be seen therefrom that continuously for the third year in succession, your Company could maintain its all round fantastic growth, which many have rightly described as "METEORIC", and still present you the audited accounts in this record time of 66 days after closure of the Financial Year.

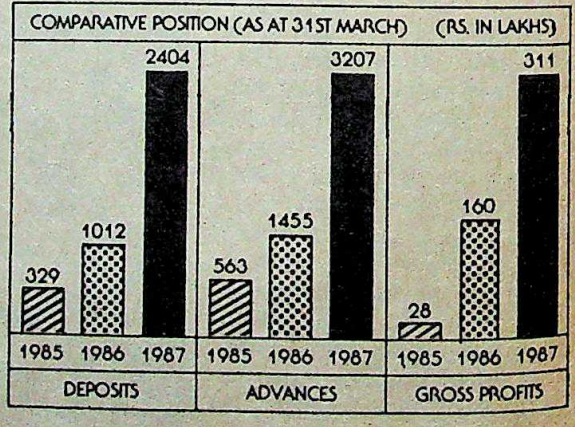
DEPOSITS :

There is no doubt whatsoever that the entire team of Officers and staff of your Company continued to work during the year with a sense of urgency and on the basis of warfooting, of which I have been speaking to you all along. The result has been an astounding increase in deposits from only Rs.10.12 crores as at 31-3-1986 to Rs.24.04 crores, (the number of depositors being 36,764) showing an increase of 137%. In fact, during the year, your company was able to mobilise as much as about Rs.17 crores as fresh deposits from as many as 23,554 depositors. I dare say no other Finance or Leasing Company in the country can boast of such an achievement. More, we had the benefit of renewal of as much as Rs.5 crores during the year, whereas refunds were only to the tune of Rs.3 crores.

The figures given above indeed speak volumes of the trust and confidence that the depositing public are increasingly reposing in your Company. And all this inspite of the keen competition for available funds from our 400 and odd bretheren, if the Press Reports go right. Another interesting feature is that our inimitable service to the depositors is getting increasing recognition from the investing public in Northern States, following the opening of our Branch Office in Bombay. Your Directors propose to redouble their efforts in this regard and have accordingly fixed a high target of adding another Rs. 25-crores to the deposits before the current year ends on 31-3-1988. I am sure, in this behalf, I can count fully on your support as also of your friends and relations.

Many a Finance and Leasing Company in the country is claiming to be the fastest growing. However, if the rate of mobilisation of public deposits is taken into account, which indeed should be the real yardstick for the purpose, I assert that your Company stands first in the country today, excepting for a solitary exception.

S.N. Pai,



ADVANCES :

Your Company's record in the matter of advances during the year under review had been equally impressive. These, comprising of stocks-on-hire, leased assets and other loans and advances had jumped from Rs.14.55 crores as at 31-3-1986, to as much as Rs. 32.07 crores as on 31-3-87 showing an increase of 120%. Here again, inspite of very keen competition, your Company could regularly deploy its funds at reasonably remunerative rates, which advantage it is hoping to enjoy in future also.

PROFITS :

The result, naturally, had been a handsome Gross Earnings of Rs.7.49 crores, which is more than double of Rs.3.24 crores earned in the previous year. Accordingly, the Gross Profits of your Company had also almost doubled and stood at Rs.3.11 crores, as against Rs. 1.60 crores in the previous year. However, thanks to a much heavier depreciation of Rs. 1.29 crores (Rs.0.43 crores previous year) that had to be provided, the net profit had been to the extent of Rs. 1.82 crores only, as against Rs. 1.17 crores in the previous year. This has given an earning rate per share of 101%, which is the highest in the industry and one of the best by any standard. I am sure you will find these results excellent. Indeed, these are without parallel and without precedent in the industry. Verily, your Company continues to make history.

DEPRECIATION :

While on this, I refer to para 9 of the Directors' Report, which deals with 'Depreciation', which is a 'hot' subject in the leasing industry these days. It has been stated therein that though depreciation on leased assets has been accounted for on the basis of straightline method, as provided in the Companies Act, the difference in depreciation that will result if the same is calculated on the basis of written down value method, is more than fully covered by the General Reserves of your Company. This position should be deemed as satisfactory.

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DIVIDEND :

In line with the increased profitability, but consistent with the prudence to be observed by Companies like yours, the Directors have recommended payment of a final dividend at 10% per annum on equity shares, raising the total to 22% for the year, as against 20% paid during the previous two years. I hope you will welcome this. The Dividend Warrants are almost ready and will be despatched to you all immediately.

BRANCH OFFICES/SAKTHI SAFE VAULTS :

During the year under review, your company had established eight more Branch Offices and commissioned five Sakthi Safe Vaults, taking the total number to 24 Branches and 8 Safe Vaults. More of them are in the offing.

HEAD OFFICE BUILDING :

The rapid unprecedented growth of your Company has posed many problems, the most important being the shortage of office space at Head Office, which has been affecting the efficiency. Your Directors have, therefore, decided to put up a multistoried building in the vacant space behind the present Head Office building. Construction work has already been started and the first phase thereof is expected to be completed before the end of the current Financial Year.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT :

Your Directors continued their policy of spreading their advances very widely during the year, with the result that the Company had 11,651 borrowers at the year end, making an average of about Rs. 27,500/- only per borrower. Vehicle advances were given to as many as over 1,800 persons, whereas consumer durable loans were availed by over 9,490 persons. This, surely, minimises the risks to your Company and enhances the security to the depositors, to which your Company gives much importance.

Your Directors feel legitimately proud that the Company's activities are really inculcating the habit of savings in the middle class and helping promote production, employment, trade, etc., all of which lead to the economic development and national good to a considerable extent.

WARNING BELL :

That all is not well for the Hire Purchase and Leasing Industry in the country is fairly well known, what with the steep demand recession in the automobile industry, the sad plight of the road transport operators, the sales tax on lease rentals imposed by the various State Governments, 'Exposure Draft' circulated by the Chartered Accountants' Association seeking to modify the accounting practices of leasing companies and last but not the least, the Book Profit tax imposed in the recent budget. The Government of India, which was encouraging leasing industry in the country, as a dispenser of supplementary finance for industrial development, as evidenced by the fact that it had agreed to the International Finance Corporation setting up jointly four large scale leasing companies in the country, amongst others, appears to be now a silent spectator to the pitiable position to which the leasing companies are being pushed to. As per Press Reports, out of over 400 Finance and Leasing Companies that had mushroomed in the Indian horizon since 1983, nearly 300 are already in serious difficulties. Of the rest, only about half are said to be somewhat healthy. It is certain that unless serious steps are immediately taken to protect these weak units, thousands of investors will be put to serious loss, leading to national waste. It is hoped that the authorities concerned would take note of the warning bell and do the needed before it is too late.

PROSPECTS :

All-the-same, I can assure you that the future of your Company will be taken care of fully and will not be allowed to be affected by this general malaise. Foundations have been laid fairly deep to enable it to weather any storm. In the two months that have passed in the current year, your Company has kept up the steady allround upward trend, indicating that the prospects for the current year are going to be equally bright. Hence, I continue to be optimistic as ever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT :

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would now like to conclude by placing on record my very deep appreciation for the excellent services rendered by the entire band of Officers and staff of your Company. I also thank my colleagues on the Board for their wise counsel and guidance throughout the year. Last but not the least, I thank you all, the shareholders, depositors, and borrowers, for the continued trust and confidence reposed in your Company.

Let God Bless us all!

The above is the full text of the speech delivered by Shri S.N. Pai, Executive Chairman, Sakthi Finance Ltd., at the 31st Annual General Body Meeting of the Company held at Coimbatore on 5-6-1987.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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(MS/4643)

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The preferred age is 35 to 45 years.

MARKETING DIRECTOR

(MS/4644)

Salary not less than US$ 80,000 per annum plus excellent perquisites

The Marketing Director will be involved in conceptualizing, planning and implementing marketing strategy. He will be expected to be an ideas person.

The preferred age is 32 to 40 years.

Candidates for both positions should have strong leadership abilities and experience of consumer brand marketing. They will form a part of an aggressive action oriented cosmopolitan group and should be comfortable in an international environment.

The salaries for the above positions are entirely negotiable. Perquisites include furnished housing, car, etc., that normally go with senior expatriate jobs. Our client is keen on the best talent in the Industry and will reward good performance. Future prospects are excellent as the Group is growing rapidly.

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giving full details of age, qualifications, experience and salaries drawn. All applications and envelopes should be marked with the relevant MS reference number. Candidates not contacted within three months of application may assume that they are not being considered.

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MAHARASHTRA

Open Attack

WHENEVER Rajasthan Governor Vasantdada Patil visits his home state, he never fails to arouse intense speculation about the fate of Maharashtra Chief Minister S.B. Chavan. Patil's latest four-day trip was no exception. But this time, he threw discretion to the winds. His open campaigning against Chavan led his arch rival to complain: "No governor has ever acted in this manner and that too without any provocation."

But the message from Maharashtra's 70-year-old political war-horse was clear: it is time for yet another change in the leadership of the Congress(I)-ruled state. Significantly, it was Patil's son Prakash, a Congress(I) MP, who triggered off the latest fusillade. Said an MLA: "When Prakash speaks everybody knows it is the voice of his father, so we had come prepared for some action during the monsoon session." Next, Patil himself flew in from Jaipur to step up the campaign.

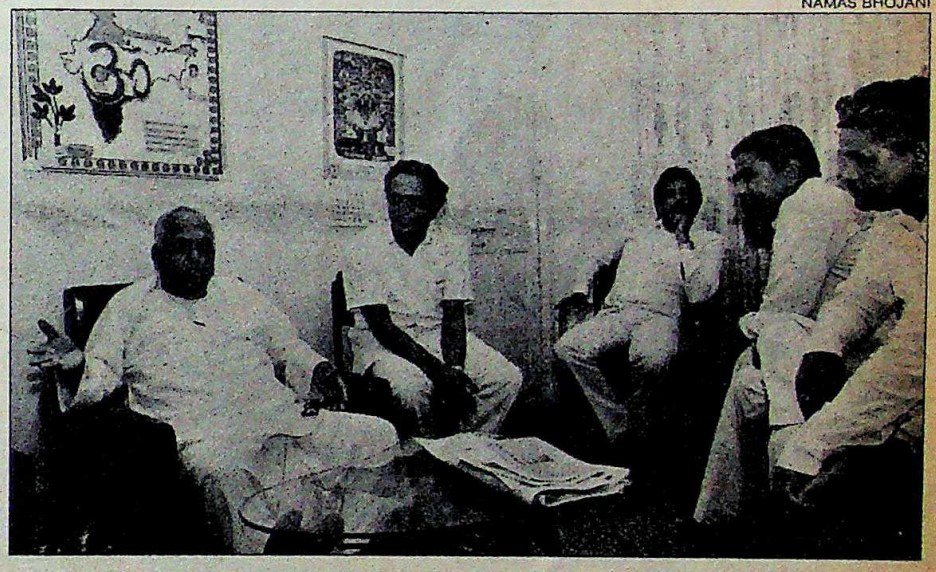
Ensconced in his son's official bungalow in Bombay, Patil met scores of party legislators and prominent leaders, conveying to all his determination to oust Chavan after the presidential poll. "I may go to Delhi to take up a party post. I may return to Bombay," Patil said. "But it is clear to me that if the Congress(I) is to survive in Maharashtra, the leadership will have to change." And his associates hinted broadly that Rajiv Gandhi had given the green signal to Patil, after the latter had thrown his weight behind the prime minister in his conflict with the President. As proof of Patil's new-found importance, there was the last minute invitation to son Prakash to accompany Rajiv on his Moscow trip.

Though his supporters were projecting Prataprao Bhosale, an MP from Y.B. Chavan's old Satara constituency, as the next chief minister, and Patil himself spoke of taking up a senior party post in New Delhi, it was clear that the politician from Sangli was attempting to seize power just when the authority of the party high command had been weakened after the Haryana debacle. However, by the week's end when Chavan returned from Delhi to announce that Rajiv had cleared the long-awaited Cabinet expansion, it was apparent that the high command had decided to back the incumbent chief minister.

In an attempt to demonstrate Chavan's isolation in state politics, Patil's focus was to ensure that his followers stay away from a dinner hosted for legislators by Chavan supporter and former Maharashtra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (MPCC-I) president Premala Chavan. The dinner became a bone of contention between the groups, and with the chief minister's opponents claiming that only 70 legislators showed up (his supporters put the number at 100) it was seen as a last supper for Chavan. The absentees included present MPCC(I) chief Prabha Rau.

When three Central observers sent in connection with the presidential poll arrived in Bombay, more than 150 legislators and former ministers made a beeline to the state guest-house demanding a change. Even the composition of the Central team was considered revealing—besides Union Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and party General Secretary G.K. Moopanar, there was also Chavan opponent N.K.P. Salve, who was behind an ouster campaign during the winter Assembly session in Nagpur. Though Rao described the dissident campaign as "a family quarrel which will be settled without much fuss", the impression had gained currently that

NAMAS BHOJANI



Patil with legislators: determined

Asserting that he enjoyed the full support of the Congress(I) Legislature Party (CLP), Chavan ridiculed talk of a change in leadership. He even refused to be drawn into a slanging match with Patil, though the Rajasthan governor had declared: "Let Chavan speak out now, then I will give my reaction." But Chavan shot back: "I am not the sort of person who can get provoked."

Nevertheless, with the legislature in session, hectic lobbying was on. Ninety-three legislators serving their first terms came together, with their leaders first demanding that the leadership issue should be left to the party high command and then maintaining that the CLP should be free to elect a leader. Though 46 legislators from Sharad Pawar's erstwhile Congress(S), who are first-timers, were kept out, the move was widely seen as one inspired by his camp. Pawar himself was missing throughout the drama, away attending a Marathi literary function in the US.

the party high command was once again willing to yield to patriarchs in the fold.

But even if the demand for a change was to be accepted, the problem would be on the choice of a successor. Though Patil and Pawar have mended fences neither of the two leaders are likely to remain quiet if the other gets the plum job. Younger and equally adroit at political manoeuvring, Pawar could prove an obstacle in Patil's plan.

But whatever the outcome Patil had made it clear that in spite of occupying a governor's chair he was not averse to indulging in political gamesmanship in order to unseat his rival, Chavan. With the party leadership preoccupied with the presidential poll, he was obviously trying to demonstrate his muscle in his home state and force the Congress(I) high command's hand. With the state Assembly scheduled to remain in session till July 24, the scenario after the presidential poll promised to be full of suspense. But the final chapter would depend a great deal on the script-writers in New Delhi.

—M. RAHMAN

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UTTAR PRADESH

Power Politics

IT was the case of the proverbial monkey outwitting the squabbling cats. In Uttar Pradesh, ever since the main opposition party, the Lok Dal, went alphabetical and split into A and B factions in February—led by Ajit Singh and H.N. Bahuguna respectively—the situation has been convenient for the ruling Congress(I). In their vying to outdo the other, the state Assembly has been without one or the other faction. The struggle for supremacy led to a situation recently when, for only the second time in 18 years, the police had to be called into the House to physically remove members bent on disrupting proceedings.

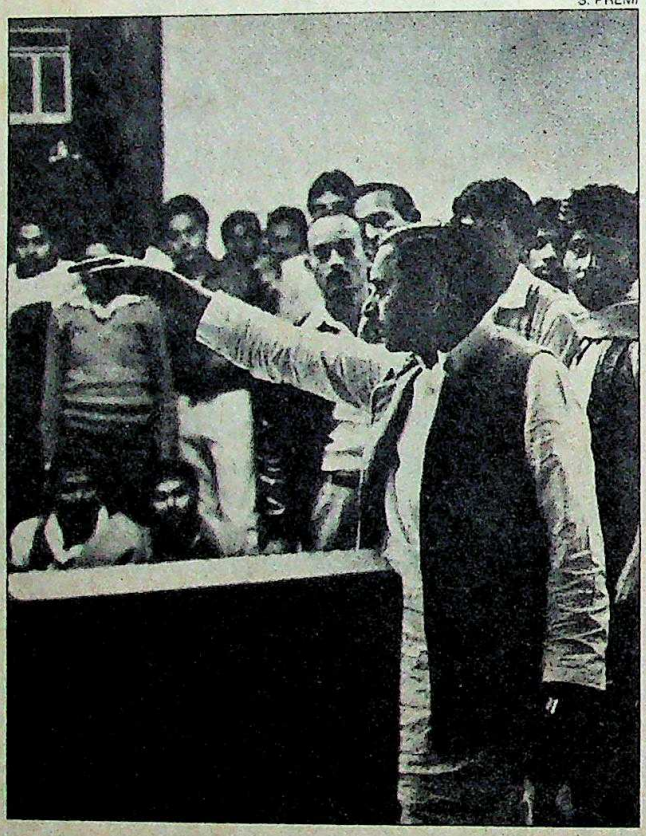
The Ajit Singh group had fired the first salvo in the opposition war by staging the February coup by collecting the majority of the MLAs. This had led to the installation of Satyapal Yadav as leader of the Opposition replacing Lok Dal(B)'s Mulayam Singh Yadav who was also state party chief. Then, in March, the Lok Dal(A)'s 53 members boycotted the entire assembly session in protest against its brief 10-day period.

Late last month, the Lok Dal(B), fired by its landslide victory in Haryana, decided to avenge Mulayam Singh Yadav's humiliation. Having cobbled together a five-party combine along with the Janata Party, CPI, CPI(M) Congress(J), called the Krantikari Morcha, it made a plea to Assembly Speaker Niaz Hasan that the Lok Dal(B) leader be re-awarded the status of leader of the Opposition as the Morcha had a combined strength of 67 MLAs as compared to the Lok Dal(A)'s 53. Hasan, after reserving his ruling, refused to concede their demand though the business conduct rules of the House clearly state that the leader of the single largest opposition party be awarded the status of the leader of the Opposition, provided the party's strength is one-tenth of the strength of the House.

Hasan's ruling went to the advantage of the Congress(I) which, after the Haryana debacle, would not have liked to see the Lok Dal(B) gain in strength in Uttar Pradesh. As leader of the Opposition in the past, Mulayam Singh Yadav had often faced the charge of working hand in glove with Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh. But after Haryana, his getting the post is no longer such a pleasant prospect for the ruling party.

What followed, however, was abysmal, a contretemps precedented but once—in 1969—before in the history of the Assembly. During question hour, 38 slogan-shouting legislators of the Morcha, led by Yadav himself, entered the well of the House. The Deputy Speaker, Trilok Chand, after a brief adjournment, named the 38 members and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Ammar Rizvi moved a motion for their expulsion. Given the majority of the ruling party, the motion was passed with ease. But a tricky situation developed. The members refused to leave the well, and the marshals, normally asked to remove obstructing legislators, found themselves outnumbered. The Congress(I) then passed a resolution empowering the "speaker to seek the help of the police whenever he deemed it necessary" and at 1.30 a.m., the police entered the House. Next morning, another 14 of the Morcha members were expelled for the session when they resorted to similar tactics. This time, however, the Council House guards were enough to complete the task.

S. PREMI



Yadav with supporters: noisy scenes

While the expelled members have been denied participation in the continuing budget session, the rest of the opposition has been attending regularly. Said an angry Mulayam Singh Yadav: "They are doing what the Government wants them to." The members who are attending the House, level similar charges against the Lok Dal(B) leader. Says leader of the Opposition Satyapal Yadav: "They are the people who have given the Government a free field by creating a situation in which they must already have known that they would be expelled for a long time."

He is not alone in voicing this opinion. Even senior leaders in Mulayam Singh Yadav's camp are not satisfied with the way in which things have developed. Said Lok Dal(B)'s Chief Whip Ram Saran Das: "After all, people send us here to participate in the proceedings instead of sitting outside helplessly like anyone else." Even an annoyed Rizvi charged: "Nobody in his right mind would defend the action of members who just keep saying that 'we will not allow the House to function.' " With nothing better to do, the 52 expelled MLAs have embarked on a tour of the state to organise demonstrations and dharnas. "We have been ousted from the Vidhan Sabha so we are going to the house of the the masses," says Yadav.

But even as they left to plead their case with the public a fresh scandal rocked the House. This time it was a Lok Dal(A) MLA, Yadunath Singh, who was at the centre of it. Singh, who had gone to the chamber of Bhola Shanker Maurya, minister of state for irrigation, evidently did not see eye to eye with the minister over a transfer case. Soon, the two honourable members of the House were freely punching each other. And though a committee was set up to probe the incident, the two Lok Dals had certainly given tradition a hard knocking in the state.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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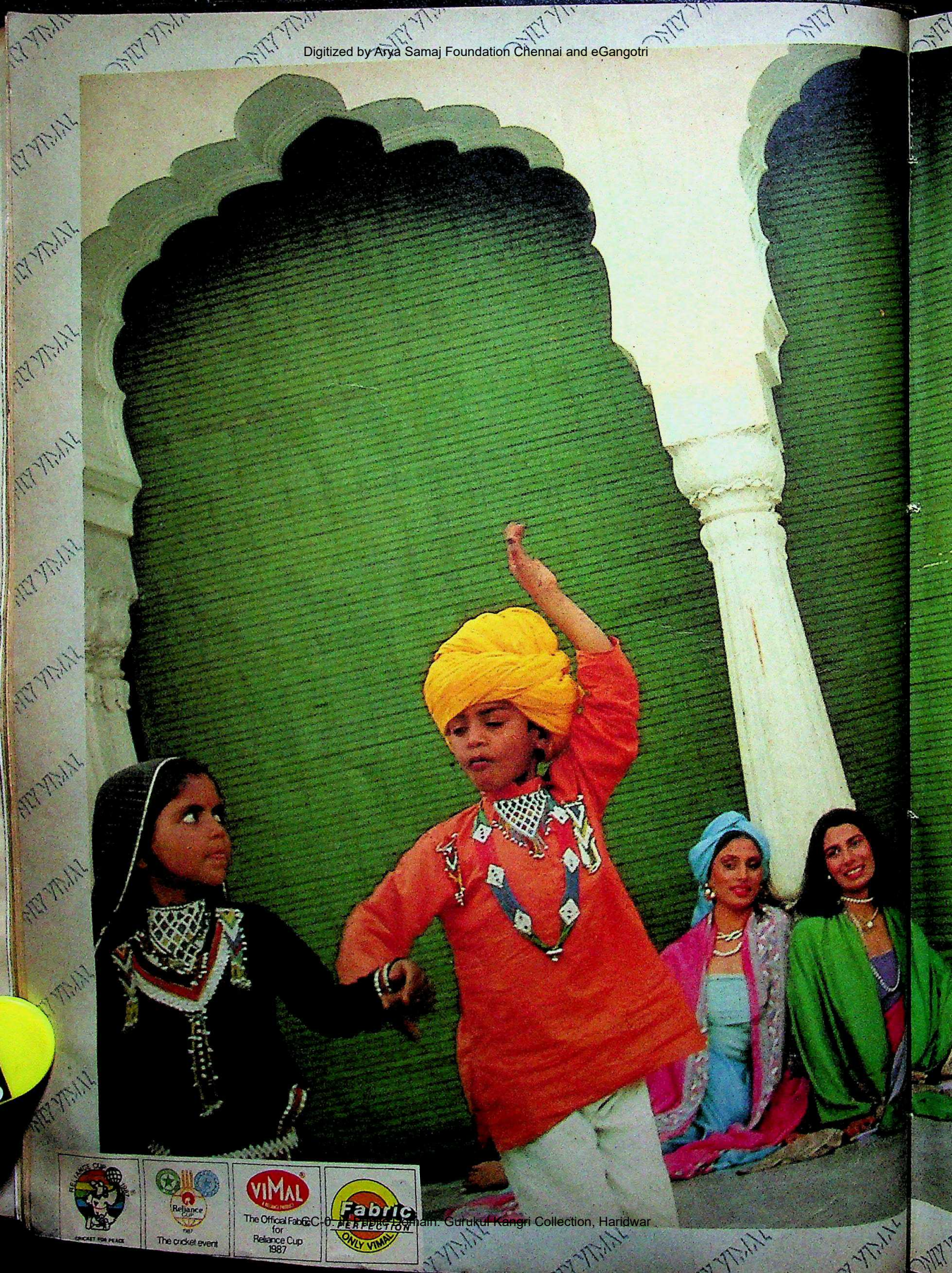

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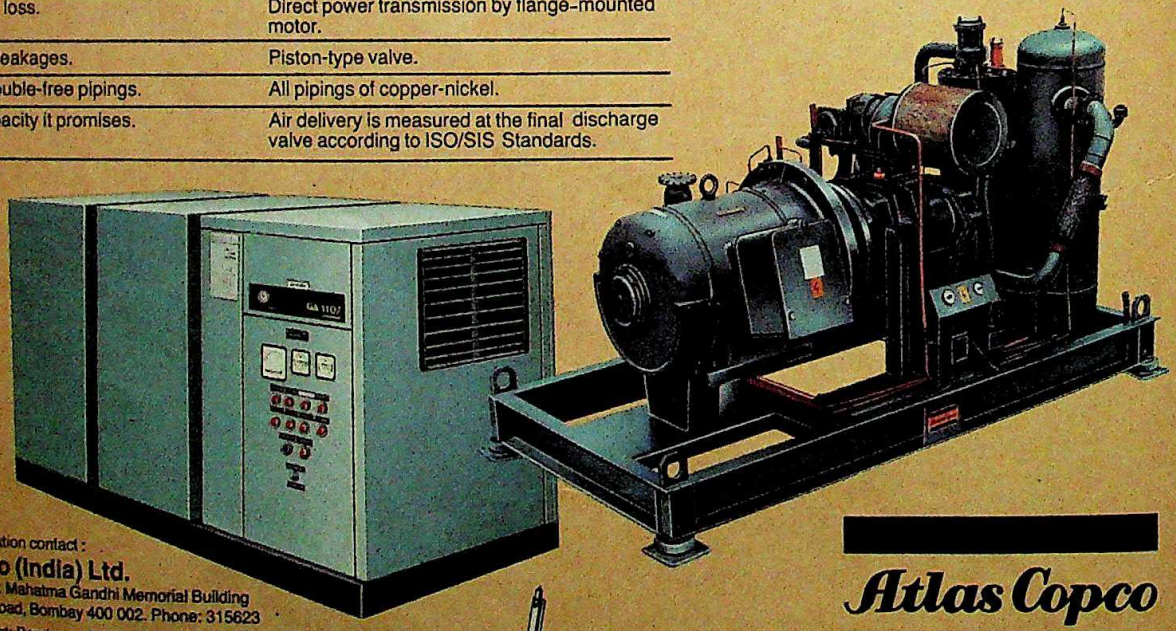

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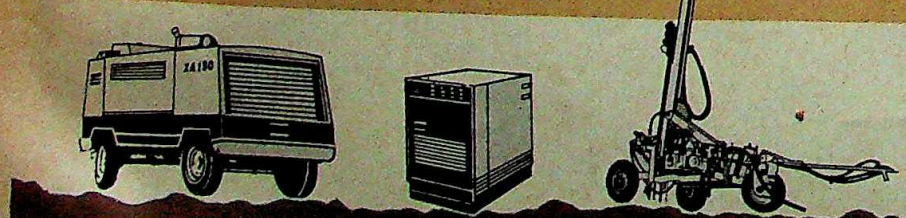

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CHITRAKOOT

Parched Land

FOR at least 33 pilgrims who came to the holy town of Chitrakoot for the monthly *Amavasya* (moonless night) mela on June 26, the end turned out to be as dark as the night itself. Heatstroke and dehydration claimed their lives as the water supply along the pilgrims' route dried up. Chitrakoot, on the border of Madhya Pradesh's Satna district and Uttar Pradesh's Banda district, falls in a belt that is perpetually drought prone.

Though Chitrakoot sees really large melas during Diwali and another around February, called the Ramayana mela, the event in end-June was one of the regular festivals which take place every month during *Amavasya*. All the same, some 50,000 pilgrims attend each month's mela and perform the 5-km long parikrama (round) of Mukhya Dwar, the main temple. The temple is in Satna district as is 3 km of the parikrama route, the remaining 2 km coming under Banda district.

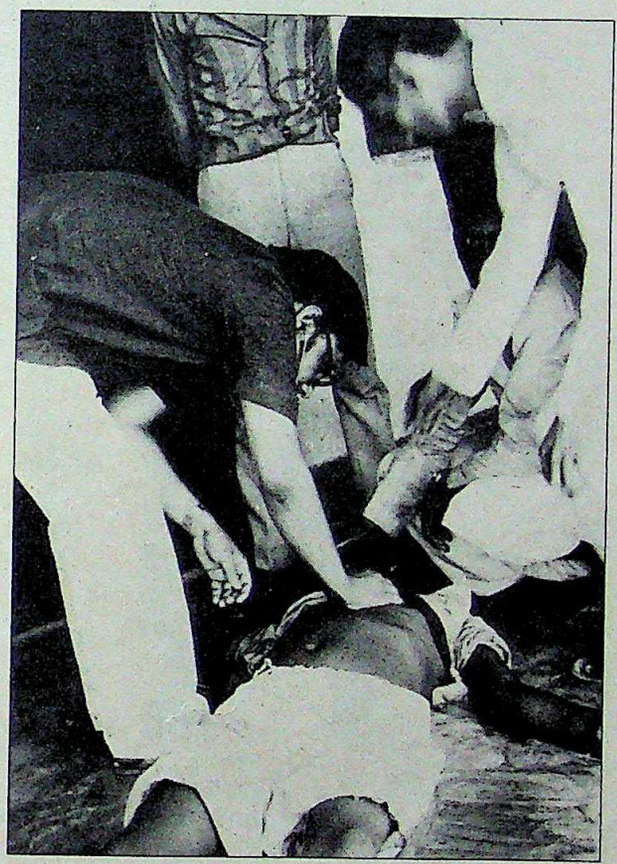
The route has 23 drinking water points on the Uttar Pradesh side and 18 such within Madhya Pradesh. There are also instructions that water and power supply remain uninterrupted two days before and after the monthly melas.

Yet, on the first day, with the mercury at a scorching 47 degrees centigrade, the supply was disrupted by power failure from 9 a.m. to 2.30 p.m., according to a report by Chanchal Tewari, additional district magistrate of Karvi, Banda district. Temple Mahant Prem Pujari Das and residents say there was not a drop of water all of June 26 and 27. Officials also admit that there was only intermittent supply on June 27. What made matters worse was the presence of nearly two lakh pilgrims, much higher than usual, because late rains had suspended all agricultural activity.

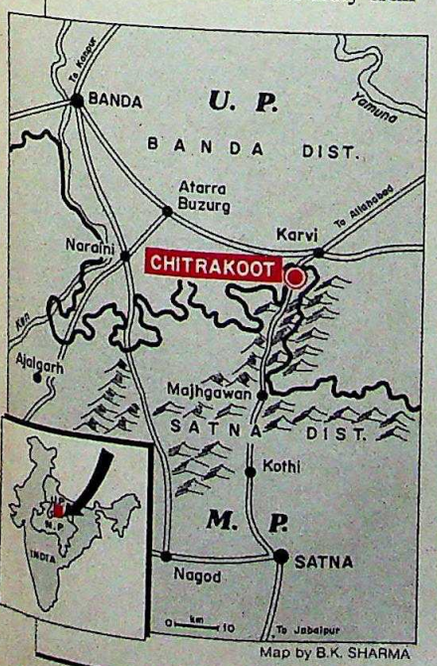
At 5.30 p.m. on June 26, Karvi Subdivisional Magistrate Rudra Pratap Singh learnt that a middle-aged man had died in the parikrama's Uttar Pradesh section. Said Singh: "I had no idea the situation could be so grim." This was followed by news that several people were lying unconscious. Singh rushed to the spot with local doctors and they took over 20 pilgrims to Karvi Hospital.

By June 30, district officials in Banda had recorded 11 deaths and were aware of nine others that could not be registered because relatives had taken away the bodies. Satna officials registered 13 deaths. But the temple mahant alleged that not less than 100 people had died and INDIA TODAY investigations revealed that there were at least a dozen more deaths than officially admitted.

As soon as the magnitude of the tragedy became known, officials of each state immediately tried to establish that the other state had suffered more. Satna Deputy Superintendent of Police Raghuvir Singh said that he had "reason to believe that over 35 deaths had occurred in Uttar Pradesh". Rudra Pratap Singh, however, alleged that "in Madhya Pradesh, being in the upstream portion of the Paisuni



Doctor examining patient; (below) devotees on the holy trail



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river, people could throw the bodies into the water and make them cross the state boundary."

Since most temples and the major portion of the parikrama are in Satna, it is likely that more people died here. Interestingly, Satna officials showed their reluctance to face the truth by conducting post-mortems in the cases of only three unidentified people out of 13 who died. Their counterparts in Uttar Pradesh, however, conducted a post-mortem in each officially registered case.

But the responsibility for the tragedy rests with the Jal Sansthan officials of Karvi and the Madhya Pradesh Public Health Engineering (PHE) Chitrakoot unit, the two organisations that are supposed to ensure an uninterrupted supply of water. Both agencies, however, have denied that they failed in any way to carry out their allotted task. Karvi Executive Engineer N.C. Aggarwal, in his report to the Banda district magistrate, has claimed the water supply was disrupted for only one hour and 45 minutes on June 26. On the other hand, though the PHE has admitted that water supply was maintained only till 10 a.m., it argued this was normal.

The truth is somewhat different. The Patha project in Banda district is supposed to supply water to Chitrakoot, Karvi, Manikpur and 106 villages at a targeted rate of 90 litres per capita per day. But in reality, only the three towns and 70 villages in Banda receive water at the rate of 40 litres per day. Moreover, the generator sets failed to work when they were switched on after power failure on June 26. Only one could be repaired on June 27 to maintain an intermittent supply. And though Aggarwal had said in his report that a heavy-duty pump was pressed into service to maintain supply, informed sources say this actually happened only on June 30.

As for the PHE unit, it is supposed to pump 225,000 litres of water into smaller tanks, but sources in Satna revealed that the water was being routinely supplied at such low pressure that none of the water tanks along the 'route of death' received any supply during the summers. Of the 56 wells in Chitrakoot—31 in Uttar Pradesh and 25 in Madhya Pradesh—most of them, 70 feet to 80 feet deep, did not have any buckets or ropes to draw water.

It was, in the end, a classic case of administrative inefficiency, seen so commonly elsewhere. The pity of it was that it had to be so tragically illustrated.

—DILIP AWASTHI in Chitrakoot

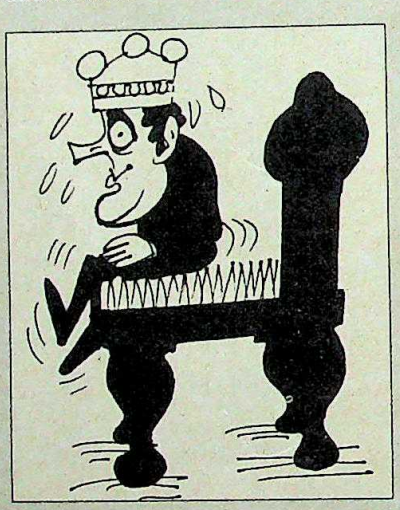
LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Finding an Alternative

PUBLIC Chand put down his morning newspaper disgustedly and said: "What a mess! We simply must get rid of this prime minister, he is absolutely useless!"

His wife looked up from her knitting and said: "By all means dear, but whom will you put in his place? First you must find an alternative."

"There must be any number of alternatives," Public Chand said impatiently. "I'll go out and find one today itself." He hurriedly dressed and went out in search of an alternative.



His first stop was at V.P. Singh's house. The host was sitting in the garden and Public Chand got straight to the point. "V.P. Singhji," he said, "what do you think of the current situation?"

"It's terrible," V.P. Singh said. "Corruption has never been higher. We simply must have a change."

"Good," Public Chand said. "Are you willing to replace the prime minister?"

V.P. Singh went pale. "No, no," he gasped. "We must never change the prime minister. We must always remain loyal to our leader. What I meant was that we must change his advisers...."

Public Chand left him in disgust. No use wasting time with Congressmen, he thought. Must talk to opposition leaders. So he called at Chandra Shekhar's house. He repeated his question.

"The current situation is terrible," Chandra Shekhar said solemnly. "This brute majority, with 80 per cent of the seats, has made the Government totally immune to criticism. We must somehow bring down this government if democracy is to be saved."

"If his majority does get destroyed, will you be prepared to replace Rajiv Gandhi?" Public Chand asked.

"Rajiv Gandhi? Who said anything about Rajiv Gandhi?" Chandra Shekhar said angrily. "I was talking about Devi Lal...."

After overcoming his shock, Public Chand decided to call on Bahuguna. He met the Lok Dal leader in his study and told him: "Bahugunaji, the nation is in a terrible state, and people want change."

"How can there be any change until the dynastic principle is wiped out from the politics of this country?" Bahuguna shot back. "That is what my party is trying to do, we want to obliterate the dynastic principle from Indian politics, and I'm glad to say that we are making headway."

"Good," Public Chand said. "So how soon will you replace Rajiv?"

"Are you crazy?" Bahuguna snapped. "I was talking of Ajit Singh. First I must wipe out Ajit before I can even think of Rajiv...."

In desperation, Public Chand went to the house of Lal Advani. "Advaniji," he told the BJP leader, "the country is in a mess, and Rajiv Gandhi must be replaced. Are you willing to do that?"

"Of course," replied Advani. "But not now, we will replace him only when we can do that by ourselves, because we believe in going it alone. We hope to be ready by the year 2025...."

Tired by the day's exertions, Public Chand sat brooding over his dinner that night. "Well," asked his wife. "Have you found Rajiv's replacement yet?"

"No," Public Chand said with a sigh, "but tomorrow I will try again. I will talk to Sonia, she might agree to replace him...."

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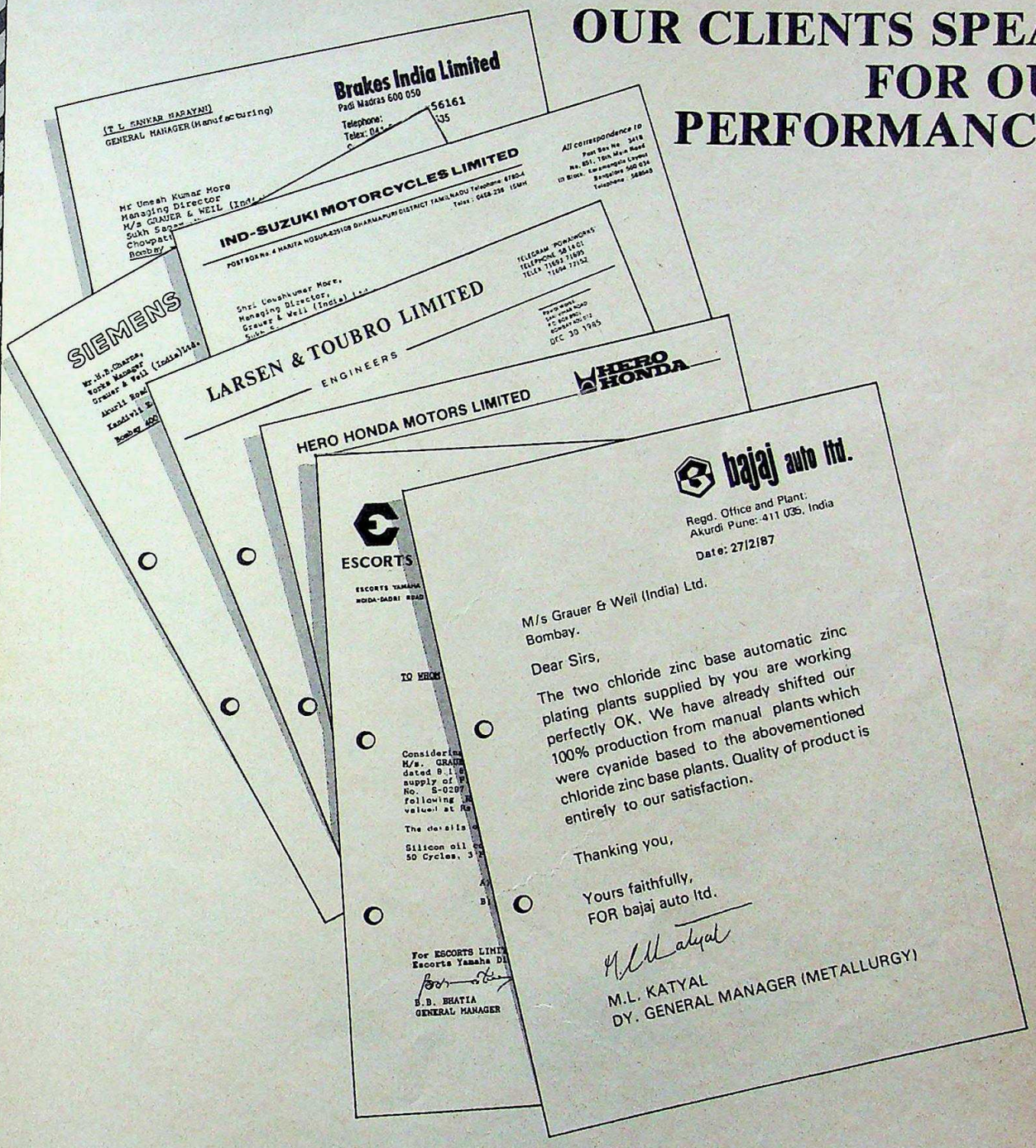

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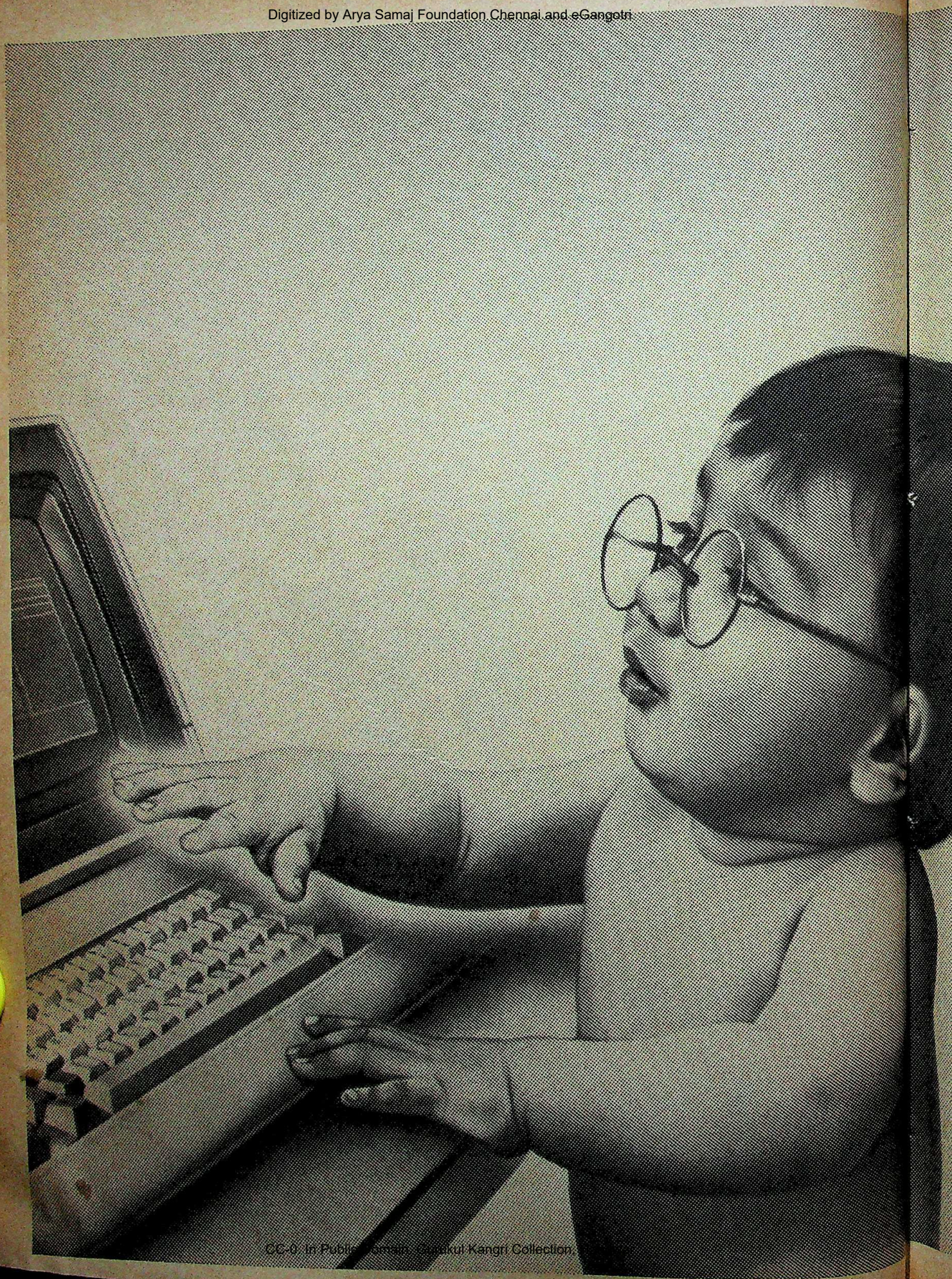

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TAMIL NADU

A Decade of Decay

AMONG the country's most controversial—and, at one time, the most colourful—political personalities is M.G. Ramachandran, the erstwhile Tamil screen hero who burst upon Tamil Nadu's political stage a decade ago, with all the fervour of a messiah. Now a sick and isolated man, MGR celebrated his tenth anniversary of chief ministership last month. Despite a yawning chasm separating promise from performance, he continues to hold the adulation of the masses. To assess the MGR decade, Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA and Senior Correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI spoke to politicians, intellectuals, civil servants and ordinary people. Their report:

LAST month, Tamil Nadu's seriously-ailing and idiosyncratic Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran completed a decade of his reign over the state. But there was little to celebrate. The region, which still exults in the vibrant memories of the legendary Cholas and Pandyas who excelled in military exploits, learning and trade and commerce, was suddenly left, it seemed, without a modern legend. When he strode upon the political stage 10 years ago, MGR seemed to be a character right out of the history books—a sage-poet-politician in the mould of the famous Alvars and Nayanars—who would fashion a new era for a region that prided itself as the crucible of indigenous Indian culture. But, a decade later, the only legacy of MGR's one-man dynasty is mindless autocracy and a trail of broken promises.

Analysts of the MGR decade—even the most vituperative critics—will readily admit that, notwithstanding his glaring failures, the fur-capped chief minister still has an uncanny hold over the masses. Because of his welfare schemes—the public dole—they look up to him as the fount of all munificence. But the MGR welfare formula, just about the only thing his government is now associated with and which informs its very style and functioning, has proved simply a disastrous short-term palliative in which efficient administration and economic development have been sacrificed at the altar of largesse.

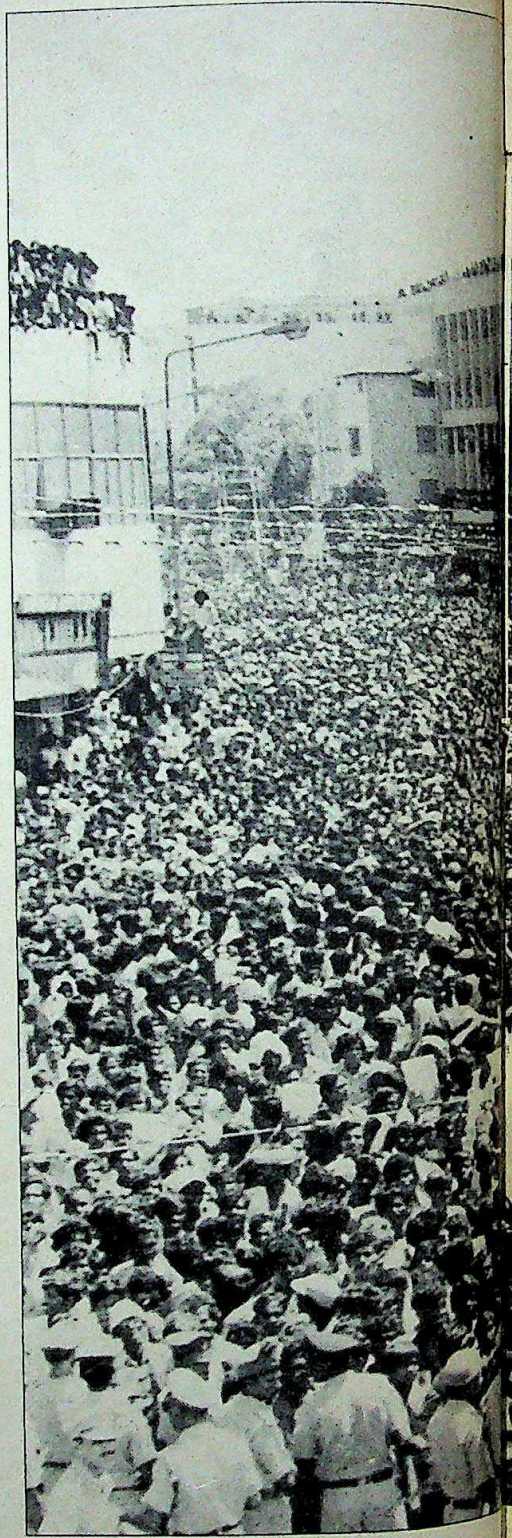
That hardly appeared to be the case when MGR captured power on the promise of eliminating corruption, fighting Brahminism and idol worship, ensuring speedy development and an open government, and opposing the Central Government and its language policy. But the only thing that MGR provided in the ensuing years, apart from state charity, was stability. But it is the stability of stagnation. The state has become MGR's personal fiefdom and every institution—the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the press—has been threatened or cajoled into obsequious submission to the Tamil satrap.

The 120-odd MLAs and 25 MPs of MGR's AIADMK have been reduced to non-entities. Cabinet meetings are as rare as the visits the chief minister makes to his office. Ten years ago, MGR's absence from his office for a day made news. Now, his visits to his secretariat office make headlines. Six years ago, party functionaries and petitioners had easy access to MGR. Now, with a huge security wall around MGR, the already tenuous link between the leader and his partymen and the public has just about snapped.

And the state is descending into chaos and decay. Almost every minister, including the chief minister himself, is involved in allegations of widespread corruption. The number of people living below the poverty line is unchanged at 50 per cent. The growth of state income has been less than the national average of 3.5 per cent as has the per capita availability of essential items, like water and electricity.

MGR's most abysmal failure has been his inability—and perhaps unwillingness—to tackle the two major problems of power shortage and water famine. Last year, State Industries Minister K. Rajaram visited the Hanover Industrial Fair and decided to import several one-mega-watt power generating wind-mills, which could provided power to the coastal villages. He sent his recommendations to MGR, and that was the end of the matter. The file hasn't moved.

Then, four years ago, amidst great fanfare, MGR signed the Telugu-Ganga agreement with his Andhra Pradesh counterpart N.T. Rama Rao. The scheme was crucial for Tamil Nadu as it envisaged



The 10 years of MGR's rule have seen:

- The institutionalisation of corruption in the state;
- Lack-lustre economic growth, with the state income growing at less than the national average of 3.5 per cent;

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- Low per capita availability of essential articles;
- No change in the percentage of population living below the poverty line;
- No progress on the critical water and power fronts;
- Emergence of a highly individualistic and centralised administration;
- Repressive laws to shackle both the press and the film industry;
- Growing tension between the executive and the judiciary;
- Total demoralisation of bureaucracy;
- A bewildering array of welfare schemes, highly populist in character, but basically short-term palliatives; and
- Dilution of Dravidian culture and toning down of anti-Hindi sentiments.

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the transportation of Krishna waters to cater to the desperate needs of Madras city. It was originally expected to cost Rs 600 crore, of which Tamil Nadu was expected to pay Rs 180 crore to Andhra Pradesh for works to be carried out within its territorial boundaries. In addition, the MGR Government was expected to arrange to dig canals from Tamil Nadu's border with Andhra Pradesh to the city. But a dispute over payments for the project between the two states halted the work. To resolve the issue, NTR visited Madras to confer with MGR. But MGR failed to attend the scheduled meeting at the secretariat. His gimmicky answer to the water famine in the city, which smacked ominously of a if-they-don't-have-bread-let-them-eat-cakes attitude, was the announcement of a scheme of giving plastic kudams (water containers) to families living below the poverty line.

MGR'S Government, if it can be called that, is difficult to assess according to known administrative yardsticks, for it works according to the whims and dictates of the chief minister. As a former top police official put it: "All MGR's decisions are sudden and illogical. He will keep files pending indefinitely, and suddenly, come out with 50 decisions. But he has a way of carrying them all through, and he will always appeal to the poor rural people."

As a result, the bureaucracy is languishing with virtually no work and no decision-making powers. No secretary can leave to attend official meetings outside Madras without MGR's permission. In the past two years, Tamil Nadu has not been represented in over a dozen important conferences in New Delhi because none of the invited secretaries could get approval in time. The civil service has, therefore, totally withdrawn from participating in the administration of the state. It no longer makes preparations of the notes and agenda even for cabinet meetings, if they are held. And MGR appears to take a special delight in being rude to officers. Often, he will not even offer a chair to an officer he has summoned. Until 1977, only one IAS officer had resigned from service in the state. Since MGR took over, more than 20 have resigned.

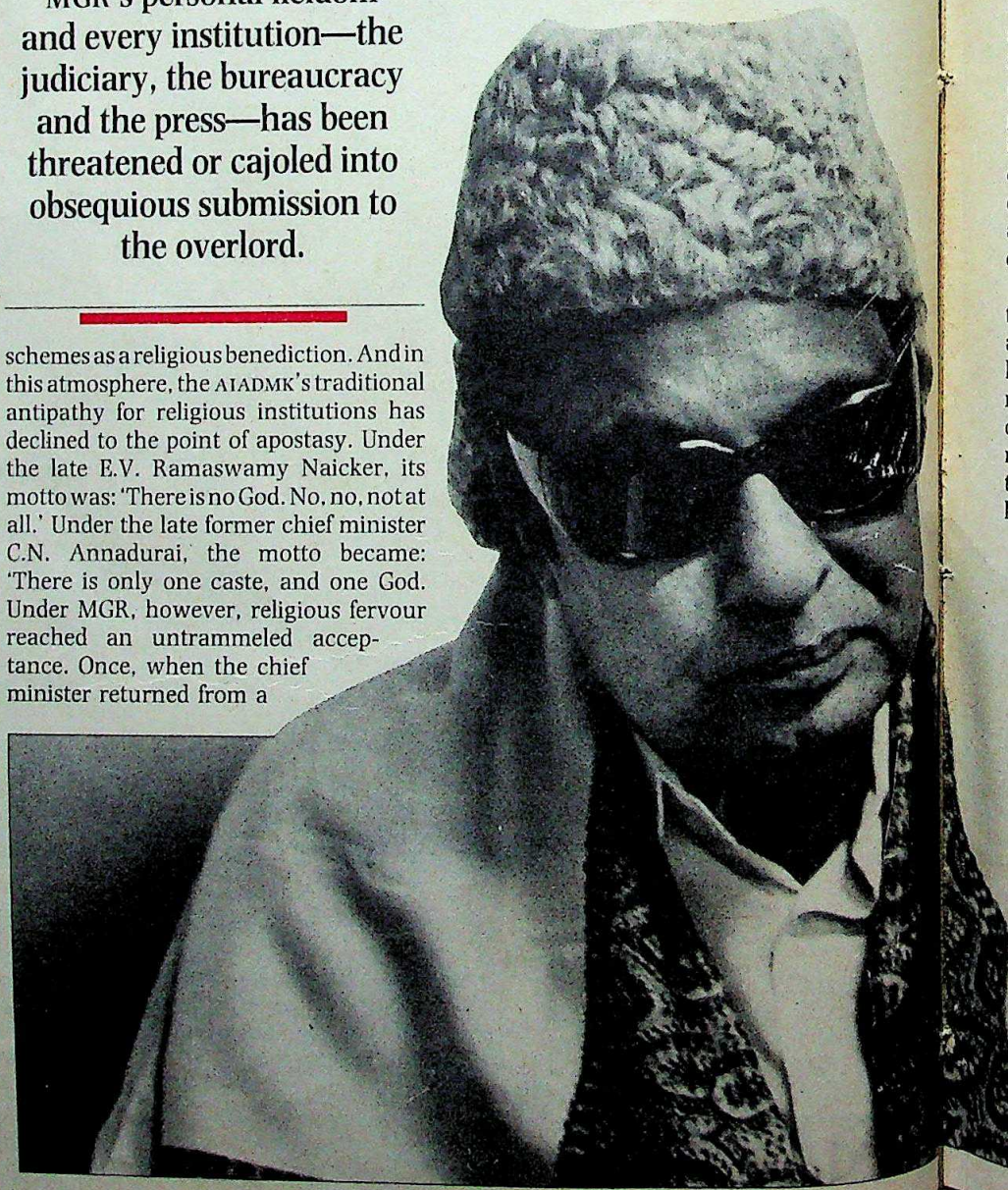
But the main reason that MGR continues to rest easy on his laurels which, by all logic, should have become a crown of thorns, is the success of his welfare schemes. Centres have been set up where parents and children can avail of a free meal a day. Over half the state's population now depends, directly or indirectly, on state charity. More than three-fourths of the state budget is spent on subsidies: free noon meals, textbooks, tooth-powder and, to a lesser extent, rural housing. In addition, the Government supplies highly subsidised power to farmers. Education up to the ten-plus-two stage is also free: an annual cost of Rs 450 crore.

But these schemes have been at the cost of the infrastructural development of the state. Though two lakh people are employed in the noon meal scheme, the state Government has neglected the development of industry and its consequent employment generation.

The people, however, view the welfare schemes as a religious benediction. And in this atmosphere, the AIADMK's traditional antipathy for religious institutions has declined to the point of apostasy. Under the late E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, its motto was: 'There is no God. No, no, not at all.' Under the late former chief minister C.N. Annadurai, the motto became: 'There is only one caste, and one God. Under MGR, however, religious fervour reached an untrammeled acceptance. Once, when the chief minister returned from a trip to the US where he had gone for medical treatment, S. Raghavanandam, former state housing minister and AIADMK general secretary, got himself tonsured at Tirupati as an offer of thanks for MGR's recovery. The chief minister himself regularly visits the Mookambige temple near Mangalore, and he is also credited with building golden chariots for 12 temples in the state.

When he first came to power, MGR vowed to exterminate the twin devils of religion and corruption. Now, with the recrudescence of religion, corruption has also made a come-back. Says Cho Ramaswamy, satirist and editor of the fortnightly *Tughlak*: "Corruption has been institutionalised under MGR's rule. Apart from all the scandals which have been written about, the chief minister has recently begun gifting wads of currency

The state has become MGR's personal fiefdom and every institution—the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the press—has been threatened or cajoled into obsequious submission to the overlord.



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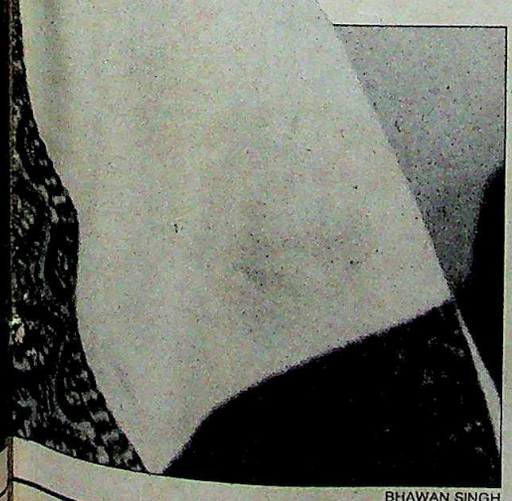
notes to the bride and bridegroom of every wedding he is invited to preside over. You should remember that MGR once said he had no money to pay his income tax."

CORRUPTION has become part and parcel of MGR's Government now," observes DMK Assistant General Secretary Nanchil K. Manoharan, the former number two man in MGR's 1977 cabinet before he returned to the DMK in 1980. "During his first term of office, MGR was okay. But after he got re-elected in 1980, transport permits, admissions into medical and engineering colleges—everything was turned into a money spinner," he adds. The early scandals began with allegations that rectified spirits worth crores were diverted to other sources with the knowledge of the Government. Commissions of inquiry were appointed by the Centre but their operations were stayed by the courts. Then the state Government-owned Poompuhar Shipping Corporation, set up in 1975 to transport coal by sea to the state's thermal power plants, signed a deal with a Bulgarian firm in March 1979, for the purchase of three ships for $13 million each. The corporation went back on the contract after Karunanidhi alleged that a Rs 4-crore kickback was involved in the deal.

Later, MGR himself figured in allegations of kickbacks in the awarding of arrack bottling and blending licences to highly ineligible parties. Former chief minister Karunanidhi made a blatant charge in the Assembly that he had received bribes up to Rs 25 crore a year for the arrack licences. When MGR challenged Kaunanidhi to repeat the charge in public, he promptly obliged. The chief minister then sued Karunanidhi for criminal and civil defamation but withdrew the case after seven months.



BHAWAN SINGH

Along with corruption came repression against those who sought to expose it. The state police has been shamelessly used in harassing the media, political opponents and even nonconforming judges. It was MGR who pioneered the anti-scurrility long before former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra even began thinking about it. He introduced a law in September 1981 making the publication of grossly obscene, indecent, or scurrilous matter a cognizable and non-bailable offence. And the person given the responsibility for making such a highly subjective judgement—a police inspector.

The MGR welfare formula, the main reason for his continuing popularity, has been at the expense of efficient administration and economic development in the state.

This law had all the potential of being used to harass independent journalists and was repealed after repeated protests. But before it was put into the statute book, MGR issued an order in September 1980 proscribing any government official from divulging information, even of a purely routine nature. Under this, irrigation storage statistics cannot be revealed. Only the chief minister or ministers—with his approval—can give out information to the press. Recently, the state Government has passed an Act authorising pre-censorship on any advertisement material or films depicting politicians as corrupt.

Tamil Nadu is also the only state in the country with a Goondas Act, under which district collectors can preventively detain, for a year, anyone who they suspect can create law and order and other problems. Disclosed a police source: "On an average, the police have been detaining 50 people every month under this Act." The Madras High Court, acting on habeas corpus petitions, has released nearly 200 detenus under the Act. The fact that many of these petitions become infructuous as the detenu's term ends before the court considers his petition for final disposal shows the extent of arbitrary detention.

The irony of the MGR decade is that notwithstanding repression, corruption, nepotism, maladministration, and religious obscurantism, he continues to be the only popular leader in the state. He has systematically eliminated all threats from within his own party by clipping the wings of future contenders like Jayalalitha and Veerappan, and the Congress(I) has been unable to produce an alternative. Even though the AIADMK candidates for the 1985 elections were chosen when MGR was undergoing treatment in the US, none of them has the capacity or charisma to replace him. He has also succeeded in insulating the state from the mainstream of national politics and the cross-currents of the southern state politics, where governments have changed in the past decade.

MGR has uniquely demonstrated time and again that a dismal performance in office need not have anything to do with a chief minister's hold over the masses. In 1977, he won 130 of the 200 seats contested by the AIADMK and secured 30.76 per cent of the total votes polled. In 1980, share of votes polled rose to 38.74 per cent, but he won 129 of the 177 seats contested. And MGR reached his pinnacle of popularity when a sympathy wave hit the state following his illness. While he was in the US, the AIADMK won 133 seats of the 155 seats contested, including the 12 Lok Sabha seats it fought.

Moreover, despite his providing Tamil Nadu an insular flavour, the parochialism has not intensified into anti-Hindi sentiment. The anti-Hindi movement, which he had earlier made full political use of, has almost faded. In fact, he ruthlessly suppressed the DMK-led agitation and even created legislative history by getting almost half the DMK MLAs expelled from the house for burning the Constitution.

MGR presided over a lack-lustre, sleepy decade in which he used his charisma and welfare schemes as a soporific for the masses. There is little doubt among observers that the potion will soon wear out and that the people will awaken to the real demands of water, electricity, efficient governance, jobs and development. But that will most likely happen when MGR, already ailing and now barely able to speak, is no more. He will leave behind, for his successors, the burdensome task of dealing with a newly awakened and rebellious electorate. Yet, the irony will remain that in the midst of the turmoil that is surely ahead, MGR will be remembered not as a man who broke his promises to his people but as a giant who presided over a decade of dreamy stability.

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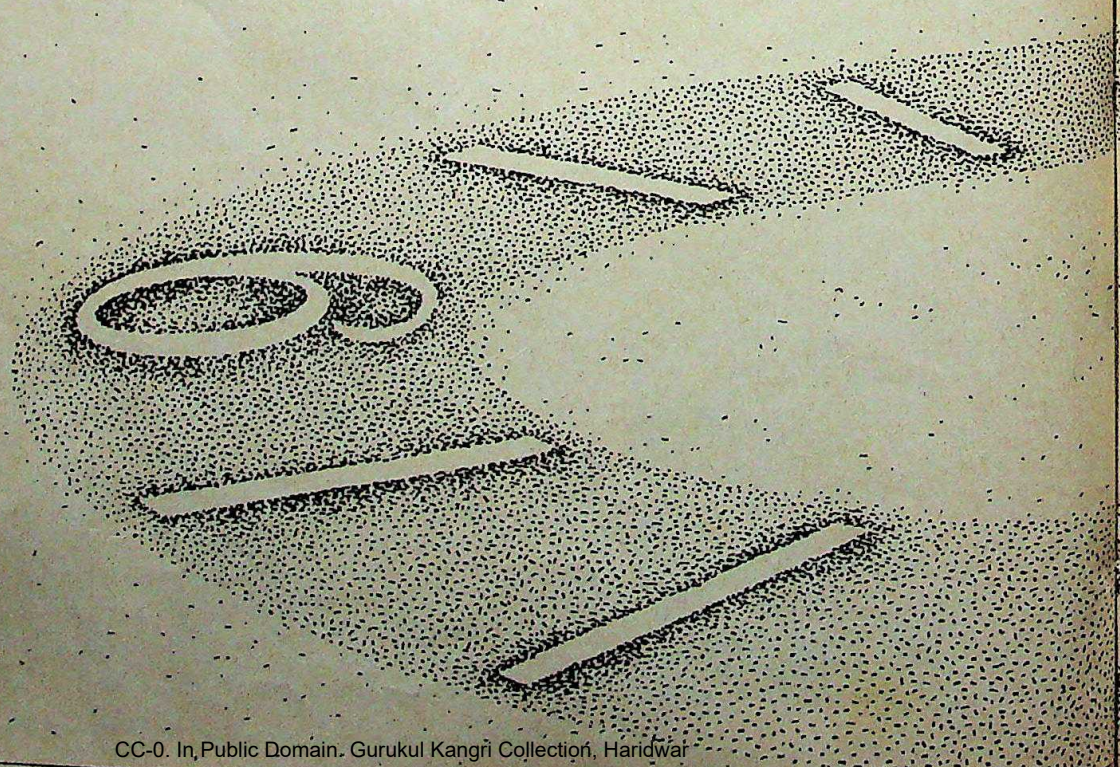

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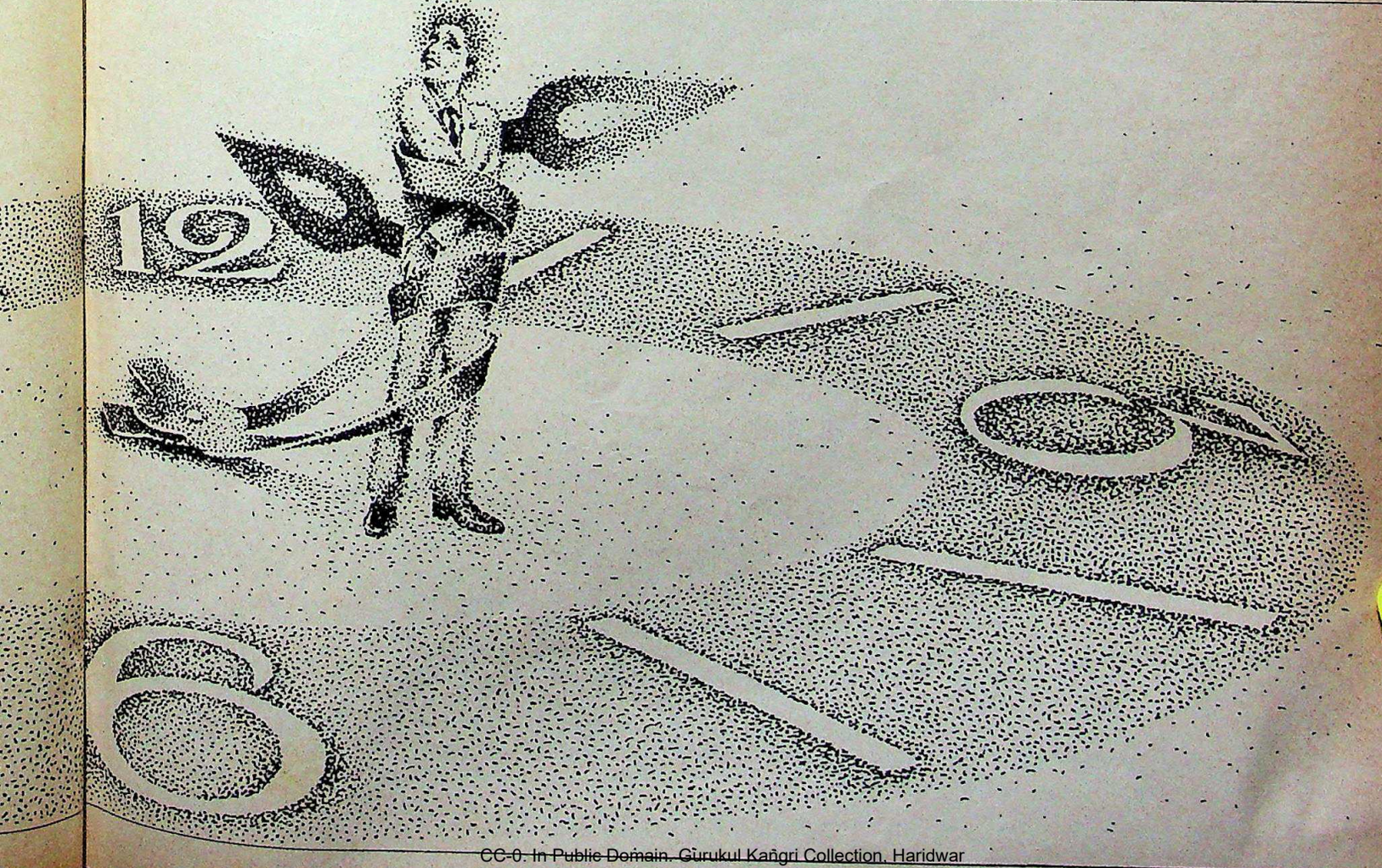

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RAMASWAMY VENKATARAMAN

"President has no powers"

A Gandhian, a freedom fighter cut from the old cloth, an uncompromising progressive, is how most of 73-year-old Ramaswamy Venkataraman's peers describe him. But 'RV', as he is affectionately called, is remembered above all as a man imbued in the tradition of humanist philosophy.

One of the features of Venkataraman's long and distinguished career, which began in 1942 when he went to jail for participating in the Quit India Movement in his native Tamil Nadu, is the fact that the lawyer-turned-politician never actively sought political office. His first ministerial office was virtually thrust upon him by Kamaraj in 1957, when Kamaraj insisted he join his Madras state (this was before the DMK renamed the state Tamil Nadu) cabinet as industry and labour minister. In this capacity he gave birth to the concept of industrial estates. He then served in the Planning Commission, and in 1980 Mrs Gandhi inducted him as finance minister and later selected him for vice-presidentship.

A clear thinker, astute logician and consummate debater who is known for never losing his cool, Venkataraman enjoys the distinction of having earned the respect not only of partymen but also of opponents, whose cases he has demolished during parliamentary debates. Excerpts from his interview with Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA:

Q. What do you think of the current controversy regarding the right of a President to seek information from the Government?

A. The President has the absolute right to ask for information on any matter. But the President has to be selective in asking questions. If every day he sends 10 questions to the prime minister, asking him what happened in Kerala, Kashmir or Bihar, then obviously it will become unbearable for the prime minister. It is a question of mutual trust and confidence.

Q. You mean the President has to exercise restraint?

A. Absolutely. The President cannot ask an unlimited number of questions. If the prime minister goes on answering the President, then he can't function at all.

The second thing, which people overlook, is that the right of asking the Government for information is actually the right of the Parliament. It is the Parliament which can force the Government to share information with it. The prime minister is duty bound to answer every question asked in Parliament.

Q. But the Government has been withholding information from Parliament as well.

A. Then it can also withhold information from the President.

Q. That means the Government, if it so desires, can also deny information to the President.

A. Oh yes! You cannot postulate a rule that the prime minister must answer every question that the President can ask on every subject. It is not possible.

> "So long as the prime minister enjoys the confidence of the Lok Sabha, no power on earth can remove him from his office....Under the Constitution the prime minister is responsible only to the Lok Sabha....The Constitution does not say that he is responsible and answerable to the President."

Q. But where does one draw the line about the right of the President to be informed by the Government?

A. No one from outside can draw the line. It has to be drawn between the two.

Q. But suppose you decide to ask a question and the prime minister refuses to answer, then what action can a President take?

A. Nothing. Under the Constitution the President has no powers. I am a student of the Constitution, and I have not been shown any provision in which the President has the power to force the Government to give information to the President if the Government chooses to ignore the presidential request. The Constitution does not provide any penalty against the prime minister for not providing information to the President.

Q. So the President has to be content with whatever information the prime minister decides to furnish him.

A. Nobody can say that the President cannot ask for information. He can certainly do that. But the prime minister can also decide that he will not pass on any information to the President which he thinks cannot be given.

Q. Does the President then have the right to be briefed on important national and international issues?

A. Definitely. The President has every right to know what is happening in the country. But during the briefing, what kind of information the prime minister gives, is at his own discretion and decision.

We are all grammarians, and we try to reduce everything to a formula and set of rules. But the relationship between the prime minister and the President can't be judged by any set standards. It is a personal relationship.

Q. But don't you feel that the President has a wider national role to perform, since he is elected by the state assemblies as well?

A. The Indian Constitution doesn't envisage the office of the President as a parallel seat of power. The framers of the Constitution made it very clear that the position of the President would be similar to that of the British crown.

Q. But the Constitution also envisages that it will be the duty of the President to ensure that the prime minister and the Government function according to the Constitution.

A. How? If the President has the authority to do anything, then it automatically becomes a presidential form of government and not a parliamentary form of government. It is only in the French Constitution that the President can dismiss the prime minister.

Q. You mean that even if the prime minister violates the Constitution the President can't move against him?

A. Yes, nothing can be done against the prime minister. You are trying to put in the Constitution a position for the President which was not envisaged for him at the time of framing the Constitution. The Constitution might be changed, but for now, there is no provision for taking action.

Q. Do you mean the President is helpless?

A. It is for Parliament to take action. Under the Constitution the prime minister is responsible only to the Lok Sabha. It doesn't say that he is responsible and answerable to the President.

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Q. Does this also rule out the possibility of the prime minister being dismissed by the President?

A. There can be some occasions, but these are all hypothetical situations. Suppose the prime minister loses the confidence of the Lok Sabha and refuses to resign, then certainly the President can dismiss him. This is the only possibility. But so long as he enjoys the confidence of the Lok Sabha, no power on earth can remove the prime minister from his office.

Q. How would you decide that the prime minister has lost his majority?

A. The President must direct the prime minister to summon the House and seek a vote of confidence. It cannot be decided outside the Lok Sabha. The prime minister's position can only be tested on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

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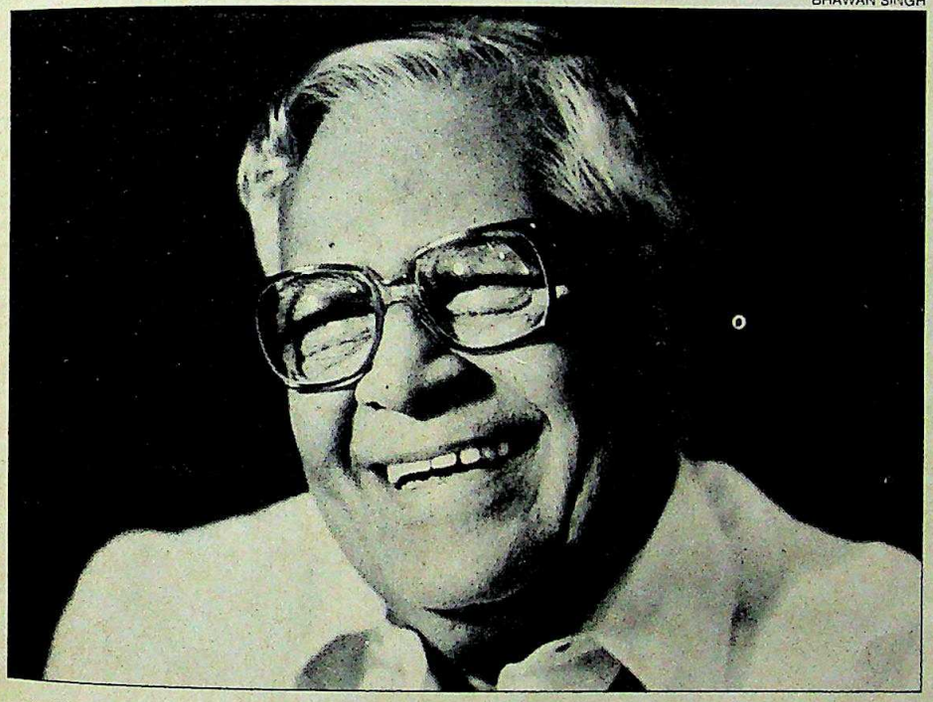

Q. Suppose the ruling party adopts a no-confidence motion against the prime minister.

A. The President is not expected to take note of this. If the party passes a resolution and comes to the President for action, he can only call the prime minister and tell him to seek a vote of confidence from Parliament. Because, if the prime minister commands the confidence of the Lok Sabha, he can still be prime minister. According to the Constitution, a prime minister has to command the support of the Lok Sabha and not that of the party.

Q. Can you apply the same rule while imposing President's rule in the states, and dismissing chief ministers?

A. This can't be done at the state level because in the Constitution the governor has the power to take a decision. If he is convinced that the state Government can't be run in accordance with the Constitution, then he can recommend the imposition of President's rule in the state.

Q. So chief ministers can be dismissed without being given the chance to prove their majority in the Assembly.

A. Could be, but I don't say they should be. If both the governor and the President are satisfied, a chief minister can be dismissed from office. But there is no such corresponding provision when it comes to the dismissal of the prime minister. If the President feels there is something wrong, he can only counsel, advise and warn. He has to stop there.

Q. And he can't act.

A. I wouldn't say that.

Q. Then what is the check on the prime minister?

A. Only Parliament.

Q. What if Parliament refuses to take action, even if the prime minister is involved in corruption charges?

A. These are hypothetical questions which no one can answer. It will depend on the facts, the evidence, the law and advice of the attorney general, and whether the President has the power or not.

Q. How would you ensure that there is no conflict between the party interest and the national interest?

A. Once an individual becomes President, he has to quit the party. Even the Lok Sabha speaker and the vice-president perform on a non-party basis. If you don't agree with the Opposition, that doesn't mean you are partisan. For example, I allowed the whole discussion on the relationship between the President and prime minister in the Rajya Sabha.

Q. But don't you think that in the prevailing circumstances, the President can play an important role in the country?

A. That I agree. If the man in Rashtrapati Bhavan is of a high moral authority, he can be a sobering influence on everybody.

Q. What are the areas which need the immediate attention of the Government?

A. Communalism is the major problem facing the country. Indian traditions and ethos have been one of tolerance. During the British rule that ethos was diluted. They divided Indians on the basis of caste and religion, so that they could rule without opposition.

Q. It is happening even now. Politicians are encouraging communalism.

A. Man is selfish, and whatever suits his interest he will do. Communalism has been made a political problem.

Q. There is a language problem as well. Shouldn't we have a national language in the country?

A. Yes of course. And Hindi has the potential of becoming a national language. We cannnot function without a national language. But it should not be forced or accelerated by some drive, giving an impression that somebody is forcing his will on others.

Q. Do you think the Punjab problem can be solved?

A. Terrorism can't be fought by the Government alone. People must come out and fight it.

Q. Your name is often mentioned in connection with the submarine deal. What was your exact role in it?

A. I don't know why my name is being mentioned now. I prefer not to answer this question. If I say that as defence minister I was not responsible, then it means the party was responsible. If the party is responsible then I am also responsible. Actually, the fact is that the submarine deal was finalised before I became the defence minister.

Q. Is it a fact that you presided over a function in New York where the Hindujas announced a donation of $100,000 to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan school? Later they were at a dinner attended by you.

A. I did visit New York for an International Monetary Fund meeting and presided over a function of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, but I am not aware of any donation by the Hindujas or their presence there.

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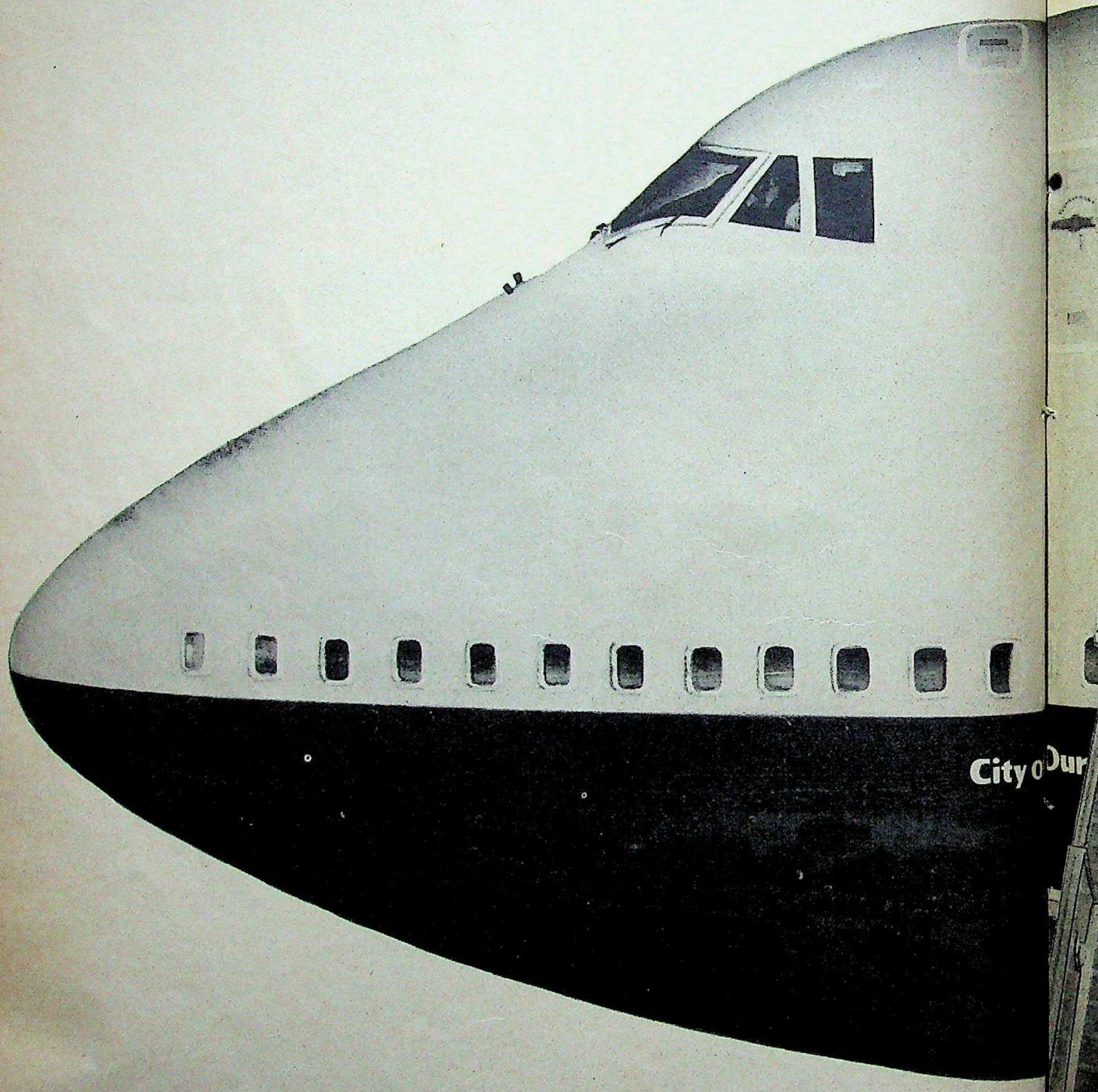

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People vs Party

BARRING some unforeseen development in the next few days, the presidential election is all over but for the shouting. The last opportunity for a revolt in the Congress(I) against Rajiv Gandhi will soon be gone. With this, many would like to believe Rajiv's mid-term crisis is over. They could not be more mistaken.

While the purely personal attack on Rajiv will come to an end, particularly if he pushes the Bofors inquiry to the limit and cancels the contract if it refuses to reveal the names of the recipients, his problems as the leader of the Congress are only beginning.

A large number of Congressmen see in the Haryana results the writing on the wall. The south is gone, and the Hindi states may go the Haryana way. Even Maharashtra and Gujarat are no longer certain to return a Congress government in 1990. Believing that the end is approaching, many Congressmen have begun to feather their nests frantically. By doing this, they are only hastening its end. Rajiv therefore has not only to stabilise the Government but also to breathe new life into his party.

The prime minister is understood to have asked his key advisers and friends what the party's future programme should be. But apart from the very real danger that he may find himself swamped by too much advice, all of it is also being generated from within the Congress Party. It is therefore not likely to tackle the root causes of its decline.

The Congress(I) is losing its hold on the country because for years the interests of its party cadres and of the nation have been diverging steadily. Today the gap is so wide that no prime minister can serve both. For much of her term in office, Mrs Gandhi put the interests of the party ahead of those of the nation. What we are witnessing now is a revolt by the people against the system she built.

There is no inherent reason why the interests of the party cadres should coincide with those of the nation. In ideologically-oriented parties, clashes occur because the cadres' interest is to safeguard their ideology, but their leaders, when in power, are always being drawn towards compromise.

In India, where the non-communist parties serve only as instruments for the capture of power, its pursuit has become an end in itself. The Congress Party's interests began to clash with those of the nation from the day it felt its hold on power threatened. The way in which the party's leaders first arranged defections from opposition coalitions, then misused the power of the governor to dismiss elected governments, and finally suspended the working of democracy in several states to retain their hold on power, does not need repetition.

> "Today Rajiv needs to realise that the only way in which he can restore the people's confidence in himself and also improve his party's chances in the next round of elections is to reach out to them directly, over the heads of his partymen."

Other acts designed to woo voters or influence the results of elections, such as the indiscriminate reservation of jobs for the backward classes, the misuse of the police and local administration for booth capturing, the waiver of loans and the lowering or waiver of power and water tariffs, have brought the administration to its knees. But nothing has done as much lasting damage as the system of financing elections out of black money. This has created a nexus between crime and politics and bred a class of wealthy people whom the law cannot touch.

When Rajiv came to power, the conflict between party and nation had come close to paralysing the country. Assam was in revolt because, for two decades, the Congress(I) had cynically turned a blind eye on illegal immigration from Bangladesh to create a Muslim vote bank; Punjab was in turmoil because of Bhindranwale, a tool forged by the Congress to break the unity of the Akalis; a highly unpopular defectors' government was propped up by the Congress(I) in Kashmir; an opposition chief minister in Andhra Pradesh had fought off the most brazen attempt to dismiss an elected government the country had ever seen; and in Karnataka, one of the most efficient governments in the country had its back to the wall because of the Congress(I)'s attempts to woo defectors.

Rajiv set out to change all this. He signalled the end of the *Aaya Ram Gaya Ram* epoch—by his behaviour with Hegde and the anti-defection bill. He came to terms with dissidents in Assam and Mizoram and made a valiant bid to do so in Punjab. He reformed the tax system and set out to hound offenders and those with money cached abroad. And his popularity in the country soared.

But his popularity in the party fell. In 1986, when he felt the ground under him get soft and began to backtrack, procrastinating over the implementation of the Punjab accord for fear of losing Haryana; seeking to appease Muslim sentiment with the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights) Bill, and finally allowing the party to slander and insult V.P. Singh in spite of the damage these tactics did to his own image; his popularity in the country plummeted.

Today Rajiv needs to realise that the only way in which he can restore the people's confidence in himself and also improve his party's chances in the next round of elections is to reach out to them directly, over the heads of his partymen. He has lifted the ban on company donations and all but ended the loading of front-end commissions on defence and other foreign contracts. He must now create a state fund to finance elections—a reform needed to break the nexus between black money and politics.

He must complete the greening of the Congress, begun when distributing tickets for the 1984 parliamentary elections. The impressive performance of at least four of the young ministers he brought in should justify inducting more young people. Most important, he must restore democracy to the Congress. Only thus can the hold of the satraps be broken and young people drawn to its ranks.

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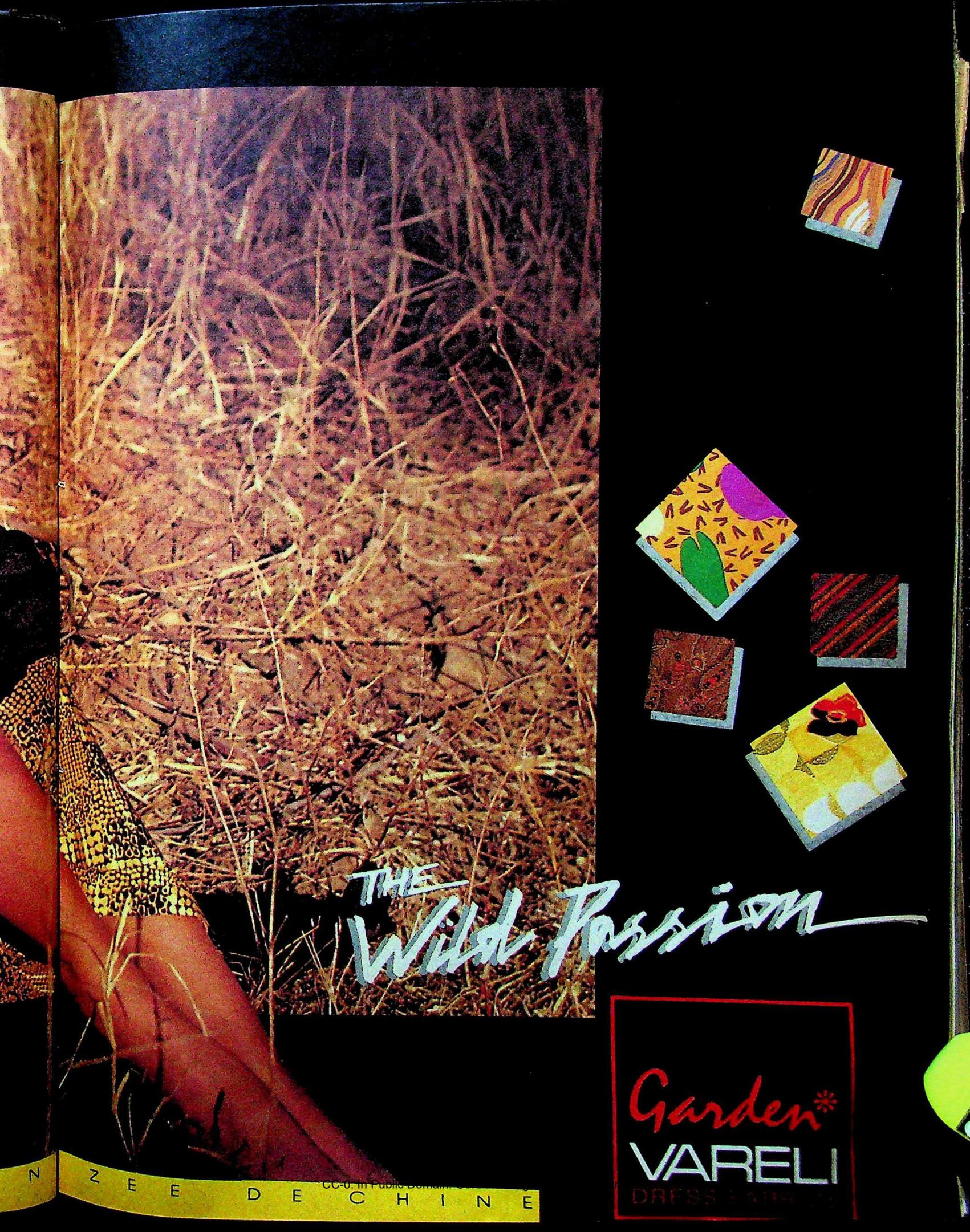
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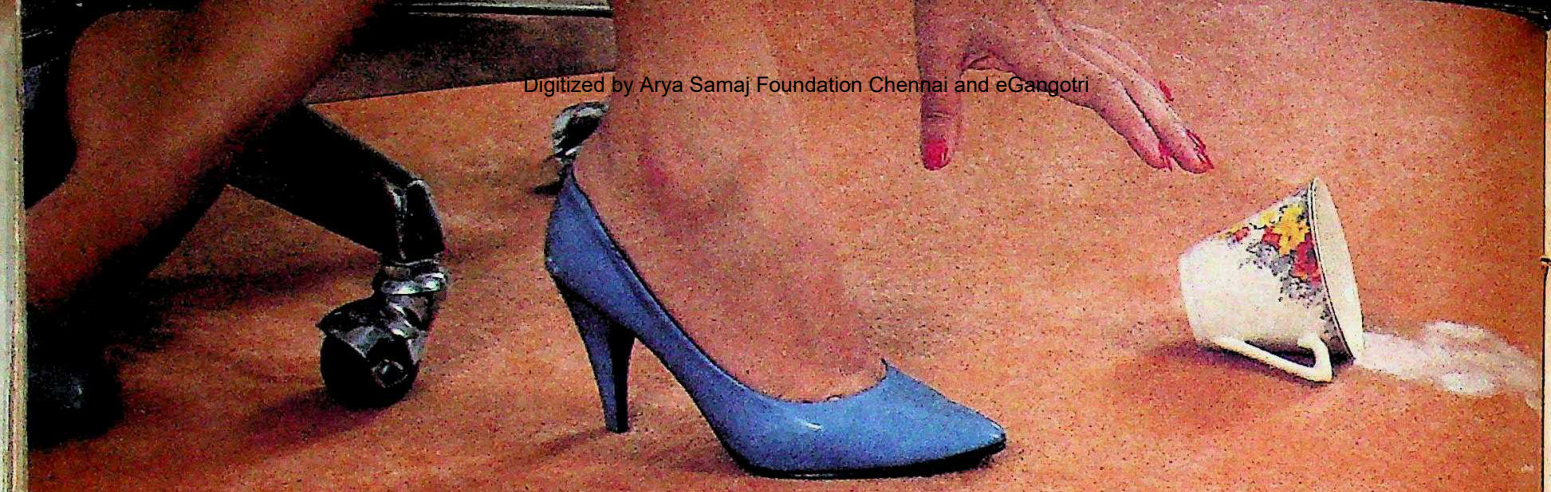

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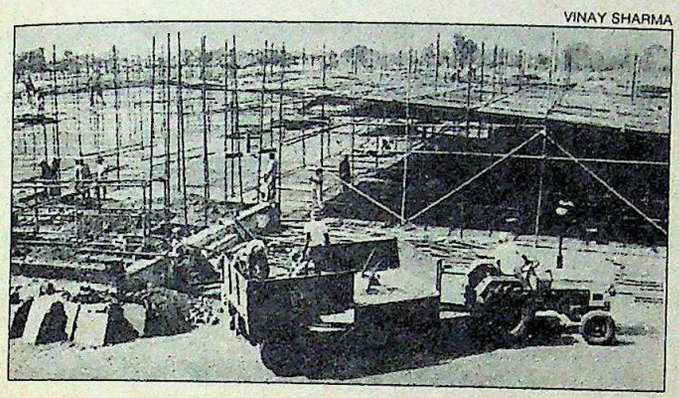
Expensive Welcome

LAST fortnight, landlocked Raipur in Madhya Pradesh was a sea of khaki. Anticipating Rajiv Gandhi's arrival over 5,000 policemen were brought in, as were half-a-dozen inspector generals of police, 18 deputy inspector generals and naturally, superintendents and so on.

The occasion was the Congress(I)'s political conference for which Chief Minister Motilal Vora pulled out all stops. He flew from Bhopal to Raipur almost daily for 10 days. The public

VINAY SHARMA



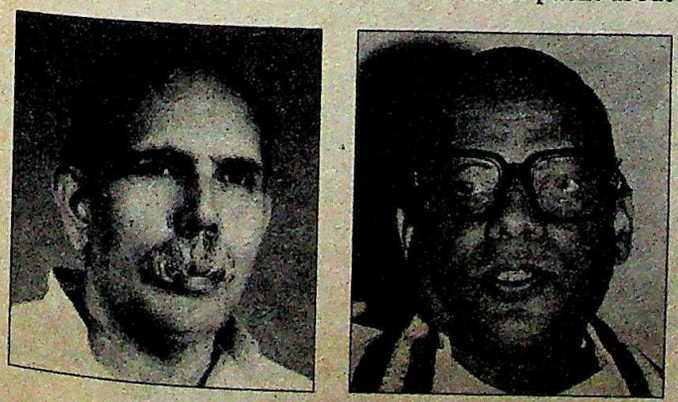
Hindustan Steel's pandal in Raipur: gross waste

sector Hindustan Steel Construction Ltd erected 80,000-sq ft pandal to seat 20,000 people. The municipal corporation repaired Raipur roads double-quick. Said the Congress(I) MP from neighbouring Rajnandgaon, Shivendra Bahadur Singh: "This is not a khadi conference but a khaki conference." The cost of the show, although Rajiv ultimately failed to turn up? According to a conservative estimate, Rs 50 lakh.

Quelling Dissidence

J.B. PATNAIK has already reserved a place for himself in the history of modern Orissa by successfully completing seven uninterrupted years as chief minister. And last fortnight, he demonstrated just why he has been able to remain at the helm for so long in the face of swelling dissent within the party.

While dissidents felt that Patnaik's tour of the state was part of the central party directive to educate the public about



Mishra (left); and Patnaik: wily

the designs of destabilisation, the chief minister chose to take on other issues as well. "There are no dissidents. Where are they? I want to see them," he thundered in public meetings. At several of these meets, he had with him on the dais state party chief and MP Nityanand Mishra, Patnaik's arch-rival.

The dissidents, who have viewed Mishra as one of their prominent leaders, are appalled and now see him as someone who has switched sides. Mishra's defence that he had no option but to share the platform, being the party chief, has fallen on deaf ears.

It would seem that Mishra now faces a two-pronged attack. Patnaik, as it is, wants him to go in order to weaken his adversaries. And now Patnaik's friend-turned-foe Basant Kumar Biswal, party treasurer and a powerful figure, wants to take advantage of the existing suspicion against Mishra to oust him and take his post.

Spring Cleaning

K.R. GOWRI, 67, Kerala's minister for industries, excise and vigilance, has been creating tremors in the state secretariat ever since the Marxists came to power. Gowri, was a front-runner for the chief minister's job, but disappointment at not getting the top job has not dimmed her enthusiasm to fight corruption.

Gowri has already served notice of her intentions by ordering a raid on the premises of T.P. Vasudevan Nair, private

SHYAM TEKWANI

Gowri: causing tremors

secretary to former chief minister K. Karunakaran. Said Gowri, after Nair's assets—valued at Rs 10 lakh—were found to be disproportionate to his income: "The raid will serve as a lesson to others." Her next target was another Karunakaran favourite, S. Padma Kumar, a senior IAS officer. He was transferred from his powerful post of commissioner, industries, to the Board of Revenue as a member despite the pleas of her colleagues. Gowri has also made sweeping changes in the Excise Department. Most important of all, the Government has decided to take over the wholesale trade of Indian-made foreign liquor by next year. Not surprisingly, her public image can only improve further at the rate at which she is going.

Relentless Crusade

EVEN as the Lentin Commission initiated perjury proceedings against a former health minister of Maharashtra, Dr Baliram Hiray, the present Health Minister, Bhai Sawant, raised a hornets' nest in the Assembly. He charged that opposition legislators were misleading the commission set up by the Government more than a year ago, to inquire into a spate of deaths at Bombay's J.J. Hospital, following the use of substandard Glycerol. Denying that he had supplied any information to the commission, BJP

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legislator Ram Kapse shot back: "The only offence I committed is that I read the newspaper reports about the commission's proceedings every day." He dared Sawant to make the charge outside the protection of the House, a challenge the minister hasn't accepted.

Justice Bakhtawar Lentin's relentless uncovering of the gross negligence and corruption in the state health services, especially in the food and drugs administration, which is expected to protect the public from ruthless drug manufacturers, has discomfited many public men. It has brought out the devious nexus between crooked businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians. In an obvious attempt to keep the commission's work above political squabbling, Lentin quickly issued a statement pointing out that "no member of any party, ruling or opposition, has supplied information to this commission". He said that the facts the commission possessed had been sifted from hundreds of government files. "The commission has kept itself above politics," Lentin emphasised. But in response to Lentin's statement, an opposition MLA has given a privilege notice against the commission in the Assembly, objecting to the commission commenting on the proceedings of the House. This has ensured that the political controversy will drag on.

Samant (left); and Lentin: embarrassing disclosures

Unending Nightmare

DROUGHT-stricken Kalahandi in Orissa has had to witness considerable misery over the last many years. But what it has seen this year is a tragic drama of entirely another kind.

On January 16 this year, the Supreme Court appointed Kalahandi's District Judge, Pratap Chandra Panda, as inquiry officer to look into the implementation of government welfare schemes in the area. This order came following a public interest petition by two social workers, Kapil Narain Tiwary and Kishan Patnaik.

For six months Panda did not investigate while a lethal summer gave way to rains, which offered at least some hope toKalahandi's hungry people. During this period, according to local Janata Party legislator, Bhagata Charan Das, 541 people died of starvation. Just as the district judge finally started the inquiry, the state Government released large advertisements in some national dailies to highlight its achievements, crowing about the "changing landscape of Kalahandi".

Panda wrote to Tiwary in a letter dated June 20 that since it would be a "fact-finding mission" nobody, not even the petitioners, would be associated with it. This was in contradiction to the judge's earlier view that the petitioners should not only be present but should also suggest the names of villages to inspect. A clearly upset Tiwary replied: "It appears you are going to have the inquiry behind my back. As a result, the inquiry would be unilateral and highly prejudiced as no facts would be placed before the inquiry officer."

As the disappointments mount on every front, it is not surprising that the locals of Kalahandi find it harder and harder to believe that they will ever emerge from the cycle of drought, disease and hunger.

Battling for Control

WITH his career as a film star all but over, Rajesh Khanna, recently inducted into the Congress(I), is taking an active interest in the politics of the film industry. The Progressive Group, led by Khanna along with producers Gulshan Rai and Prakash Mehra, made a determined effort last fortnight to grab the reigns of the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association (IMPPA) from the ruling United Group led by the body's outgoing President Ramraj Nahata and producer Manmohan Desai. But they did not quite succeed.

The progressives alleged that though last year's film industry's strike had forced the state Government to concede reliefs of over Rs 30 crore, Nahata had shown himself to be a leader who could easily succumb to government pressure. But the 285 producers who gathered to vote in Bandra's National College were not fully convinced. Though Khanna and four others of his group were elected, the remaining 11 seats on IMPPA's executive committee remained with the United Group. Said Nahata: "The results clearly show that producers have faith in us." The election, however, was a far cry from last year's when all the contestants were elected unopposed.

PETER MARTIS

IMPPA executive committee: star wars

Ironically, the very next day, the Federation of Western India Cine Employees called a strike, demanding a 25 per cent pay hike. The members charged producers with not having passed on the reliefs to workers. The producers, though, insisted that the gains had gone to distributors and exhibitors and not to them.

Interestingly, Amitabh Bachchan, though in Bombay, stayed out of the election scene. Khanna was unavailable for comment, but industry circles feel that his challenge to IMPPA's leadership (which contains many Bachchan associates like Desai), was an attempt to strike at Bachchan's pre-eminent position in the industry. Though Khanna's critics doubt his ability to lead, everybody acknowledges that his knack for being in the news will be increasingly in evidence in the months to come.

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KARNATAKA

A Disillusioned State

KARNATAKA'S shrewd and capable Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's popularity is on the slide. Returned with a thumping majority just two and a half years back after he sought a vote of confidence, Hegde seems to have become a victim of his own procrastination. Corruption has pervaded every nook and corner of state administration; political interference has demoralised the bureaucracy; populist schemes have burnt deep holes in the state's pockets; and disillusionment has replaced the mood of hope and expectation among the state's middle and upper classes. Principal Correspondent ANITA PRATAP studies the changing mood in the state. Her report:

"Ramakrishna Hegde, you are not the same person we knew earlier."

"Don't give us assurances alone, please take some action also."

"We want you to be firm, sir."

—Comments addressed by the people to Karnataka Chief Minister, R.K. Hegde, when he toured his constituency, Basavangudi, in June 1987.

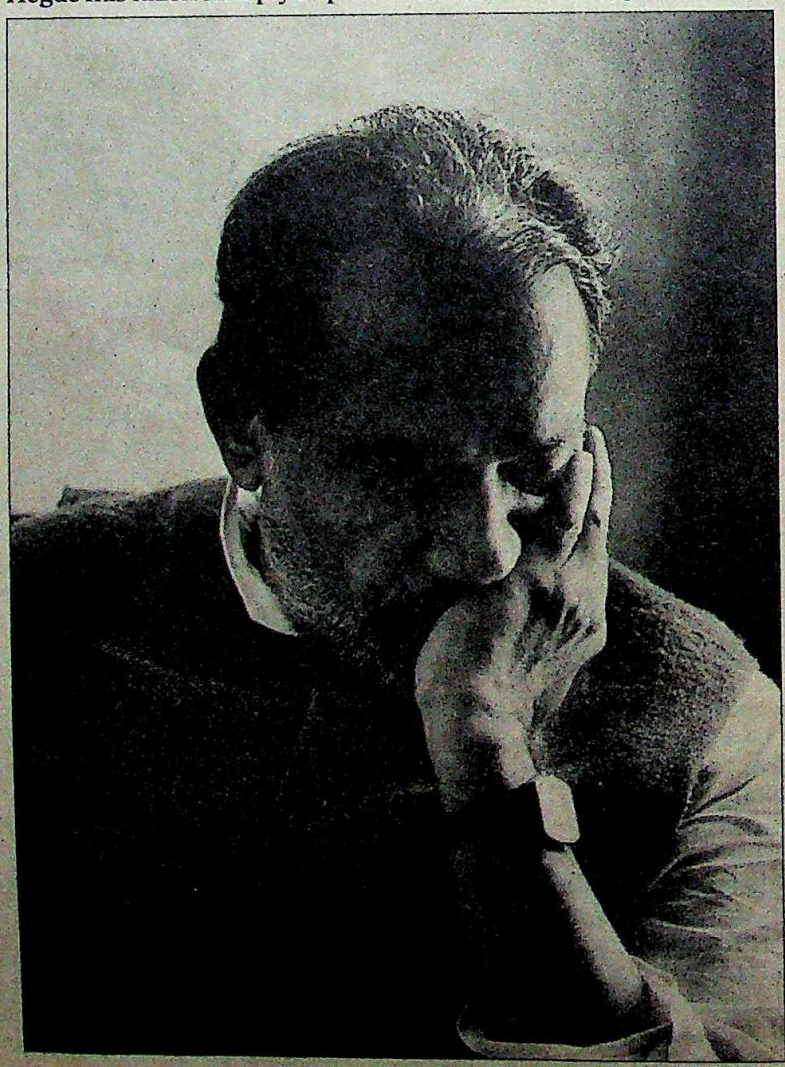
Ramakrishna Hegde's beguiling charm and intelligence has created a unique situation: he is more well thought of in the rest of the country and abroad than in Karnataka. Though his charisma is still intact with the backward sections, particularly the rural poor, there has been, a significant erosion in his popularity in his home state. He is no longer seen as the messiah of the middle class, the icon of the intelligentsia and Mr Clean of the south.

In a sense, what is happening to Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre is happening to Hegde in Karnataka. Like Rajiv, Hegde too had soared to an exalted political status, thrust by public admiration and expectation. But from that apogee, the slide to public disillusionment was quick. Since his triumphant personal victory at the hustings two years ago, Hegde has not done justice to his talents as a shrewd politician and an able administrator. Today, he is under siege.

Hegde's finest hour was the implementation of the panchayati raj system in Karnataka early this year. Despite opposition, he managed to translate into action his commitment to set right the urban-rural divide. But since then, it has been all downhill. Though sections of the public do not doubt his capabilities, they wonder, with growing chagrin, why he has allowed the rot to set into state politics and administration.

Hegde's Government has fallen sharply in public esteem for a variety of reasons. High on the list is the widespread and institutionalised corruption among ministers and bureaucrats. Hegde admits this as his biggest failure *(see interview)*. Perhaps the prime reason for this phenomenon is that, in the four-and-half-years of its rule, the Janata fought five general elections.

Hegde has fallen sharply in public esteem for a variety of reasons.



BHAWAN SINGH

All government posts are up for sale—the post of a gram sewak can be bought for Rs 5,000, that of a teacher for Rs 15,000 and of an inspector for Rs 25,000. From big deals like arrack bottling to routine issues like appointments, transfers, licences, allotment of house sites and power connections, nothing moves unless money changes hands.

Hegde's image has been greatly tarnished by his coterie of young Turks, by men like Dr Jeevraj Alva, P.G.R. Sindhia and R.C. Jigajinagai—popularly believed to be his fund-raisers. Roshan Baig, a Janata MLA, in fact described Dr Alva as Hegde's 'Natwarlal'. Hegde claims he has not authorised anyone to collect money but his young Turks do it openly.

Administration in the

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state has become woefully unwieldy and slack. Apart from its obvious financial and political undesirability, Hegde's jumbo cabinet has made the administrative apparatus creak under its weight. There are 35 ministers, 38 zilla parishad presidents and vice-presidents and 55 chairmen of corporations. Eight needless ministerial portfolios have also been created. As a result, the secretary of industries has to report to three ministers—J.H. Patel, the minister for large and medium industries, B.A. Jividiya, minister for small-scale industries, and R.B. Potdar, minister for industrial cooperatives.

The ministers are hardly ever in their chambers. Taking the cue from them, the administrators are equally lackadaisical—as is evident from delayed and inconsistent decisions. For instance, the file on the prestigious Chowdiah Hall, which involves violation of government conditions, lay with Jeevraj Alva, the then information minister, for three years. There are 45,000 pending files in the secretariat. Several merchants, who have been unable to get shops allotted in the corporation shopping complex in Yeshwantpur, complain that one either needs power or money to get things moving."

Inefficiency in the state Government is amply demonstrated by its casual attitude to collecting taxes. Since 1983 tax arrears have mounted to a staggering Rs 400 crore. The Excise Department has to collect Rs 40 crore, Forest Department Rs 32 crore and the Sales Tax Department Rs 146 crore.

Political interference has reached an all-time high, demoralising the administration. The Superintendent of Police of Tumkur, A.R. Infant, who had suspended a sub-inspector for dereliction of duty, suffered the shame of seeing him reinstated following pressure by the home minister's office. Asks Infant: "When I am undermined like this, how can I exercise my authority?" The most pernicious symbol of political interference is the high number of transfers. A secretary in-charge of an important portfolio laments: "The bane of this administration is transfers. We may all have ridiculed Gundu Rao but I must say he never interfered with the administration nor did he allow his legislators to do so."

On the financial front too, Hegde's performance has been lack-lustre. He attributes it to four successive years of drought, fall in agricultural and industrial production, and such fiscal drains as payment of enhanced dearness allowance. But he fails to mention the populist schemes that have burned a hole in the dwindling resources of the state exchequer, as pointed out in a recent confidential note by the World Bank. Popular but unproductive schemes like subsidised rice to the poor, free supply of uniforms and textbooks, subsidised clothes, and maternity benefits have cost the state's exchequer Rs 383 crore in the last two years. Yet, as a political analyst put it: "How will Hegde keep the poor happy once the money runs out?'

Senior officials in the Finance Ministry criticise some open-ended schemes. "The subsidised rice scheme covers even those who can pay more than Rs 2 for a kilo of rice. There is also wastage and leakage," says an official in the Finance Ministry. Burdened by such largesse, the state's deficit this year is anticipated to be around Rs 340 crore, the highest in the country. Not surprisingly, many of the earlier developmental activities have slowed down, leading to a quantitative and qualitative decline in the state's economy.

Also, the virtual doubling of power tariff from 35 paise per unit to 65 paise, together with hikes in property tax, water, bus and milk rates, have turned the middle class against the Hegde Government. It perceives the power tariff hike to be a way of covering up the inefficiency of the Karnataka Electricity Board (KEB). That is a point: while distribution loss is as high as 37 per cent in the state, power is supplied free to 1 lakh employees of KEB.

Moreover, the enthusiasm of the Janata ministers and MLAs, which had waxed in the first phase, has now visibly waned. The Janata leaders, who identified themselves with the people during their first tenure, have now distanced themselves. Thus, Rural Development Minister, Nazeer Sab, did not even stop when farmers near Mudhol tried to present a memorandum to him on June 24.

The politics of Karnataka has traditionally been inextricably tangled with casteism. But under the Janata regime, the unholy nexus has increased alarmingly. The taint of casteism has come to

The Congress(I) is capitalising on public disillusionment and Janata misdeeds.

MUSHTAQ AHMED

In the Janata Party, indiscipline is endemic.

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RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE

"I have my compulsions"

KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, recently back from a prolonged overseas tour, returned to a state seething with political unrest. Not only does he face serious dissidence within his Janata Party, he also has to contend with public dissatisfaction over a number of issues. Principal Correspondent ANITA PRATAP *spoke to Hegde for over two hours last fortnight. Excerpts:*

Q. *What has led to the erosion in your image?*

A. It is because of a few recent unpopular decisions—taxation, hike in bus fares, milk, water and power rates. It is the worst thing a government can do. Then there was the enlargement of the Cabinet and the behaviour of MLAs and party leaders. There is no erosion in the eyes of the general public but, yes, it has happened among the educated class. They read the papers. There has been a stepping up of a vilification campaign by Congressmen just to divert attention from all the scandals that the prime minister is involved in. The Congress(I) people exploited my long absence from the state. If I had been here, I'd have given a good fight.

Q. *How do you propose to tackle the group of dissidents in your party?*

A. I do not recognise any group of dissidents. Yes, some members are unhappy. But the cause of dissidence is frustrated ambition and not principles.

Q. *Aren't the dissidents capable of creating mischief?*

A. Do you think I am attached to this position? That is my biggest strength. Congressmen have the stupid idea that I'm only interested in saving my office—that is just not true. I am here not because I want to be here, but because my party and the people want me to be here. I'd be the happiest person to be relieved of this responsibility.

Q. *Your jumbo cabinet has been widely criticised.*

A. Do you think I was happy to have such a big cabinet? Of course I agree, I took a very lofty stand from the beginning about value-based politics. Now it is being thrown at my face. But I have my compulsions. You see, the Janata Party is accused of being a party of the dominant communities. So I had to induct backward class members so that a sense of justice is created.

Q. *Will you prune the Cabinet now?*

A. I propose to do two things. I will explain to the people why I had to have such a big cabinet and I will assess each minister. If his performance is not satisfactory, he will have to be dropped.

Q. *What annoys the public is that you have such a large cabinet when there is a resource crunch.*

A. Nobody raises questions when we create posts of inspectors general of police or chief engineers, which cost us much more. But I do agree that I can do with a much smaller cabinet.

Q. *You claim you are not interested in saving your office—then why do you give weightage to compulsions?*

A. That's only because of the party—I don't want the party to go after I go.

Q. *The public feels you are appeasing casteist and communal lobbies.*

A. To be considerate to the needs of the needy is not being weak.

Q. *You are said to be the prisoner of a syndicate.*

A. (Laughs) All of them have been my very old and valued colleagues. But I am guided by my conscience, intellect and experience, not by others.

Q. *What has been your biggest failure?*

A. I have failed to eliminate corruption. Corruption in this state is chicken feed compared to that at the Centre. But I feel deeply distressed that I have been unable to eliminate it.

Q. *Why has the administration turned so slack?*

A. There has been a slackness due to my personal lack of attention. I was preoccupied with meeting people, MLAs—all trivial things I admit.

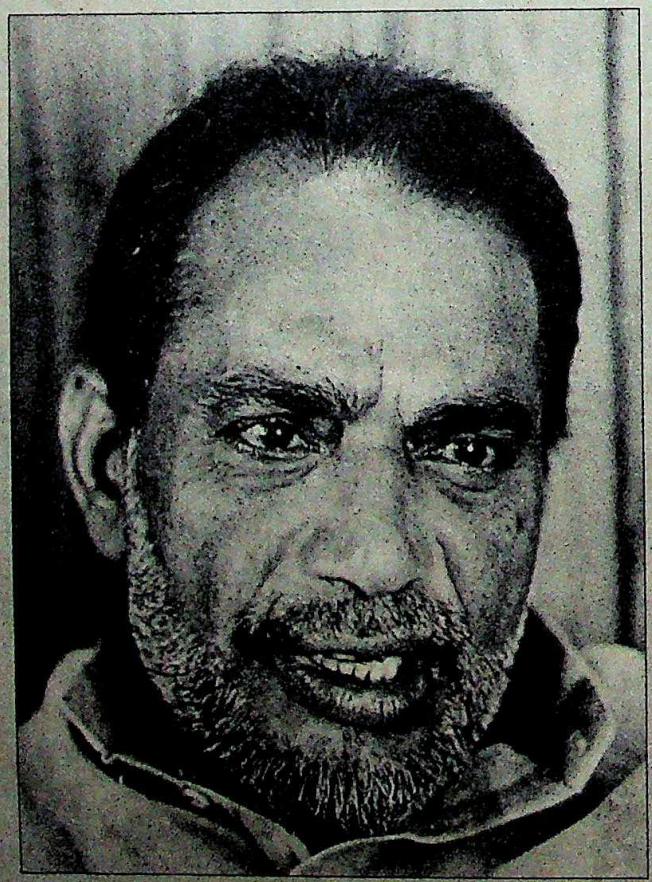
Q. *Your obsession with emerging as a national alternative is said to have led to your neglecting the administration.*

A. It's just propaganda. I don't live by illusions. It's ridiculous to think that I, as an individual, can be an alternative when there is no party—of comparable strength and credibility—to back up that individual.

Q. *Do you want to retire from politics?*

A. It depends on two things—firstly it depends on what happens at the national level. I do not now have the kind of hopes I had entertained earlier about opposition unity. Even on the issue of selecting a presidential candidate we couldn't sail smoothly. The second is how I feel about it. I feel that, when you reach a certain age, you must try to withdraw from active politics. But right now I want to set things right.

"I have failed to eliminate corruption."



BHAWAN SINGH

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besmirch every action of the Government—be it the sanctioning of capitation-fee-based professional colleges or tagging of the dominant communities, the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, as backward classes.

One disturbing fall-out of the panchayat elections has been the concentration of political power in the hands of the dominant communities and the consequent fuelling of social tensions (INDIA TODAY, June 30). In June 1987, land disputes snowballed into a social boycott of Harijans in the Medikinal and Ginigera villages of Raichur district.

IN the Janata Party, complacence has hardened into rank indifference. Indiscipline is endemic. While the Minister for Large and Medium Industry J.H. Patel calls party MLC T.R. Shamanna 'senile', the latter promptly calls Patel a 'drunkard'. The dark and burly Transport Minister P.G.R. Sindhia has even bashed up a conductor, but no disciplinary action has been initiated against him.

The serpent of dissidence lies coiled in the entrails of the Janata Party. This, in fact, is its biggest problem today. Charges a dissident: "Hegde can't afford to complain about us. He is the biggest dissident in the national Janata Party." A dissident nucleus has emerged calling itself the Janata Shasaka Vedike (Janata legislators forum) which has a strength of about 25 MLAs, with the slogan: *Chikka Chokka Daksha* (small, clean and attentive cabinet). About 18 months ago, 91 legislators submitted their first memorandum demanding the sacking of arrogant, inefficient and corrupt Cabinet ministers. Many were won over. On June 25, the dissidents, now down to 57, submitted their fourth memorandum. They claim they stand for value-based politics, whereas Hegde feels that frustrated ambition propels them. But what cannot be denied is that Hegde, in the first place, had pampered the legislators when he had a wafer thin majority. He is not so accommodative now.

As a bureaucrat puts it: "Hegde of 1983 was an uncertain man but with the right impulses. The electoral victory of 1985 made him confident. But the impulses have gone awry." Hegde himself admits that he was disinterested and wasted too much time with legislators, thus allowing the degeneration to set in. In fact, more harm than good has come out of his accessibility and kindness. As Jivijiya said: "Most people are misusing the chief minister's goodness." Often, Hegde is not strict with defaulters. He issues warnings and, when they are flouted, chooses to brush the whole thing under the carpet.

For some odd reason, Hegde seems to quail at the prospect of drawing blood. He has not initiated a really vigorous anti-corruption drive though a sizeable number of ministers, IAS and IPS officers have assets disproportionate to their known sources of income. Indeed, he has repeatedly shown that he is a procrastinator, who prefers to get agitations off the front pages by instituting committees.

Though he denies it, his partymen believe that Hegde has neglected his party and the state because he had his sights fixed on Delhi where he saw himself as the alternative to Rajiv. Today, his prime ministerial ambitions have dimmed. Being practical, he realises that it is no longer feasible due to four obstacles: a pitiably weak party, opposition disunity, the V.P. Singh factor and the growing credibility of the left parties in the Opposition.

Not surprisingly, while the Janata has slumped in Karnataka, the Congress(I) is working hard to regain its lost credibility, capitalising on public disillusionment and Janata misdeeds. Recently, Congressmen have been mobilising public opinion, attacking the Government whenever it trips and submitting memorandums to the governor demanding a Central probe into allegations of corruption.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that Hegde today has become a victim of a publicity overkill. He himself acknowledges this saying that the Janata leaders had projected themselves as "oversized personalities but in reality were somewhat smaller". Hegde has now announced his decision to tone up the administration, enforce party discipline and check corruption in the bureaucracy. But announcements have to be fleshed out in action. People are tired of technically correct and democratic gestures like probes and committees that only defer the problems. For too long has Hegde doled out placebos. The time has come for surgical intervention.

Hegde is no longer seen as the Mr Clean of the south.

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F-16

Exploding a Myth

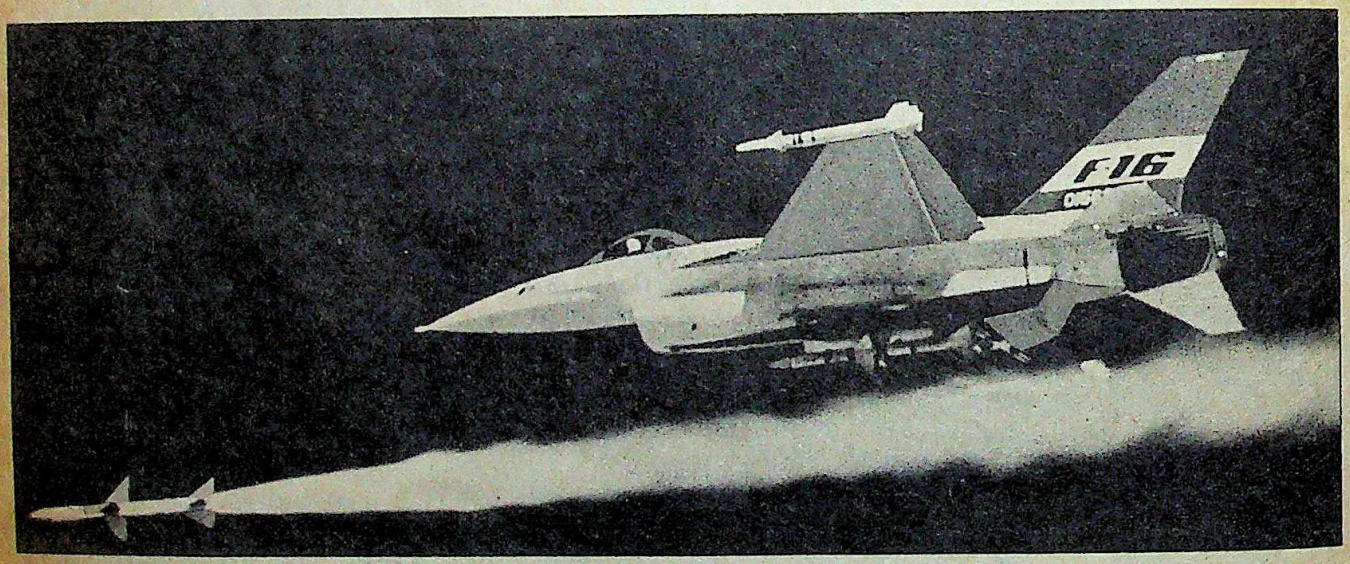
FOR the last two months, since an F-16 Fighting Falcon, pride of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), crashed out of the Afghan skies, American and Pakistani experts have been desperately trying to figure out what happened in those frenetic minutes as two F-16s chased Afghan MiGs over the guerrilla country. Details of the findings are now tumbling out in the defence grape-vine. And if the findings are true, the Americans and the PAF could do without the embarrassment.

Sources in Pentagon confirm that it was neither the MiG-23s nor the latest MiG-29s that outnumbered or outgunned the Pakistani fighters. It was simply a case of mistaken identity: the leader of the Pakistani combat air patrol mission shot down his own wingman. The PAF has already held a court of inquiry into the incident and is sharing the findings with the US authorities.

This curious incident of mid-air fratricide in perfectly good weather has raised several questions in defence circles where new doubts have now cropped up about the F-16, touted for too long as the hottest fighter in the world and one whose capabilities has been exaggerated to mythical proportions by the media, especially in India.

Experts at Pentagon say they find it hard to believe how an F-16 could shoot its own wingman when the aircraft is equipped with one of the world's best IFF (identify friend or foe) system. The system shoots an electronic beam at the target and identifies the return beam as that of a friend or a foe. Further, when the missile locks onto the target the firing pilot switches on an air intercept interrogation system which further confirms the identity of the victim. It seems that in this case this was either not done or the system malfunctioned.

The Pentagon finds it painful to accept either. At Congressional hearings on the AWACS question last month, Pentagon experts called Pakistani pilots "some of the best in the world, next only to the Israelis", and find it even harder to accept failure of such crucial components of the F-16 system.



F-16: new doubts

The Pentagon thus is more inclined to buy the Pakistani version of the incident. That the leader of the PAF fired his AIM-9L missile at the fleeing MiGs but in the heat of the battle his wingman, who too happened to be chasing the MiGs, came in the way. Since the F-16 has a much more powerful engine than any of the MiGs, the heat-seeking AIM-9L lost track and went straight for the F-16's exhaust. This version, however, knocks the bottom out of the earlier claim of the Pakistani lobby that the only reason the MiGs succeeded against them was the lack of an AWACS system on the Pakistani side of the Hindukush.

But the incident, viewed with several others in the recent past, delivers another nasty knock to the myth of the invincibility of the F-16. The PAF has by now lost three of its 40 precious F-16s. One hit a pig that strayed onto the Sargodha runway and then a two-seat trainer crashed on take-off. The Dutch Air Force recently grounded its 200-odd F-16-A after defects were discovered. The Pakistanis obviously need in a hurry the 10 F-16s that they have sought in their arms aid package being currently debated.

But the biggest blow to the F-16 myth came when a Federal district jury in Tampa, Florida, recently awarded $3.1 million in damages to the widow of a United States Air Force (USAF) pilot, Captain Ted Harduvel who died in an F-16 crash in South Korea. The USAF and General Dynamics, the manufacturers of the aircraft, had blamed the crash on "errors by an overmedicated pilot". But the widow, Janet, sued General Dynamics, charging that the aircraft was badly designed and wired. In a judgement that shocked the entire F-16 lobby, the court ruled that the wiring in the all-electronic aircraft was so shoddy it led to short-circuits that numbed the jet. "We came, we saw, we kicked ass. This clears my husband's name," said an excited Janet.

Understandably the accidents and misdirected missiles have led to consternation in the Pentagon and have raised fresh questions about the hype that is often built around western military equipment. Closer home, it provides comfort, and food for thought to the Indian Air Force strategists who have been studying the developments closely. The lessons are not to panic every time a MiG-23 crashes, and not to go into panic manoeuvres over any new piece of American equipment that the western media touts as the world's best and which the Pakistanis happen to acquire.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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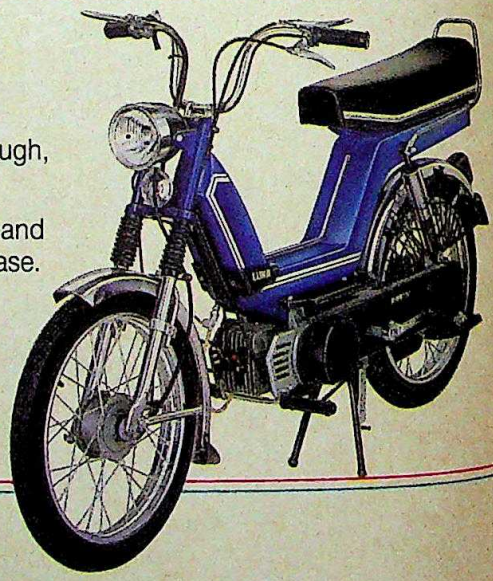

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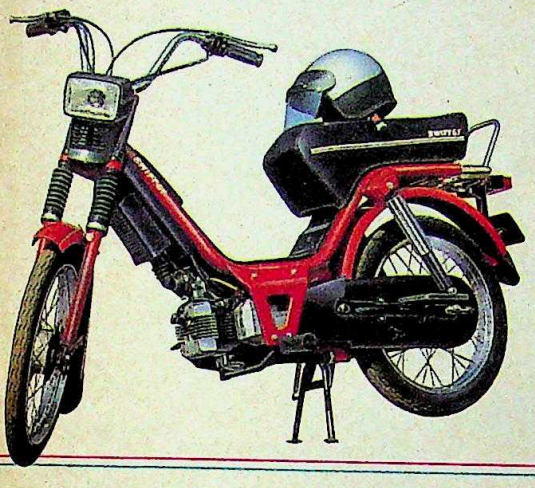

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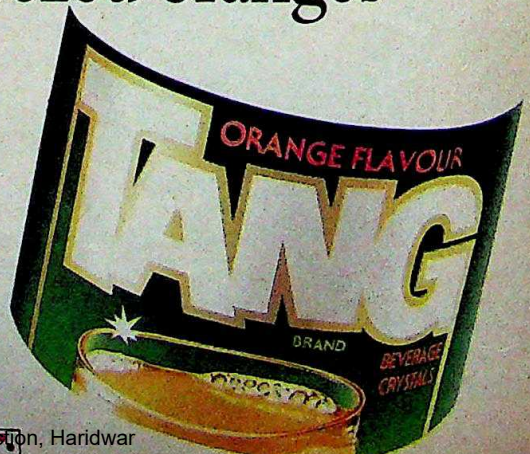

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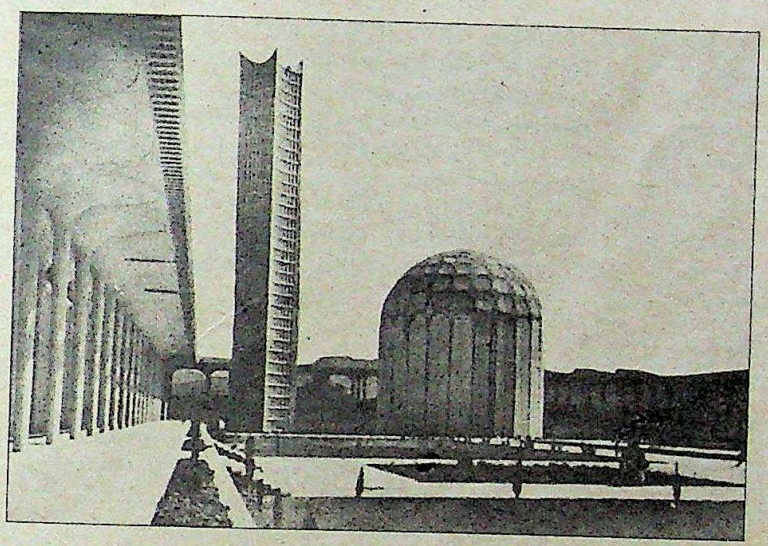
PAKISTAN

The Nuclear Heist

WITH a little luck, it would have been the biggest nuclear coup of all times. And for a nation which has stolen everything nuclear, from enrichment technology to trigger devices, from electron beam welding machines to rare alloys, this would have been the ultimate achievement: the smuggling of an entire, ultra-modern uranium enrichment plant, capable of producing weapons grade uranium every year for 10 bombs and establishing Pakistan firmly as a nuclear power. Currently, Dr Abdul Qadir Khan's pilot plant at Kahuta produces at best 10 kg a year, barely sufficient for one bomb.

Beginning with a series of raids by top government agents in West Germany in May this year, the story of Pakistan's boldest covert nuclear operation ever has just begun to unfold with a joint investigation by Switzerland, West Germany and France. Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *talked to diplomats, proliferation experts and investigators to put together this account:*

Pakistan's Nuclear Institute at Kahuta



THE controversial claims and disclaimers of Dr Abdul Qadir Khan, the father of the Pakistani nuclear programme, may have brought his government a lot of embarrassment. But they have also served a vital purpose: of drowning, in their raucous din, the fact that Pakistan has just been caught red-handed in its attempts to mount yet another major international operation in smuggling nuclear technology and hardware. If, in 1974, Khan got away with the uranium enrichment technology from the tri-national European Nuclear Consortium, Urenco, his people now nearly pulled off a similar—if not more audacious—coup, this time to buy an entire new enrichment plant.

The Swiss, West German and French authorities are now jointly investigating a racket which was busted following massive raids on a Cologne-based German firm, Leybold-Hereaus GMBH, that has been accused of shady nuclear deals with South Africa and Pakistan in the past. Said an aide of Senator John Glenn, the anti-nuclear activist: "This particular company has had a record of having illegal deals with the Pakistanis. US intelligence should have been watching it all the time." "But this is the biggest scandal of its kind ever, and undoubtedly the biggest nuclear-smuggling effort by a sovereign government," a West German official told INDIA TODAY on the telephone from Bonn. Declared *Foreign Report*, a confidential publication of *The Economist*: "The acquisition of this equipment is as much a coup as learning the technology of centrifuges, which can enrich uranium to weapons grade."

Pakistan has recently been caught red-handed in its attempts to mount yet another major international operation in smuggling nuclear technology.

The "equipment" consists mainly of three huge autoclaves (electronically-controlled precision furnaces), type 48-X steel containers and type CB-AD-1 desublimers. All these have been on the "trigger list" of the International Atomic Energy Agency since 1983.

Using this equipment, the plant turns solid uranium hexafluoride into gas form and then pumps it into thousands of centrifuges which Pakistan has now learnt to make. Briefly, the giant autoclaves, five metres long and two metres wide, are used as baking ovens. They hold the type 48-X containers in which uranium hexafluoride is heated to 80 degrees centigrade under 1.8 bar pressure. The containers and autoclaves are built to prevent uranium leakage.

The desublimers serve as the vital cold traps used to pass the gas into centrifuge cascades in under-pressure conditions. When enrichment up to only 20 per cent is required, which is what power plants need, the desublimers are about 15 cm long. But when higher enrichment is required, these must be either 5 cm long or built in a special, narrow design. Looking at the blueprints, the European experts easily confirmed that what the Pakistanis had in mind was of a different kind altogether.

It is obvious that in its quest to set up a proper-sized enrichment plant, Pakistan decided to smuggle in a whole new plant of the latest technology rather than build on its existing pilot plant which is obsolete by at least three generations, compared to West European facilities. As the well-known proliferation expert, Leonard S. Spector, of the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said: "The episode shows that Pakistan's movement (towards the bomb) is continuing. On the other hand, the fact that they have got caught is also a set-back to their plans."

According to West German and Swiss investigators, goaded into action by revelations in the German weekly *Stern*, the Pakistanis paid Leybold-Hereaus slush money to illegally acquire the blueprints of an ultra-modern, Gronau-based enrichment plant of Uranit, a West German member of Urenco. Pakistani experts then modified the blueprints to suit their needs. Leybold-Hereaus subcontracted a Swiss firm, Metallwerke Buchs (MWB) to fabricate the components for Pakistan's second, 33-million deutschmark (Rs 23 crore) enrichment plant, referred to as Factory P-2 in clandestine correspondence. The MWB order was placed under a mysterious Dr M. Kothari's signature, on the stationery of Hilton Hotels in Switzerland. The money—more than

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two million Swiss francs (Rs 1.7 crore)—was to be sent clandestinely from Hong Kong or the United Arab Emirates.

The equipment produced at MWB was then smuggled to Lyon and other French ports, shipped onwards to Kuwait and Dubai, and finally to Islamabad. The network was partly busted in January this year when the Swiss authorities, acting on a tip-off, raided the MWB factory and confiscated the autoclaves and the smuggled blueprints. But the rest of the equipment—the desublimers and containers—has reached Islamabad. According to *Stern*, several of the blueprints had alterations and markings by Pakistani experts.

While the western press has largely ignored the scandal, it is being hotly discussed in established nuclear journals such as *Nucleonics Week* and *Nuclear Fuel*. A Uranit spokesman says the firm is suing Leybold-Hereaus for damages. In fact, Uranit found its blueprints missing in January 1984 and discovered, through industrial sources, that they were lying with MWB whose officials were promptly informed. MWB also disclosed it had received some orders with the blueprints, from a Dr Kothari. Uranit then asked the police to look for the mysterious man and let the matter rest there. Meanwhile, MWB sat on the order for a whole year till the Pakistanis' patience ran out.

THEY began to press their principals, Leybold-Hereaus and MWB, for quick execution at a crucial stage when, on December 19, the Swiss National Council in Berne passed stiff atomic energy regulation laws to be effective from January 1, 1986. MWB now began to run extra shifts to finish the order and, when its premises were raided, everything except the autoclaves had already been sent to Pakistan. Painstaking investigations later led the trail to West Germany, resulting in the raids in May on the premises of Leybold-Hereaus and the residences of Otto Hellingbrunner, one of its directors, and Gotthard Lerch, posted in Switzerland to coordinate with MBW. A phone call to the firm drew no comment though a spokesman confirmed the "investigations and raids were a fact".

The discoveries have resulted in several red faces. For Pakistan, it is another embarrassing case of getting caught in the act of officially sponsored smuggling. It underlines the fact that they still haven't changed their ways despite Dr Khan's repeated claims that Pakistan knows all it needs to in the nuclear enrichment field. At the diplomatic level, Pakistan has had to face protests from both Switzerland and West Germany for trying to subvert their laws. And though Pakistani diplomats deny it all as the "usual cock and bull creation of the Zionists", it is only a matter of time before the US Congress takes cognizance of their latest misadventure. As Spector points out: "The lesson in this is that US efforts have not succeeded in stopping their (Pakistan's) nuclear programme."

But amid all this commotion over Pakistan's unabashed beg-steal-or-borrow madness to acquire nuclear arms technology, the international watchdog organisations are not giving India an absolutely clean chit either. It is true, they acknowledge, that India has never mounted a similar drive of this magnitude, either in terms of technical significance or audacity. But it has surely bent a

INDO-PAK N-WAR

Sobering Scene

WHAT are your chances of surviving an India-Pakistan nuclear war? One in 500 if you live in New Delhi, and possibly one in six if you live in Bombay or Karachi. But even the first-stricken survivors will vanish by noon the day after, consumed by burn injuries and radioactive fall-out, dying more painfully than those mercifully vaporised in the initial blast.

A single, one megaton bomb exploded over New Delhi would leave only 18,600 people alive of the city's anticipated 1990 population of 91.18 lakh. Two thousand kilometres to the south-west, Karachi will do a little better, losing only 62.52 lakh out of its 1990 population of 83.37 lakh right away. And while the survivors will die quickly, thousands more will be consumed in the following days by radiation and epidemics in nearby towns.

Naim: gloomy

This horrendous scenario has been painted by Syed Rashid Naim, an Indian expert at the office of Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security (ACDIS), based in the University of Illinois. Naim has made his projections in a highly acclaimed research paper titled *Asia's Day After: Nuclear War between India and Pakistan*, now appearing in a book called *Security of South Asia*. Says he: "The two nations must think of building up machineries of better control and communication such as the superpowers have so that a nuclear war could not take place accidentally or through misunderstanding."

While a nuclear war is unlikely here, if it does take place, it could follow one of these scenarios:

- ► India and/or Pakistan decide to attack one or more of each other's major cantonments. A small, 20 kilotonne bomb may be used with a surface burst that causes less widespread damage than an air burst.
- ► The two nations attack each other's crucial economic centres.
- ► In a more savage war, they decide to attack major population centres.
- ► One nation may launch a symbolic attack in a sparsely populated region or a symbolically important target to demonstrate its resolve to take the extreme step.

Naim says that major cantonments in both countries are situated too close to urban centres to allow either side the luxury of a purely military nuclear attack. Similarly, an attack on economic targets will result in heavy civilian casualties. Such an attack may prove more crippling, particularly in Pakistan's case. For example, just the destruction of the hydel power stations at Mangla and Warsak and the thermal ones at Multak and Sukkur would take more than half the power away from Pakistan's already impoverished 1,583-million-watt power network. The destruction of Karachi port would cut Pakistan's only link with the world and any attack on Mangla or Tarbela dams would result in a total loss of control over the Indus valley water system. Though India has greater resilience, an attack over one of its petrochemical or hydro-electric centres could have a severely crippling effect.

If attacks are made on city centres, Naim says both nations could use up to one megaton air blasts that destroy everything in an area of 200.9 sq miles or everything within an eight-mile radius. Casualties would be higher than in western cities because most south Asian cities are small in area and congested.

The toll will also be higher because neither India nor Pakistan has the kind

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few international regulations and conventions when things got too desperate, as in the case of India's paucity of heavy water, essential for its pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR).

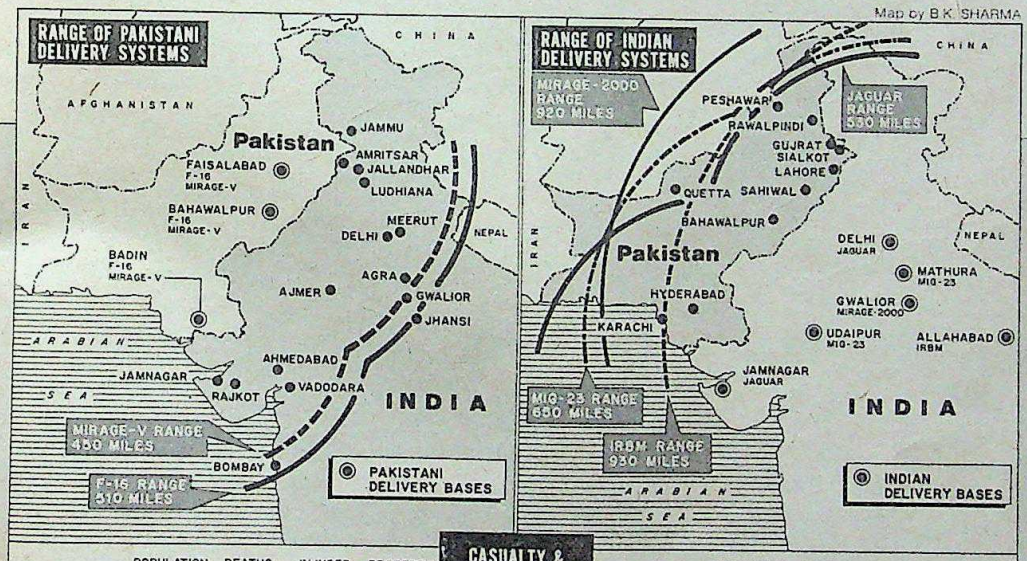
Last year, an American expert, Gary Milhollin, made waves by charging India with buying clandestinely a hundred tonnes of heavy water from China—a charge India vehemently denied. But, despite doubts expressed by experts on the very possibility of China selling such significant merchandise to India, it was widely accepted that India did buy some unsafeguarded supplies.

New light has now been thrown on the affair by a highly reputed proliferation spokesman from, of all nations, the Soviet Union. Roland Timerbaez, the Soviet representative at the UN Disarmament Commission, made a startling disclosure while speaking at a recent seminar on nuclear smuggling at New York's Columbia University. Illustrating the fact that even the Soviet Union was not immune to nuclear smuggling, he said that a year and a half ago, a European firm bought Soviet heavy water in small lots of under one tonne which do not fall under the purview of international safeguards. Later, he said, the firm consolidated the supplies into an amount six times larger—six tonnes—than the minimum requiring inspections and sent it to "a nation of proliferation concern". Timerbaez did not name the country but independent sources say the consignment was kept, in small lots and with separate end-user certificates, at Zurich airport, then shifted to a mid-eastern destination by an African airline, before it was finally transferred to the nation of "proliferation concern".

THERE are strong signals that India has now decided to prepare for the inevitability of facing a nuclear Pakistan. Spector points out that India has shown some desperation in using radiologically-shielded railway containers to transport spent fuel from Kalpakkam to Tarapur for reprocessing. This is despite the fact that the size of the rail gauge changes en route, resulting in a hazardous interchange of goods trains. Says Spector: "The whole equation in the subcontinent has changed and an element of militarisation has begun to accompany the technical capabilities." He and other proliferation experts say that, though India's claims of a peaceful nuclear programme were earlier accepted at face value, despite Pokharan, the reality is now different. "There is some real ambiguity now," he says.

But with the Pakistani nuclear establishment pulling out all the stops—moral, political, scientific and legal—in its smuggle-or-bust drive to acquire the bomb technology, it is unlikely that any Indian Government could sit quietly on the sidelines. And particularly when the Pakistanis have proved, yet again, with their Urenco encore, their ability to take both American pressures and invigorated European controls in their nuclear stride.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



CASUALTY & DAMAGE PROJECTIONS: LIMITED NUCLEAR ATTACK ON MILITARY CENTRES

	POPULATION (1990)	DEATHS (ESTIMATED)	INJURED (ESTIMATED)	PROPERTY DESTROYED (SQ. MILES)
BOMBAY	11,914,900	136,900	224,600	6.16
DELHI	9,118,600	40,700	66,900	4.62
AHMEDABAD	3,164,100	153,500	251,900	3.08
AGRA	1,041,800	91,100	149,400	6.16
GWALIOR	944,300	18,000	25,400	6.16
VADODARA	821,400	4,200	6,900	6.16
AMRITSAR	813,500	15,500	21,900	6.16
LUDHIANA	775,800	14,800	20,900	6.16
JALLANDHAR	590,900	11,300	15,900	6.16
RAJKOT	529,100	10,100	14,200	6.16
MEERUT	528,400	10,100	14,200	6.16
JAMNAGAR	408,400	79,300	13,000	6.16
JHANSI	337,300	6,400	9,100	6.16
AJMER	334,300	6,400	9,000	6.16
JAMMU	273,400	5,200	7,400	6.16
TOTAL	31,596,200	603,500	850,700	84.70

	POPULATION (1990)	DEATHS (ESTIMATED)	INJURED (ESTIMATED)	PROPERTY DESTROYED (SQ. MILES)
KARACHI	8,337,100	128,900	211,541	6.16
LAHORE	4,599,900	66,100	10,800	6.16
RAWALPINDI	1,427,100	68,300	11,200	4.12
HYDERABAD	1,088,000	44,600	73,200	4.12
PESHAWAR	383,100	27,500	45,100	3.08
SIALKOT	283,200	20,400	33,400	6.16
QUETTA	282,600	35,500	58,300	6.16
BAHAWALPUR	261,900	18,800	30,900	6.16
WAH CANTT	222,100	148,000	74,000	6.16
GUJRAT	212,500	15,300	25,100	6.16
SAHIWAL	51,600	3,700	6,100	6.16
TOTAL	17,149,100	577,100	579,641	61.60

of fire-fighting, rescue and medical facilities that the West has. At present India has just 25 hospital beds per 10,000 people and Pakistan a mere 50. Also, there is no hope that the manpower or resources of neighbouring small towns could be employed effectively to assist the nuclearised metropolis.

However, Naim points out that if Pakistan reached a stage of desperation, it would perhaps have already lost the bulk of its air force, and thus the ability to deliver nuclear bombs deep enough in India. And India would have to contend with the fact that the very lack of depth that makes Pakistan so vulnerable could become its nuclear shield. A 15 mile per hour breeze would take the fall-out from an explosion over a downwind area of 140 square miles, much of which, at least from December to March, would be in India. During the June-September south-western monsoon season the wind will blow the other way.

Vitally moreover, Naim points to a most unexpected factor as one of the major constraints on a savage city strike. Every major Indian city reasonably deep inside India has a substantial Muslim population. "It will be a major constraint on the Pakistani behaviour in all but the most severe of crises where the very existence of Pakistan is at stake," says Naim, arguing that any large-scale killing of Muslims would damage Pakistan's standing in the Islamic world and would be unacceptable to the Pakistani Muhajirs, most of whom have close family relations among Indian Muslims. In fact, he points out that 80 per cent of people in Karachi have relatives in India, a factor that even India would have to weigh before contemplating the extreme step.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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UNITED KINGDOM

The Asian Stars

ARE British theatre, television and cinema afflicted with racial prejudice against Asians and blacks? Perhaps yes, and in more ways than one. In British films and theatre, Asians have been traditionally depicted in stereotyped roles, such as the 'corner shopwalla', the 'repressed sari-clad woman', the postman, the bus-conductor or, more recently, as the sleazy drug smuggler. Rarely is an Asian woman shown as a bright, persuasive university lecturer, or an Asian man as an accomplished computer engineer or even a successful entrepreneur thriving in Thatcherite Britain, as legions of Patels in the country's business directory would testify to being.

As for Asian actors themselves, the films and serials capitalising on the Raj nostalgia allow them a peek in as valets and sundry maharajas. So someone like Art Malik—the gifted actor who became something of a minor celebrity for his portrayal of Hari Kumar in *The Jewel in the Crown*—is increasingly looking towards the US for his future.

But things may be changing too. After 58 years, there is an Asian-born member of British Parliament: Keith Vaz, whose roots are Goan. In British sport, especially in field hockey, second generation Asians, British born and bred, are key members of an English side that finished runners-up in the recent World Cup. And in the performing arts, in television, theatre and films, a new breed of youth and highly articulate 'stars' are coming to the fore, overcoming what often seem to be insurmountable odds.

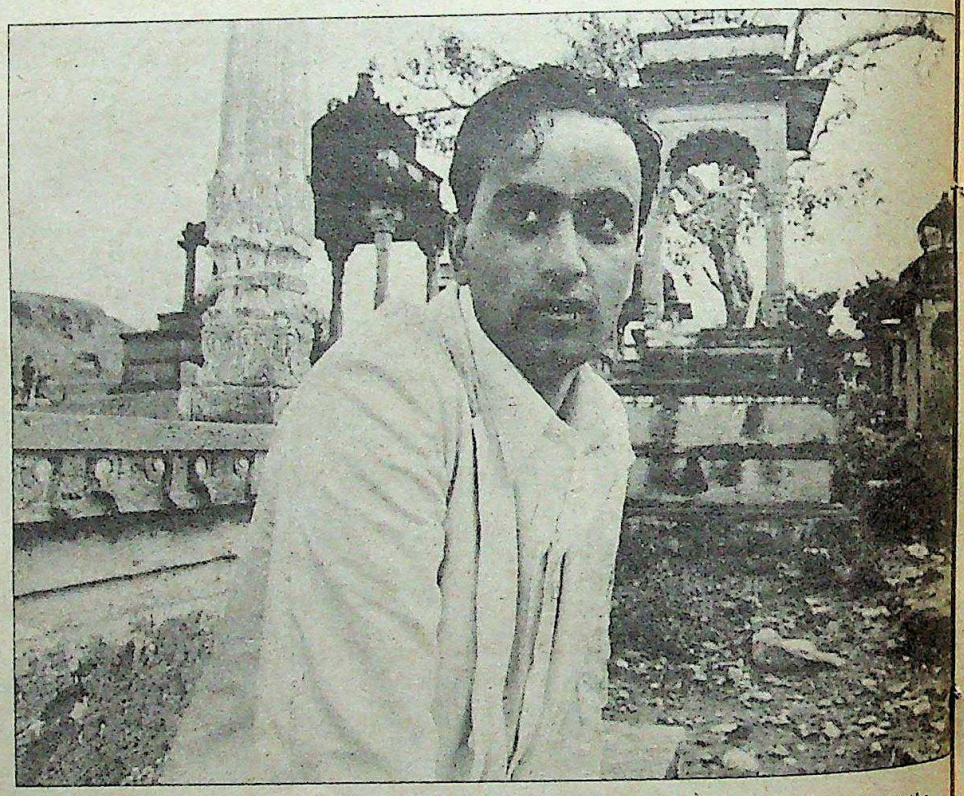
Possessing iron nerves and plenty of spunky ebullience, this assertive group of actors and actresses has barged its way through many a closed door. Even the unresponsive and often patronising white 'critics' establishment has sat up to take notice of the new Asian performers.

Of course, major problems still confront this emerging set of talented people, who themselves often see the scenario as bleak. Thus, there is a lack of gifted writers who comprehend the realities of the life of an Asian or a black in Britain is a major problem. In recent years, much of the "ethnic writing" has come from the iconoclastic pen of Hanif Kureishi or Faroukh Dhondy, a commissioning editor at Channel Four. But much of Kureishi's writing has overt sexual connotations, which seems to delight English audiences and enrage the more orthodox members of the Asian community. In any case, despite Kureishi's and Dhondy's prolific work, which has made them local media darlings, a sense of stagnation pervades ethnic writing in this country, with few inventive or original works to choose from.

Another serious hindrance for aspiring talent is the lack of proper drama schools. At present, there are only two Asian theatre groups—The Asian Co-operative Theatre and the Tara Arts Group, headed by Jiten Verma—that have done laudable work training the current crop of stars and sponsoring new plays.

However, H.O. Nazareth, the Bombay-born head of Azad Productions, who until recently ran a feisty Sunday-morning programme *Sunday East*, and who is associated with the Asian Cooperative Theatre, is more sanguine. "I think the scenario is a more positive one now. Recently, we had *The Amen Corner* with a black cast, *The Emperor* with an all-black cast, and *Serious Money*, where Meera Syal played a South American millionairess, all running more or less at the same time. I see it as a sign of the times—perhaps signalling a hopeful future for Asian performers," he says.

One outstanding actress associated with these theatre groups is the attractive and dusky Calcutta-born Rita Wolf. A former member of the Royal Court Youth Theatre, her first role was in Kureishi's incendiary play, *Borderline*. In theatre, she has enacted a variety of roles and appeared in television episodes like *Albion Market and Rockcliffe's Babies* and in films like *Majdhar*, *The Chain*, *Mohammed's Daughter* and, most notably, *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Wolf persuasively argues for change in the national theatre companies, so that, for instance, Asians and blacks can be considered eligible as artistic directors. She is also critical of the inadequate training facilities for Asians, both in front and behind the stage, in prestigious institutions like the Royal Shakespeare Company.



Malik in *Jewel in the Crown*: a celebrity

Her finely etched performance as Tania, who rebels against her father (played by Saeed Jaffrey) in *Laundrette* was highly praised by the critics. However, Wolf remains dissatisfied, chaffing at the lack of roles that ought to have come her way after the film's success. Voicing her frustration in *The Guardian*, while referring to an incident in the film where she bares her breasts and provocatively taunts Omar, the homosexual Pakistani youth, from behind a window, she ar-

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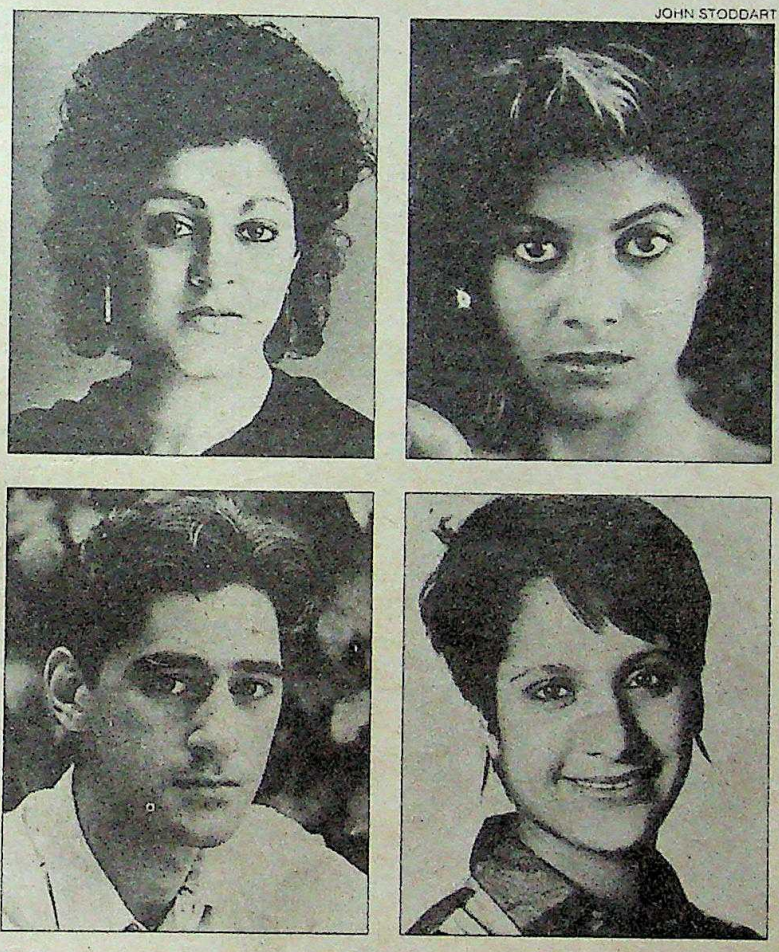
gued: "This was a small comic incident in a full length film which had much to say about class and colour and young people in England in the '80s, and said it with candour and wit. But the lasting effect this particular incident seemed to have on critics and the public alike, coupled with the fact that this is the best role I have been offered to date, suggests how little things have changed." She significantly added: "If the media were all we had to contend with, the situation would be bleak enough, but in the theatre world, we continually come up against the failure of the white establishment to respond to the challenge we present."

According to the emerging stars, the challenge represented by the two Asian theatre groups, which have pioneered some resourceful and original work, is largely ignored by the national companies. Ayub Khan Din, 25, a strapping actor with matinee idol looks, who is poised on the threshold of stardom gained valuable experience at Tara Arts. Although he earned his biggest career break in films, he regards his theatre experience to be of greater intrinsic value as "it reflects real life experiences more accurately". Says Khan Din: "If you live in a multi-racial society like Britain, you must learn to handle sensitive issues like racism. And when you interpret this on stage, you are often amazed at the audience reaction—which can be sometimes one of remarkable harmony." Khan Din, who recently performed in *Borderline* at the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton, adds: "The audiences there are not used to seeing plays with ethnic themes performed by an integrated cast. They are starved for good theatre. One night, there were 30 Asian students amongst them and after the play, we had an incisive exchange of views. Some of them remarked on the startling similarity between the racial incidents depicted in the play and their own real life experiences."

Manchester-born, Khan Din is half-Pakistani. He hails from a large family of 10 children—eight boys and two girls—three of whom are successful hairdressers. He says he opted for drama school on a whim and, after joining Tara Arts, has performed in plays like *Miti ki Gadi*, the Tamil classic *Anklets of Fire* and *Macbeth*. He plays the lead role in the eagerly-awaited next film of the *Laundrette* team—Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi. The title of the film underwent a recent transformation from the prurient to the staid. Originally titled *The F...*", it changed to the less offensive but equally titillating *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, and then to the current and sedate *Sammy and Rosie*. Khan Din plays Sammy while actress



JOHN STODDART

(Clockwise from top left) Syal, Wolf, Ghosh and Khan Din: the new challengers

Frances Barber plays Rosie. Others in the cast include Shashi Kapoor, Claire Bloom and Meera Syal.

For most of the new crop of Asian actors, theatre continues to offer the greatest creative stimulation as most of the current writing is for the stage. However, unless they have the good fortune to appear in a prestigious West End production, it does not necessarily ensure fame and money—two essential ingredients of a recognised 'star'. This kind of renown is usually ensured either by films or television. One Asian actress who has attained considerable fame and become a familiar face to millions of British TV viewers is 24-year-old Sreela Ghosh—better known as "Naima, the shopkeeper in Albert Square" in the top-rated serial *Eastenders*.

The winsome actress, born in Sylhet in Bangladesh, came to London in 1975 and has stayed since. She recently caused a stir amongst London's entertainment fraternity by opening her own wine bar in the East End that had TV buffs exclaiming about "the Eastender's" new venture. Ghosh's stylish little wine bar is called Cobblers—apparently preferred over "Rive Ghosh". She says: "Being a household name does not necessarily mean I have an entirely satisfactory career at present. Of course, my role in *Eastenders* has given me a lot of confidence that comes from filming several times a week. But the Naima character is not strongly developed. It is a pity that the 30-odd writers who work in the serial have not gone beyond stereotypes. Why doesn't one of them consider the possibility of Naima opening a smart wine bar and running it successfully, as I have done?"

Ghosh has shown admirable tenacity in unravelling her way through the maze of licence laws and in trying to sell liquor in a one square mile area serviced by 100 pubs—though no other wine bars. When not shooting, she is at Cobblers, combining fine wines and helping to cook Indian snacks with a Bengali flavour. Yet, there is little chance that her screen image as Naima could suddenly be depicted as an intrepid entrepreneur. The reason most often heard is that the British audience—predominantly white—will not accept it.

Such specious reasoning infuriates Gordon Warnecke—the gifted actor who normally lands himself the meatiest Asian roles, including the one that made him famous—as the homosexual Omar who has a dark sexual passion for his white boy-friend in *Laundrette*. Warnecke (whose surname is German, his mother

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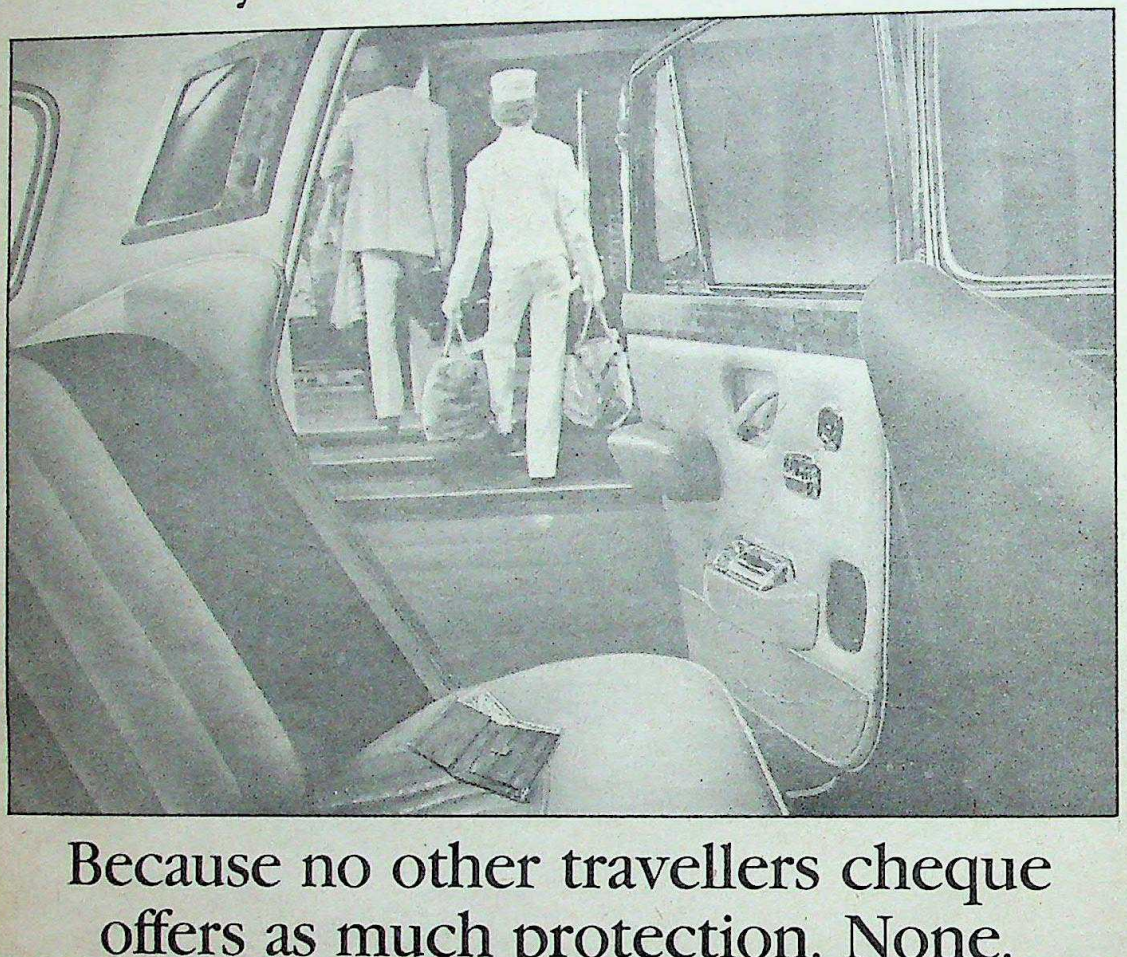

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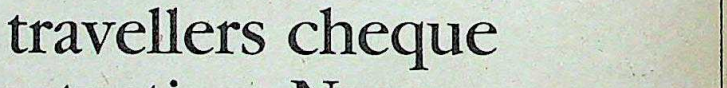

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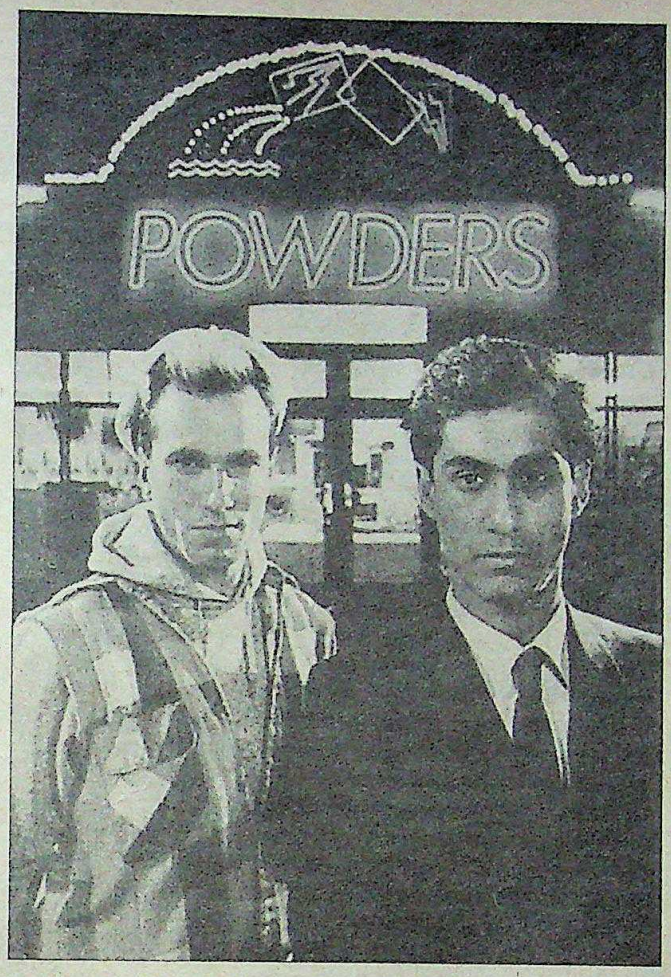
being of Indian parentage) strongly advocates integrated casting and regards as "rubbish" the notion that British audiences are not ready for it. He adds: "It is not as though multi-racial casting has not already had considerable success here. Julius Caesar was a hit with this experiment." He argues that "Both in theatre and in films, producers are not prepared to take chances. *Laundrette* was an unqualified success and I still lack challenging roles. I am now forced to look increasingly towards the US where black actors get a better deal."

Confronted with poor "ethnic" scripts (or more often a lack of them), an almost uninterested white establishment, doubting critics and poor training schools, potential Asian stars have few options left. One is to 'take charge' on their own, for instance, to write one's own scripts. This is precisely what the vivacious actress Meera Syal, fast establishing a reputation as a talented writer, is doing. Half Sikh and half Hindu, Syal won a clutch of prestigious awards for her one woman show *One of Us*. Recalls Syal: "It was great fun doing that act. Here was this unsuspecting British audience expecting a poor Asian woman in a sari who would come on stage crying about her father beating her up. Instead came this outrageous woman in roller skates and a crazy hat performing hilarious things on stage."

Syal's career is already an accomplished one. On television, she has starred in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Black Silk and The Bill*; and on stage, she was seen in *Kissing God, All the Fun of the Fair* and, more recently, in *Serious Money* that was performed at the Royal Court Theatre. She is also appearing in a significant role in *Sammy and Rosie*, where she plays the character of Rani—an intelligent, articulate, Oxford-educated Asian woman who is a social worker. And by Kureishian decree, she is also a lesbian. Did Syal have qualms about playing a lesbian role where she is shown in clinches with another woman? "Not at all," she says. "The lesbian relationship in the film is in fact much more effective, much more real and works better than the heterosexual one. The fact that Rani is a lesbian is secondary."



Warnecke (right) in *My Beautiful Laundrette*: heavy odds

ACTRESSES like Rita Wolf, Shreela Ghosh and Meera Syal have all, at some time or the other, thought about working in India. They are equally emphatic that it would not be in the Hindi film genre where heroines are shown "running around trees". They have all seen "serious Indian cinema" and would consider offers provided "the role was right". As Wolf remarks: "These high quality Indian films seem to have so much more to say than what is routinely churned out in the West." But their careers are firmly entrenched in Britain. And if at times they appear to languish without challenging roles, Wolf says: "It is all a lack of imagination, especially on the part of the writers. I, or any of my other Asian colleagues, can perform classic roles—be it Chekhov or Ibsen or Brecht. I find the concept of white actors blacking up to play black characters—like Othello—repelling." She argues that the time has come for Asian and black Desdemonas, Hamlets, Macbeths and Lears.

For Shreela Ghosh, whose career is now firmly anchored to *Eastenders* with a contract renewable annually, the serial has offered her the chance to take a detached look at the attitudes of white critics towards ethnic themes or Asian actors. She sees a lack of sensitivity and understanding, and says their patronisation "does everyone a disservice". As writer-producer Nazareth maintains: "Most critics have failed to appreciate the new frontiers of imagination and perspective that ethnic writers are opening up. They have also failed to cut down to size unworthy work. There's so little constructive criticism that we desperately need more critics to criticise those who call themselves critics. It would be great to see that critics can be creative too."

To confront what seems a bleak situation, Ghosh advises firmly: "It is a question of taking control back in your hands." Some of her colleagues have done precisely that. Warnecke's tenacious staying powers have landed him two offbeat roles for television. He has just completed filming 10 episodes of a serial called *Boon*, where he plays a character called Hanif. The second is an unusual project titled *The Hospice* in Franglais—the lingo that combines French with English. Khan Din is playing a Turkish character named Yasha in a BBC project titled *My Family and Other Animals*. For Syal, whose acting credentials are already established, the future holds more writing assignments. Among them are two episodes of the TV comedy *Tandoori Nights*, a BBC TV film script about life in Southall and a comic play about two Indian women who set up an "arranged marriages bureau". Syal has completed a 13-part series called *Welcome Home, Mr Bajaj* which she hopes will eventually be made for Doordarshan.

Clearly, the problems and roadblocks remain. But equally clearly, the new crop of Asian actors and actresses in Britain is confronting the problems frontally, and making its way.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

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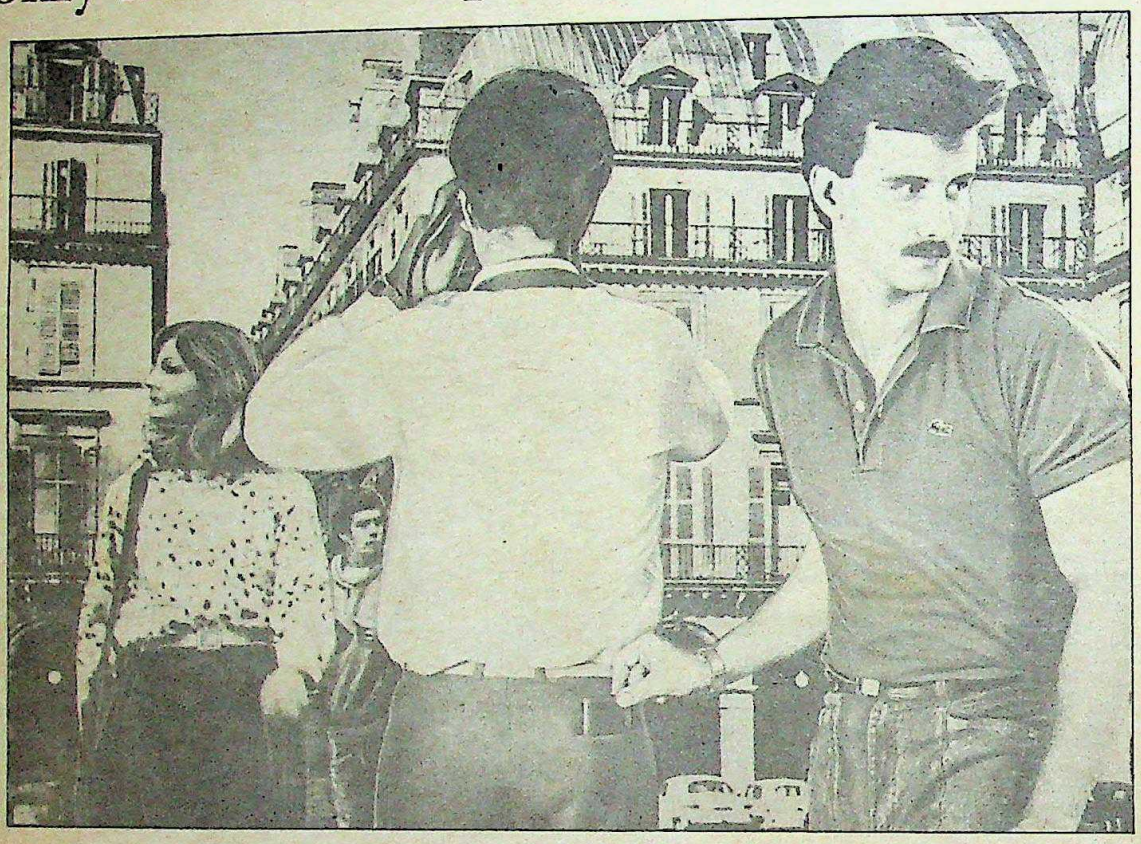

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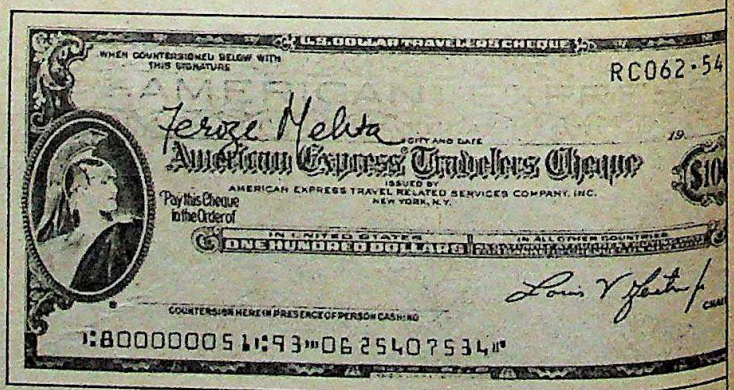

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BANGALORE'S CALL

FIRST, it was an exodus from Calcutta, with companies like Brooke Bond moving to Bangalore, and others like Surrendra Paul of Apeejay shifting to Delhi. Now it is beginning to look as if the exodus is from Bombay. And the favourite spot remains Bangalore. After Vijay Mallya's McDowell group shifted its corporate base from Bombay to the southern city a couple of years ago, it is now the turn of Britannia Industries to consider following suit, some time in late 1988 or early 1989. The company sees the requirements of its corporate office growing (the registered office remains at Calcutta), and Bangalore has been adjudged the most appropriate location in terms of general facilities, space requirements and future company plans. Business circles also talk of a Madurai-based group shifting the base of its operations to Bangalore.

DESTINATION INDIA

MAJOR international companies operating in the consumer products area continue to plan their entry into the Indian market. Among the best known names to have signed up collaboration agreements with local companies are Polaroid (with Photophone—of Hot Shot fame), the Swiss chocolate firm Jacob Suchard (with Dr Writers) and Warner Lambert (with Parke Davis—for razor blades).

How much of a difference this will finally make in the market-place is not known. There are, after all, several examples of brand names and pedigreed collaborations making little impact. Wilkinson and Gillette are cases in point in the blades market, and Rothmans and Chesterfield, in the case of cigarettes. The big question is whether Pepsi Cola will ultimately join this group, and whether it will produce any fizz after getting the thumbs up signal from the Government.

RURAL THRUST

THE Department of Electronics is planning to send the electronics industry to rural areas by decentralising the licensing policy in the small-scale sector. District small-scale industries institutes will be opened and given powers to license electronics units. The units will also be given technical assistance and financial incentives.

Also on the anvil is a major joint sector venture to manufacture critical electronics components, especially for the computer industry. The new unit will go into the production of sub-components that are presently imported for the burgeoning consumer goods market.

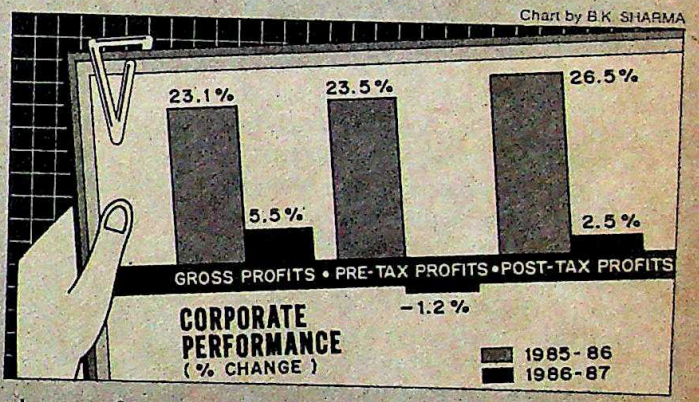
ITALIAN CONNECTION

THE Modis are getting into the construction business in a big way, and have tied up with Italy's Italstrade, a subsidiary of IRI, the world's largest public sector company. The company specialises in superstructures like hydroelectric plants, the building of highways (which may soon be thrown open to the private sector) and other large projects. The Italian company will also invest 40 per cent of the equity in a new, joint venture with the Modis.

Meanwhile, the Modis have already put in bids for three projects which include the Narmada valley project, and offers to do projects for the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation on a turnkey basis. Italstrade is prepared to fully fund the projects, and repayment of loans will be made partially through the export of Indian goods.

PROFIT SQUEEZE

BALANCE sheet figures are finally beginning to confirm what the share market has been saying for the last few months: that all is not well on the corporate front. A survey of 100 private sector companies, done by *Business Standard*, shows that the corporate sector was caught in a



sharp profit squeeze during 1986-87. Growth in gross profits plummeted from 23.1 per cent to just 5.5 per cent (the figure for 1985-86 was Rs 1,224 crore, and that for last year Rs 1,291 crore). Pre-tax profits did even worse, and actually declined from Rs 744 crore to Rs 735 crore—a drop of 1.2 per cent. The previous year, pre-tax profits had climbed by a handsome 23.5 per cent. Post-tax profits fared little better, rising by a measly 2.5 per cent to Rs 515 crore, compared to a rise of 26.5 per cent in the previous year. The survey confirms that clearly, it is not without reason that the stock-markets have been so pessimistic in recent months.

CONVENIENT MARRIAGE

THE latest marriage of convenience is between two Madras-based industrialists: C.V. Karthik Narayanan, managing director of Standard Motors, and A.C. Muthiah, vice-chairman of the Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation (SPIC). Standard Motors is strapped for cash, and Muthiah has a desire to get into automobiles as well as has cash to spare. Result: Muthiah's investment companies will buy the stock that is offered to Narayanan when Standard Motors makes a 7:6 rights issue of shares. Narayanan has 30 per cent of the Standard Motors stock, and Muthiah will have invested an almost equivalent amount after the rights issue. In return, he will have due representation on the Standard Motors board, but Narayanan will run the company. Formal clearance is awaited from the capital issues controller.

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PRIVATE SECTOR

Big is Beautiful

A Rs 700-crore project? Ho hum. A Rs 1,000-crore project? Faint interest. Five years ago, such sums would have riveted public attention. Today, they are fast becoming commonplace. For, with companies setting their sights higher and walking tall, big has finally become beautiful in the private sector.

A clutch of corporate heavies are already in the new mega buck business. Among them: Aditya Birla's Grasim Industries and Indian Rayon; K.K. Birla's group of companies; and R.P. Goenka's Ceat Tyres. Even business groups not in the same super-league are shooting high. The Apeejay group has a Rs 750-crore fertiliser project on its drawing-boards. In the south, K.V.K. Raju's Nagarjuna stable of firms is assaying only a slightly smaller (Rs 635 crore) fertiliser venture.

The giant projects are being promoted by pygmies. Tata Chemicals hawks some Rs 200 crore worth of wares but is investing in a fertiliser plant and refinery that will cost Rs 2,250 crore. The Apeejay group and K.V.K. Raju group have yet to float a project exceeding Rs 100 crore. Even Goenka's group totals sales of only around Rs 1,000 crore although it is now setting up a Rs 1,452-crore complex.

To be sure, corporations do not have to themselves shell out fat sums of cash. Indian Rayon is investing Rs 62.24 crore in the Rs 1,200-crore Mangalore refinery. The balance is to come from the public, the state-owned Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and overseas loans.

Still, these companies are collectively investing almost Rs 8,000 crore in a bevy of ambitious petroleum, petrochemical and fertiliser complexes. The total price-tag could be higher: an astonishing Rs 12,000 crore or more. Reliance Industries and National Organic Chemical Industries Ltd (NOCIL) have plans to invest at least another Rs 2,500 crore. The Singhania-controlled JK Synthetics is raring to go. Apart from a long-standing bid for a Rs 750-crore aromatics project at Saleempur in Uttar Pradesh, it has begun talking to Gas Authority of India on a Rs 700-crore project to make acrylonitrile, a raw material for acrylic fibre.

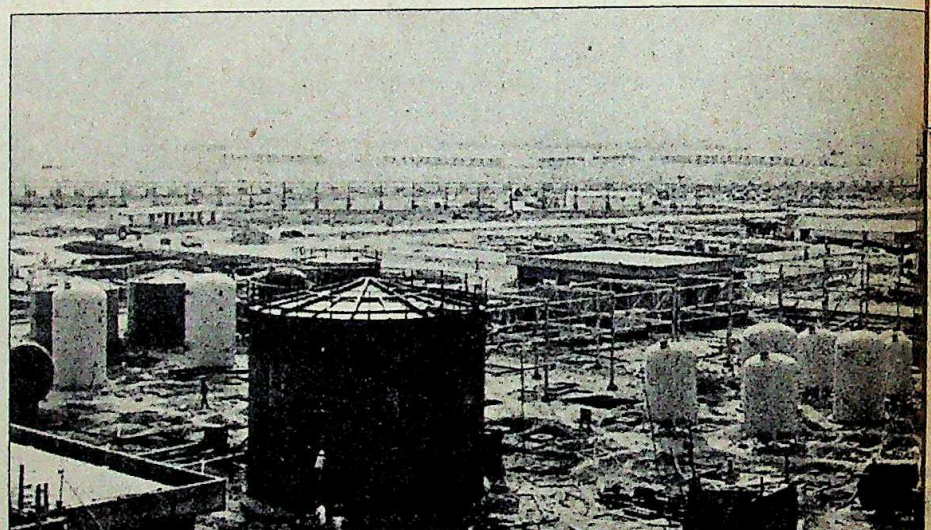
"These are huge projects," says Surrendra Paul, chairman of Apeejay Fertilisers, which is putting up one of the four private fertiliser plants along the Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline route. Stretching his arms to underscore his point, Paul adds: "They are enormous, something like what the steel plants were a few years ago."

He has a point. Everything is indeed bigger and more expensive: the equipment, the sums of money to be raised, even the project report. Example: Indian Rayon, which has tied up with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation for the Mangalore refinery, will have to fork out Rs 20 crore for the project report alone.

Why then are companies stampeding for big projects? Quite simply, they have been quick to seize government-given opportunities. Officialdom set the ball rolling a couple of years ago by encouraging bigger production capacities. "The Government has fixed higher minimum viable capacities, enabling us to expand," says F.C. Rustagi, president of JK Synthetics. He points out that, earlier, the Government licensed polyester staple fibre capacities of up to 6,000 tonnes. Now it is 30,000 tonnes. "With the new government thinking, size became important, and very sensibly so," adds Paul.

Faced with a fund shortage, the Government also threw open the petroleum industry—long a preserve of the public sector—to private firms. Explains a senior Petroleum Ministry bureaucrat: "We had to go in for the joint sector concept as provision was not made in the seventh plan for new public sector refineries." In fact, the Government had no choice. A refinery at Karnal, for instance, was crucial as the northern region accounts for 25 per cent of the country's consumption of diesel and kerosene. Moving imported petroleum wares from the coast would have heavily taxed rail and port facilities.

Companies have been only too ready to accept the challenge. B.N. Puranmalka, managing director of Indo-Gulf Fertilisers, points out that large industrial houses have successfully run several medium and large enterprises over the years and so now have the confidence, the expertise and the money for giant projects. He is right. One example: Tata Chemicals will use its own coffers to ante up the Rs 64 crore for the Karnal refinery, for which it has tied up with the public sector Indian Oil Corporation. The company has also already put up Rs 74 crore for its fertiliser project at Shahjahanpur. Together, it has put Rs 138 crore up front, no mean achievement.



Indo-Gulf Fertilisers' plant in Jagdishpur

Investors are plainly looking beyond their noses in sinking such vast sums of money into refineries and fertiliser plants. The Government has to give its nod for all major policy decisions in joint sector refineries, but private concerns are assured of a 12 per cent post-tax return (24 per cent gross) while not having to hawk the refinery's products (this is to be done by the public sector partner).

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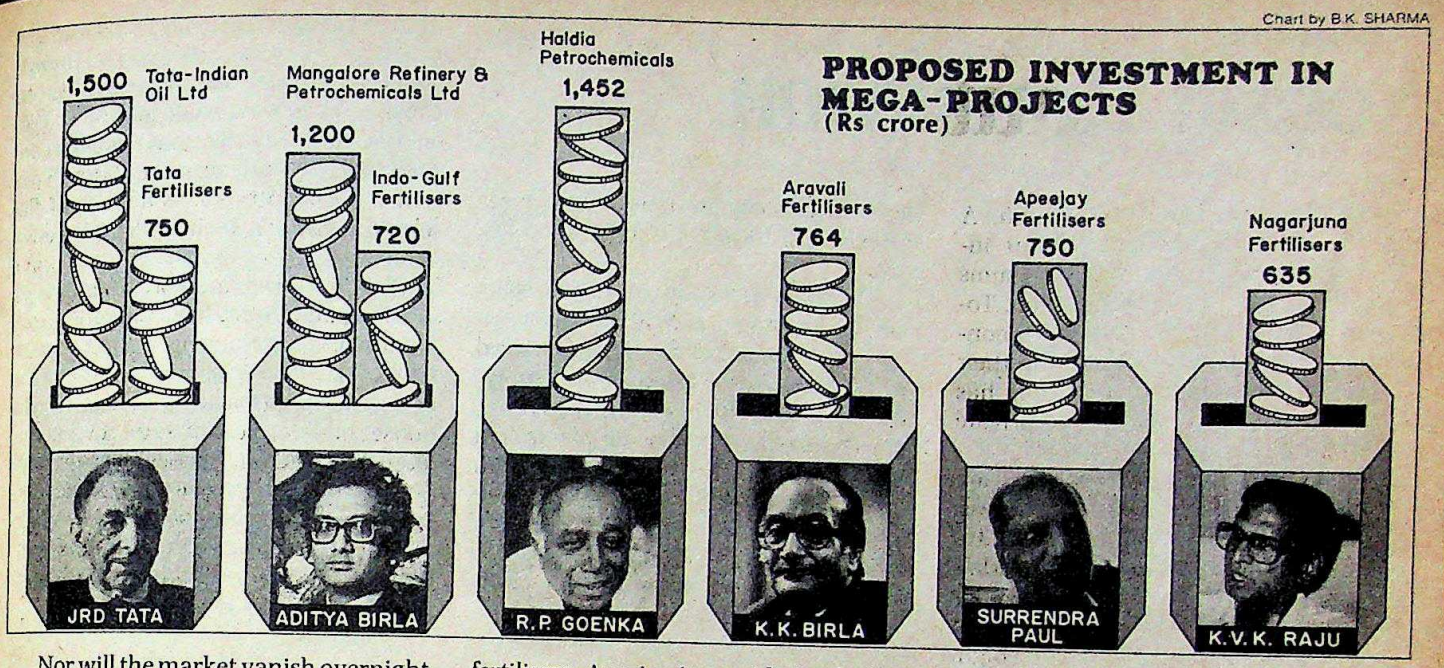

Nor will the market vanish overnight. The demand for petrochemicals is soaring by three million tonnes a year, and by the end of the eighth plan, is expected to touch 70 million tonnes, outstripping supply by 14 million tonnes—even after the two refineries go on stream.

Best of all, the refineries turn out valuable petrochemical building blocks such as propylene, based on which downstream products (plastics, synthetic rubbers) can be manufactured. The Tatas have listed 27 such items. Says a Tata official: "If this refinery requires Rs 1,500 crore, you can generate investments of Rs 5,000 crore. In tertiary industries you can generate a heck of a lot more."

"If the Haldia project is as successful as I envisage, there will be fabulous returns," says industrialist R.P. Goenka confidently. Grasim Industries too sees fat long-term rewards: it has already applied to the Government for licences to produce nine downstream wares—each project will cost over Rs 120 crore.

If petrochemicals and refineries are a sure-fire goldmine, fertilisers do not seem to offer alluring prospects. Squeezed by cheap imports, the industry is in the dumps. But most argue that the total demand for fertilisers tops local production now, and that this will continue even after all the fertiliser plants along the HBJ route go into production.

Last but not the least, the depreciation on plants will make available sizeable sums of money to their promoters. "Ten per cent of Rs 750 crore—you're talking of enormous sums of money annually," says Paul gleefully.

The players in this big-time game have their individual calculations too. In fertilisers, Apeejay is considering kicking off an agro-product business, using the same fertiliser sales network. In petrochemicals, NOCIL is compelled to expand annual ethylene production capacities from 63,000 tonnes to 3 lakh tonnes to compete with the the state-owned Indian Petrochemical Complex Ltd (IPCL).

FOR JK Synthetics, the quest for a mega project is prompted by an understandable keenness to protect its raw material flanks. "Our basic objective is backward integration," explains company President Rustagi. JK Synthetics is one of the country's biggest consumers of purified teraphthalic acid (PTA), which is used to manufacture a range of polyesters. PTA is now imported, and although Reliance is putting up a PTA plant, this is largely for captive consumption. So JK Synthetics hopes to bag the Saleempur project to produce 1.5 lakh tonnes of PTA.

For all the collective euphoria, there could be major snags. The Mangalore refineries project plans to tap public pockets for Rs 760 crore and Haldia Petrochemicals may have to raise over Rs 200 crore. Raising money in the stock-market is no cakewalk at the best of times. In today's slump, it is a superhuman task.

But promoters of some of the new ventures are marking time in the hope that the market will pick up. Says Goenka: "I believe that the capital market cannot remain this dull for a long period. So I'll go in when it revives." Others are banking on either their past experience in the market or on their reputations carrying the day with the share investor. "Our recent rights issue was oversubscribed," avers the Tata official. "NOCIL has a good track record," adds a company executive.

But NOCIL may also have a problem on its hands. The Government seems to be sitting tight on its application to expand capacities, contending that further expansion of its plant in Bombay is less than desirable from the environmental viewpoint. The company's managing director was unavailable for comment, but another NOCIL official claimed that the company had not received any letter to this effect from New Delhi, adding that the present plant site had plenty of space.

In the midst of that wrangle, a far bigger storm was brewing last fortnight. Three of the four private sector projects could be in trouble, Indo-Gulf being the exception. The Petroleum Ministry claims that they are way behind schedule. Said a Petroleum Ministry official: "The other three fertiliser plants are nowhere in sight. The power projects that were supposed to have been set up are behind schedule. The delay will cost us Rs 1,500 crore in lost revenue."

But the fertiliser companies counter that they are keen on their ventures. Apeejay, for one, says that land acquisition problems delayed its project, and that this was solved last fortnight.

Such problems are unlikely to dampen the enthusiasm of the new mega project buffs. "The Government has opened up and big projects are bound to come. I have absolutely no doubt about it," says Rustagi. His confidence is not entirely misplaced. With more projects in the official pipeline—two more refineries are on the cards in the eighth plan—mega times are here to stay.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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MUSIC INDUSTRY

Sound Revolution

THE tills are alive with the sound of music. Like switching from a Strauss waltz to hard rock, the Indian music industry has transformed itself almost overnight from creaking antiquity into an electronic wonderland. In music stores across the country, audio sets bristling with gadgetry are elbowing aside television sets for pride of shelf place and sending audio buffs into a frequency high.

Suddenly, there's a whole new vocabulary on tap—graphic equalisers, stereo amplidecks, spectrum analysers and hi-fi towers. The music business, as J.R. Mulchandani, Bush's marketing director, says, is "really booming". And louder and clearer than ever before.

Hitting the market with peak output are a host of new-fangled "music compacts" that incorporate a three to five band graphic equaliser, powerful detachable speakers, double cassette recorders and even a seven-band radio. And all of them are priced within a range of Rs 1,500 to Rs 5,000, making them immensely attractive to India's burgeoning middle class.

The result: an explosion in audio sales. Just five years ago, hardly half a million music systems were sold. But by end-'86, the Department of Electronics reported that the number had soared to 2.5 million sets—a turnover of Rs 500 crore, an average annual growth rate of 40 per cent. That figure does not include the number of sets being brought in as personal baggage or those being sold in the booming illegal markets in metro cities. And yet D.L. Jain, Philips' vice-president (consumer electronics), says: "We haven't exploited even a quarter of the potential."

In a Bombay music shop last fortnight, businessman Vijay Mehta was feeling the blast of the boom in a different way. Mehta, who wanted a two-in-one music system, was confronted with a bewildering array of sets. There was Philips with its range of 11 stereo cassette recorders. Three each from BPL (British Physical Laboratory) Sanyo, Onida and Bush. Two from Weston. And one from Sonodyne. As the busy salesman explained the advantages of each system to him, a baffled Mehta said: "It's like my wife choosing saris. I can't seem to decide."

But in a business obsessed with fidelity, it was the flurry of hook-ups with the big names in Japanese audio electronics that triggered the revolution. With the Government liberalising its electronics import policy three years ago, in Bombay, Bush tied up with Akai and Orson with Sony. In Bangalore, BPL with Sanyo. And in New Delhi, Onida with JVC. The older names in the Indian music business, Philips, Cosmic and Sonodyne, were forced to look smart.

Ironically, it was the much cried about pirated cassette boom that caused the initial demand for systems. With illegal cassettes selling for around Rs 20, almost half the price of genuine ones, tapes suddenly became as cheap as movie tickets. And the upsurge of sets coming in through passenger baggage, especially from the Gulf and Singapore, established

New music systems: boom time

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI

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the two-in-one as a middle class status symbol. Surrounded by his company's latest audio offerings, Sunder Vachani, Weston's managing director, says: "There is a new music consciousness sweeping the country and the emphasis is on quality."

Manufacturers began doing roaring business. In Bombay, Philips, the market leader, which had sold hardly 72,000 cassette recorders in 1983, found sales doubling every year and last year sold a whopping 3.95 lakh. In just two years, it has introduced seven models and now sells around a 1,000 pieces a day. Philips' Jain points out that the music business is linked to fashion and it is the new generation who are really setting the pace. Says Jain: "It is teenagers who select sets, and their papas just buy them." Philips itself came out with a trendy blood-red model.

In Bangalore, BPL, which had earlier specialised in medical equipment, tied up with Sanyo and brought out a dozen stereo cassette recorders. BPL's sales, says Biswajit Ghosal, its deputy-general manager "have multiplied rapidly". While in 1983, it sold 10,000 sytsems, by 1988, it expects to cross a lakh.

Others quickly jumped into the fray. In Bombay, Orson, tying up with Sony, introduced three new stereo recorders and sold 42,000 pieces last year. Bush didn't lie idle either. In the past year, they have introduced four new cassette recorders, and the latest being a 50 watt, five-band graphic equaliser called simply—Master Blaster. In all, they now sell 12,000 sets a month.

Music shops are dancing with delight to the audio boom. Says Kumar Malani, a partner in a Bombay music shop: "Before, we had hardly a couple of sets to offer and most of them were overpriced. Now, we can give a consumer any kind of music system he wants, for any budget." And O.P. Sharma, a Delhi shop owner, says: "We are selling music systems like transistors. Even rickshaw-pullers are buying them."

Sales, in fact, would be even more impressive were it not for the booming illegal markets in the metros. In Delhi's Lajpat Rai Market and Palika Bazaar or Bombay's Fountain market, one can pick up the latest models from Japan for prices that are far below comparable systems in India. BPL, for instance, complains that everytime it brings out a new model, smugglers sell the same one for Rs 400 less. It's not that all the sets are illegal. Small manufacturers cashing in on the Government's liberalised policy, import completely knocked down (CKD) kits, assemble them and sell them openly.

This has forced the Government to reconsider its policy. K.P.P. Nambiar, secretary, Department of Electronics, says: "We are trying to stop kit technology and ensure that the phased indigenisation programme is carried out strictly." Even the legal sector is still heavily dependent on imports. For instance, the tape deck mechanism, the heart of the cassette recorder, is still imported at a cost of Rs 300 each. The total number of tape decks imported are worth Rs 75 crore in foreign exchange. The import content in most systems could still be anything between 40 per cent and 70 per cent.

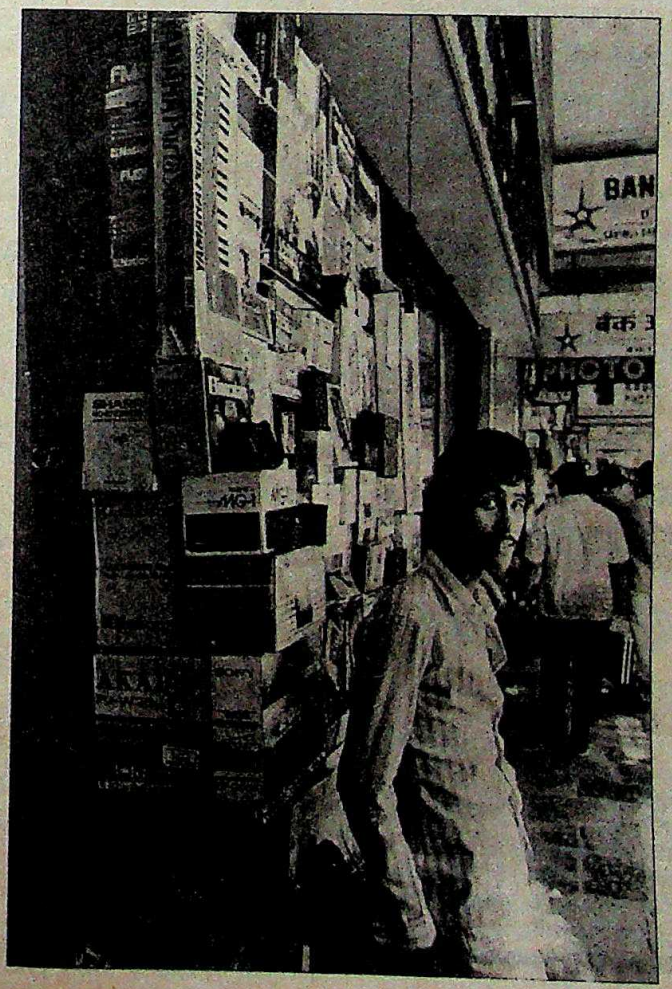
But, as a spin off to the cassette recorder boom, the market is going hi-fi. Injecting life into the market, Bush tied up with Akai and came out with its PRO-A1—a contemporary international system that is reasonably priced. When they introduced their system, dealers were hesitant to lift sets and even told them not to manufacture too many turn-tables because people were unlikely to buy them. But the market proved them wrong. Not only did their annual production of 4,000 sets get sold out but 90 per cent of the people wanted turn-tables as well.

With Bush's sensational success, Philips and Orson enlarged their range. Philips now has six systems to choose from that have speaker outputs up to 300 watts, noise reduction systems and stereo amplidecks. Orson, has got even more ambitious. Apart from their two basic systems, they now plan to bring out a set called Session 6000 with speaker outputs crossing 400 watts. Its price: Rs 20,000. Meanwhile, in Delhi, Binatone, introduced a "hi-fi tower" last February that stacks the tape deck, amplifier and tuner inside an elegant cabinet and has a remote control. Partap Lalvani, Binatone's managing director, says confidently: "I now sell 150 systems a month, but if I made 500, they would go too."

Although none of these systems really incorporate the latest in the music business like compact disc recorders (the Government has banned its import), the available range is impressive. The market is still small with the total sales amounting to only around 30,000 sets per year. But they envisage a huge growth in the future and Lalwani predicts: "After the video craze, hi-fi's are going to be the in thing." Concurring with him, Kishan Advani, a Delhi music shop owner, adds: "People are realising that videos are basically anti-social. You can't sit with friends in front of a video and relax, whereas a music system blends well."

Last month, Pulin Shroff, 17, was presented with a Rs 11,000 hi-fi system by his parents for securing a high first class in his secondary school examinations. He placed his favourite Madonna record gently on the sleek turntable and as the music filled his room, Shroff fiddled with his 9-band graphic equaliser, adjusting the music to his room acoustics. And as he laid back on his bed to relax he said: "It sounds great." Like Shroff, more and more Indians can now dicover the pleasures of high fidelity—Made in India.—RAJ CHENGAPPA

Pirated systems: flourishing trade



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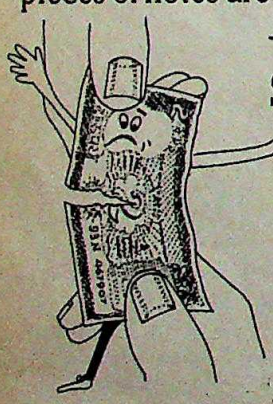
I'm worth good money... So don't treat me badly

Being a Currency Note, I'm valuable to whoever possesses me... and to the nation as well. Do you know, over 660 crore pieces of notes like me are printed every year. And the total cost of printing is really enormous.

Yet, alas, we don't live as long as we should. Improper handling shortens our existence. In fact, the life of notes like me is the lowest in India, than anywhere in the world. On an average, over 300 crore pieces of notes are destroyed annually —what a waste.



So I beseech you, do treat me right. If I were to be damaged or spoilt, it would tear me apart... a loss to you, a loss to the nation.

It's all so easy to avoid mishandling. Here are a few pointers:

* Do not handle me with oily or wet hands.
* Do not write on me – no personal messages not even telephone numbers, please.
* Do not roll or crumple me up – I may rip.
* Do not make multiple folds.

And see – by mutilating me you run the risk of not having me accepted by anybody. Even the Banks may refuse to replace me if I am torn too badly, or if part of me is missing, or if my number is beyond recognition.

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IMC-ASSOCHAM

Tying the Knot

SHORTLY before it turns 80 in September, the Bombay-based Indian Merchants Chamber (IMC) will get married. Walking up the aisle with it will be the 67-year-old Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Assocham), one of the country's three national-level business lobby groups.

After months of flirting, the two announced in Bombay on June 30 that IMC would be joining Assocham. A formal date has yet to be set, but wedding bells are expected to peal any time after Assocham amends its constitution on August 17.

"I'm happy with the outcome," says industrialist Viren J. Shah, who was roped in by IMC in the early stages of the parleys between the two sides. "We're delighted," echoes industrialist Keshub Mahindra, who was one of those who represented Assocham in the lengthy negotiations.

Assocham itself is in for sweeping changes. The organisation is to be restructured and its membership will be broadened to include trade associations. "This is a very radical change for Assocham. For the first time, trade and small industry will join it," points out Shah. One result: Assocham's very name could be changed. And 21 big daddies are vying for 15 newly-created "patron member" posts on an expanded managing committee.

Equally important, Assocham will now get some financial muscle: its annual budget of some Rs 20 lakh is to be jacked up to around Rs 70 lakh, bringing it closer to that of its rival, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). In fact, FICCI's budget of over Rs 1 crore stands to be trimmed by Rs 30 lakh because several of its members have crossed floors to join Assocham. Finally, Assocham's secretariat in New Delhi is to be strengthened and housed in a vastly more spacious office.

All this is meant to lend the organisation a much higher profile. For the latest move climaxes its three-year-old hunt for a more representative identity. Long viewed as an association of foreign and professionally-run companies, Assocham has been overshadowed in recent times by more formidable business lobby groups. Pravinchandra V. Gandhi, the industrialist and former FICCI president who sat in on the talks on behalf of IMC, dryly notes: "Assocham presidents were company executives. The Government prefers to talk to the decision-makers rather than to those who have to refer decisions."

The coming in of IMC, however, could help change that. It is bringing as its dowry a 2,000-strong membership and roughly 165 affiliated chambers of commerce. Assocham President M.K. Kumar says these numbers will swell, and that his association will reflect a truly national outlook now because IMC represents groups like the Thapars, Bajaj and the Mafatlals while the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, an Assocham affiliate, has the Tatas, Hindustan Lever and the Mahindras as members. Argues Kumar: "After IMC's affiliation, we will get national coverage. Sixty per cent of the organised sector is with us now, and we also represent 80 per cent of trade and industry in western India."

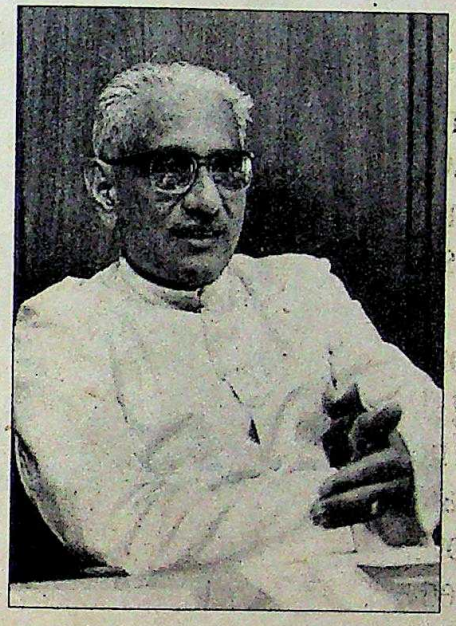
On IMC's part, the alliance's attraction was that, quite simply, it had no other place to go. IMC had three options: to rejoin FICCI which it had walked out of 15 months ago after a rip-roaring battle over the "bogus membership" issue; to set itself up as yet another national body; or to join Assocham.

The first would have meant a tremendous loss of face. IMC had quit FICCI in a huff after two of its immediate past presidents failed to be elected to the managing committee. Going it alone was no option at all. "We couldn't remain in isolation," says IMC President Nalin K. Vissanji. That left Assocham.

The ball was set rolling by the venerable industrialist J.R.D. Tata. "Tata started the whole process," says Mahindra. Confirms Gandhi: "Some of us went to J.R.D. He said, 'Why don't you join an existing organisation?' " And that was when the year-long meetings between the two sides began.

But sharp differences arose, however, on the method of selecting the Assocham president. "First we thought we should have a small group of past presidents and so on to select the president," says Gandhi. On the other side, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce insisted that its nominee for the post be unquestioningly accepted when its turn came up, as was the practice in the past. (Assocham's presidents have so far been nominated by the four major chambers that promoted it, in a six-year cycle.)

In the end, Assocham's Kumar sent a telex message calling for a meeting with IMC on June 17 in Bombay. The result was a workable compromise. A pro-



Vissanji (left) and Kumar: merger move

After it walked out of FICCI, the Indian Merchants Chamber has had few options open to it. Now, after parleys, it has taken the obvious choice—to join the other business lobby group, Assocham.

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moter chamber will now have to get its nominee for the president's post approved by a committee consisting of former presidents and a new category of "patron members" (principally, companies) before the name can come up before the managing committee. That implies that the powers of the four older chambers to select the president have been clipped.

IMC (which once had Mahatma Gandhi as an honorary member) will have a promoter chamber status. The president's office is to rotate among the five promoter-chambers in a five-year cycle, with the western region getting two shots at the post (since it has two chambers).

Care has also been taken to see that Assocham will not be flooded by bogus members. A committee is to carefully vet membership applications, based on stiff eligibility criteria. "There are certain criteria. Unless things go completely wrong, there is no reason why we should repeat the FICCI experience," says B.R. Sule, who is a former Assocham president and the managing director of Mahindra and Mahindra. If he is right, the much publicised marriage may have been made in heaven after all.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

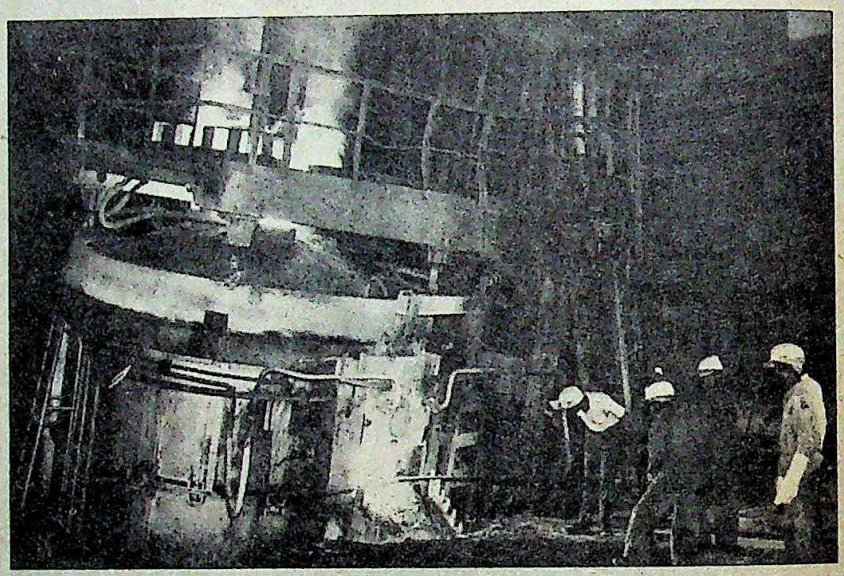
MINI-STEEL PLANTS

Major Crisis

SMALL is no longer beautiful. At least, not for the 159 mini-steel plants that are fighting a grim—but gradually losing—battle for survival. Already, about 10 units have shut shop in the last one year, and many others are on the brink of closure. Production has dipped dramatically, demand has dropped sharper still, and prices have crashed just when costs have gone up. The result: the industry is estimated to have suffered cash losses of Rs 100 crore in the last year.

While capacity utilisation in this industry, which is used to periodic cycles of very good and very bad times, has never gone beyond 70 per cent, this year has been particularly dismal, with the average at no more than 58 per cent. And what depresses several mini-steel unit owners today is the fear that the good times may never recur. Traditionally, mini-steel units have made hay in times of steel shortages, but the shortages may be a thing of the past—for two reasons. The Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) is being run more efficiently, and a liberal import policy prevents the possibility of serious scarcity.

The industry, meanwhile, blames its problems on contradictory government policies which have led to an increase in the cost of raw materials, especially that of steel scrap. Import duty on scrap has grown from nil in 1979 to 20 per cent today. Erratic supply of power and a whopping increase in power tariffs by 50 per cent to 100 per cent in different parts of the country have aggravated the problem, since steel is a power-intensive industry. Says V.K. Aggarwal, proprietor of Amrit Steels in Uttar Pradesh:



Bharuka plant: under-utilised

"We had to pay about Rs 150 per tonne extra as a result of the increases in power tariffs." And to add further to already high costs, excise duties on mild steel were raised by Rs 50 per tonne recently.

All this has occurred at a time when demand has flattened out and steel demand has fallen far below government projections. As a result, the domestic sale price of steel ingots has fallen from Rs 5,750 per tonne in April 1985 to Rs 4,500 per tonne today. A senior Steel Ministry official agrees that the situation is grim: "We know there is a problem, but we have no control over the increase in power tariffs. Or even in the increase in excise and import duties. It is the Finance Ministry which decides, though we have repeatedly asked them to give reliefs to the industry."

The Finance Ministry argues that higher import duties are meant to encourage the indigenous sponge iron industry—sponge iron is an alternative raw material for imported metal scrap. But the mini-steel industry counters that the use of sponge iron will increase the cost of finished steel by at least Rs 300 per tonne. And a token reduction of import duty by 5 per cent has been quickly offset by a Rs 100 increase in international scrap prices.

Similarly, the excise duty hike on steel ingots was effected on the premise that its incidence would be neutralised by MODVAT concessions to be given on some of the raw materials used by the industry. But even these concessions were hastily withdrawn, without any explanation.

D.D. Borwankar, executive director of the Steel Furnace Association of India, complains that the Government has made matters worse recently by reducing the duties on imported steel billets from 75 per cent to 45 per cent. So while the Government talks of helping the industry with a modernisation programme to increase productivity, and holds out the possibility of tax reliefs, the mini-steel industry remains depressed at the prospect that this particular depression may be around for a while.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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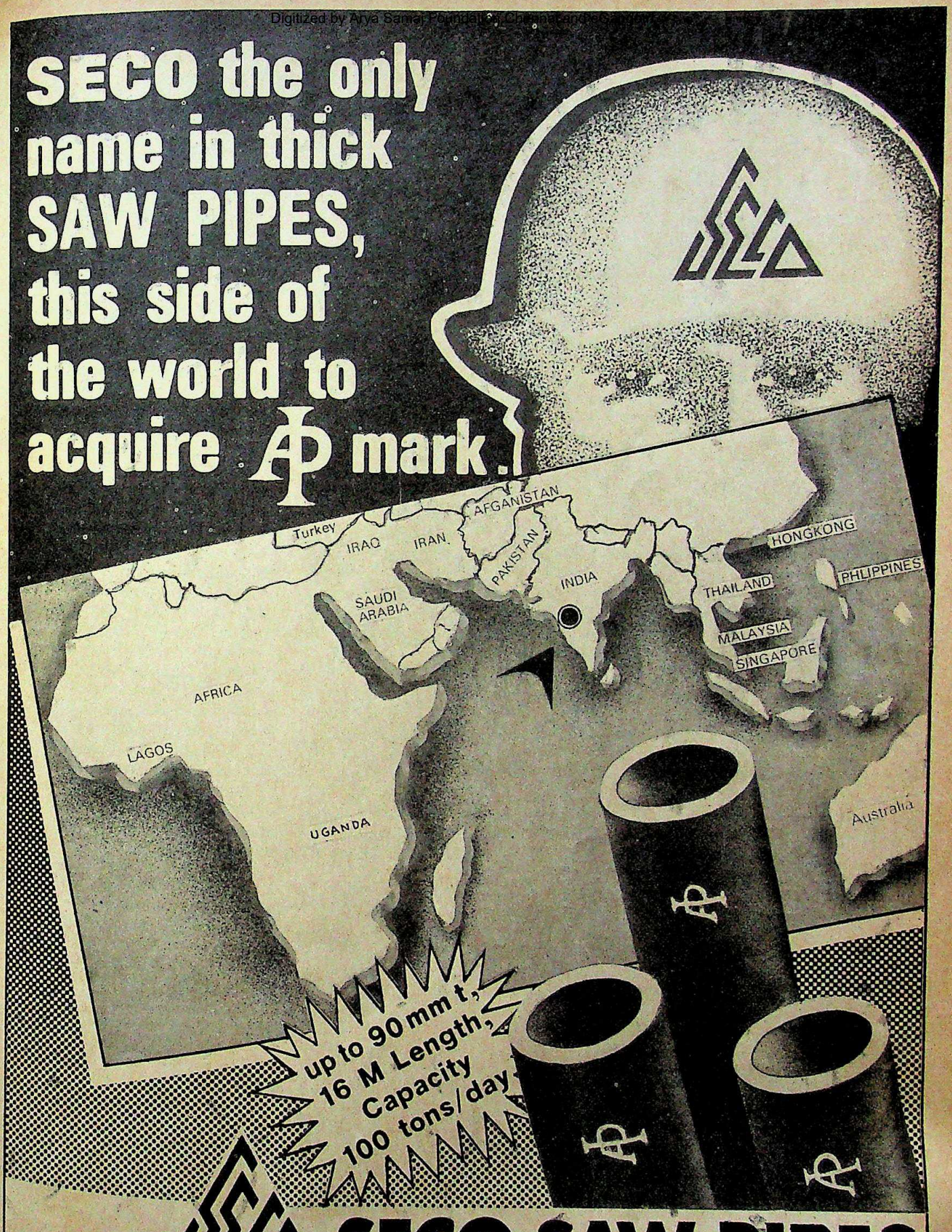

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PONDICHERRY

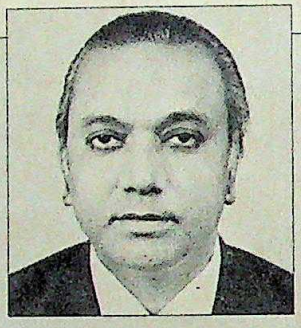
New Industrial Haven

FOR industrialists, of whatever scale and line, all roads suddenly lead to Pondicherry. This sleepy little Union territory (area: 492 sq km) in south India, with its population of six lakh, was known best for its Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the international township of Auroville. But it has now begun to throb with industrial activity.

Practically every other industrial group worth the reckoning in Madras is setting up a factory in Pondicherry, or thinking of establishing a unit there. And existing industrial units are expanding. Says Pondicherry Chief Minister M.O.H. Farook: "Pondicherry has become the Mecca of all the industrial groups now."

Last month, two new companies formed under the well-known TVS banner completed acquiring 190 acres of land in Tirubhuvanai village, 20 km from Pondicherry town, for putting up two new factories. One is a Rs 27-crore project for the manufacture of washing-machines, dishwashers, water-coolers, and refrigerators, in collaboration with a US company, Whirlpool. The other is a Rs 10-crore project to make special plastic coatings and resins, with a projected turnover of Rs 25 crore.

TVS is not the only big flag that is about to be hoisted on the Pondicherry industrial arena. Neyveli Ceramics, a popular Tamil Nadu firm with its Neycer brand name, started production last month of ceramic wall and floor tiles in its new, Rs 14-crore factory. Addison Paints of Madras is acquiring land to set up a Rs 5-crore factory to manufacture paints and varnish. Lakshmi Machine Works of Coimbatore is putting up a Rs 15-crore unit to make lathes and centring machines. And Kothari Sugars wants to set up a chemical plant.



"The Union territory has become the Mecca for all the industrial groups now."

M.O.H. FAROOK
chief minister, Pondicherry

Pondicherry's magnet-like powers are also reaching beyond Tamil Nadu. Hindustan Lever, for instance, has its blueprint ready for a Rs 3-crore project to make leather shoes for export. And Greaves Feseco, a subsidiary of Greaves Cotton (the Thapar group), is acquiring land for a Rs 11-crore factory that will manufacture foundry chemicals.

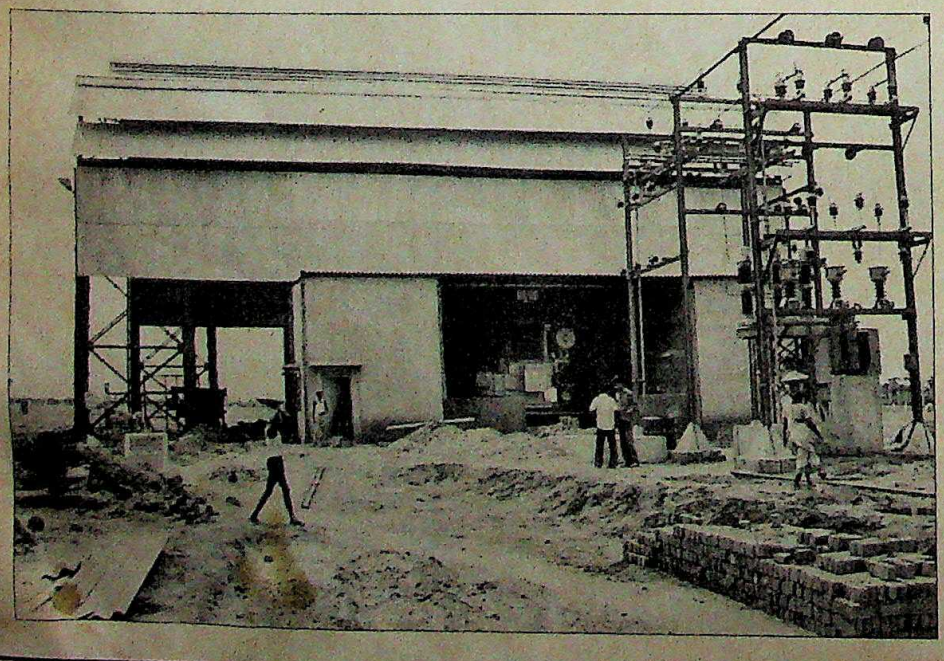
Individual entrepreneurs are also in the race. S. Rajendran, a Madras-based entrepreneur, has based his Sumangala Steels here and is putting up the Union territory's first mini-steel plant in Mettupalayam, outside Pondicherry town. And Ramesh Prasad, former president of the South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce, has acquired land in Pondicherry for his Amaravathi Chemicals, to set up a Rs 1-crore plant to make sorbitol, a chemical used in the manufacture of medicines for coronary diseases.

Meanwhile, the already established companies in the Union territory are expanding. Ponds India plans to triple its investment in its shoe-manufacturing operation, to Rs 3 crore. And the Chemfab Alkalis group plans—among several projects—a 50 per cent capacity increase in its pioneering membrane cell caustic soda plant.

As of now, the Union territory has an industrial investment of only Rs 137 crore, and the annual increase so far has been only around 5 per cent. But over the next few years, this growth rate is expected to double and 3,500 new jobs are expected to be created each year. Anticipating further growth, the local government is scouting around to acquire 200 acres of land for new industrial estates, in addition to the 300 acres that already exist.

Several reasons explain the new industrial throb in Pondicherry. One is handsome financial incentives. Another is exemption from the rigours of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act, because the Central Government has decreed that large companies which come under the Act's purview can invest only in those places which have been declared both backward districts and 'no industry districts'. Pondicherry qualifies on both counts. The only other place that does in south India is Bidar district in Karnataka.

But Pondicherry also offers



Pondicherry industrial complex: attracting business

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the advantages of a developed town in a 'backward' area. Companies like Sundaram Clayton of the TVS group, therefore, really had no option. Says its Joint Managing Director, Gopal Srinivasan: "Isn't Pondicherry better any day for starting an industry?"

The financial incentives are attractive too because of the several tax benefits that accrue from investing in an industrially backward area. Explains V. Narayanan, chairman and managing director of Ponds India: "In the final computation, something like 45 per cent of your profits are tax-free in Pondicherry."

The industrial climate of Pondicherry began to leaven after the Union Government increased four years ago, the Central investment subsidy available in the Union territory as a classified industrially backward area, from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. Then there is sales tax exemption for the first five years, plus a graduated power subsidy of 33.33 per cent for the first three years, 20 per cent for the fourth year, and 10 per cent for the fifth year. Finally, rents for sheds in the three industrial estates are low. A 5,000-sq ft shed is rented out for just Rs 4,000 a month. Most important, Pondicherry virtually guarantees uninterrupted power supply. Says A. Gnanasambandam, Pondicherry's enthusiastic director of industries: "The Union territory also has its locational advantage in terms of proximity to Madras, the main raw material and marketing centre in south India. And it is only a question of time before the Pondicherry airstrip is ready."

Added to all this are the advantages of the Union territory being a small place, and in particular, the fact that all governmental formalities can be easily completed. Says Pondicherry Chief Secretary P.M. Nair: "Small is not only beautiful but also efficient." Plus everyone who matters, right up to the chief minister, is easily accessible. The labour force is also docile.

The effects of the rapid industrialisation are already being felt. Land prices now are five to six times what they were in 1983 and the landscape is poised for dramatic change. Sheds and factories, rather than tiled cottages, have begun to dot the fields. Soon Pondicherry might become better known as an industrial township than as a Union territory where an attempt has been made to evolve a township of international unity.

—S.H.VENKATRAMANI in Pondicherry

AUDIO-CASSETTES

Plugging In

DO book-lovers only like reading a book? Or would they enjoy listening to a book just as much?

India Book Distributors (IBD) thought they would like to listen, and a year ago launched its "hear-a-book" audio cassette scheme. After all, nursery rhymes and teach-yourself-a-language cassettes had long carved, for themselves, a niche of convenience in the book world. And IBD thought that readers would be equally more than willing to have *Iacocca* read out to them on pre-recorded cassettes imported from the US.

But the response so far can best be described as lukewarm. "There definitely is scope for these cassettes. But it needs proper marketing," says Mehmood Curmally of Rhythm House in Bombay. And Rajni Alvares, of Nalanda Bookshop at the Taj Mahal Hotel, says at first the curiosity factor played a major role: "It started off well. We used to sell nearly 20 to 30 cassettes a day. But now it has petered off to two or three a day".

In Delhi, Bookworm has already sold around 70 to 80 such cassettes in the first three months of stocking them. But its proprietor Anil Arora suspects that "this reflects our marketing efforts to sell to various libraries".

The large majority of the titles imported are on management subjects, like *The IBM Way* and *The One Minute Manager*. Another major chunk is the self-improvement section (*How to Meet People and Make Friends, How to Turn an Interview into a Job*). But the subjects chosen may reflect government policy more than tastes. Since the import of audio cassettes per se is not allowed, these cassettes are imported as 'educational aids'.

Though most cassettes stick to the broad parameters of educational material, titles like Liv Ulmann's *Changing*, and even *Totally Lewd Limericks* do find their way into the audio cassette stock. Nevertheless, the best sellers so far have been *Iacocca* and *The One Minute Manager*. Even the small amount of fiction that creeps in finds few takers.

Says IBD Managing Director Harkin Chhatlani: "Fiction is popular abroad. There everyone drives, travels long distances every day (when they can hear a book en route). But here what sells are cassettes on management and self-help. Companies and senior executives buy them for their training programmes."

The company got into the business because the foreign publishers they represented wanted them to try out, in this country, a concept that had worked well in the West. But

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Variety of audio cassettes

restricted titles and the sectional response has made IBD relatively wary of the scheme. Right now they are importing small quantities—worth only a couple of lakhs in their much larger import bill—and are not even providing the scheme with advertising support.

Price has been one of the problems. With high landing costs and royalties, the cassettes are priced at as much as Rs 125 to Rs 140 each. A cassette thus turns out to be more than twice the price of the book. IBD is now thinking of reproducing these cassettes locally after importing the master tapes, for which they have already signed the contracts. Chhatlani says this will bring down the price to Rs 45 to Rs 50 per cassette. It now remains to be seen whether reluctant readers will plug in more willingly.

—TANIA MIDHA

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But for the monsoon

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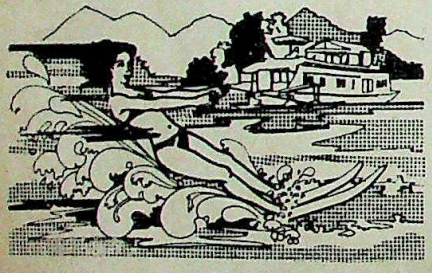


How to reach

By Air

Daily from New Delhi-direct or via Chandigarh, Amritsar and Jammu. Connecting flights to Srinagar also from Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Hyderabad.

By Road

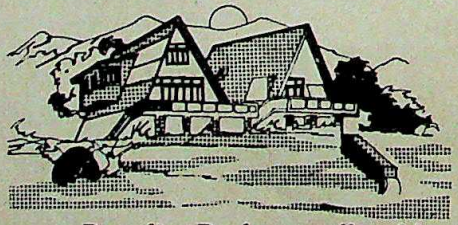
Very good motorable road. Overnight halts at Jammu, Kud, Batote, Ramban, Banihal — all places with well-appointed, moderately priced tourist bungalows. J&K SRTC has regular coaches plying between Srinagar, Jammu and Delhi.

By Rail

Railhead for J&K State is Jammu. Onward by bus or taxi.

Where to stay

All the places have tourist bungalows, tourist huts, rest houses and hotels. Accommodation is very comfortable and economical. In Srinagar you can stay in houseboats too. Hoteliers Association of Kashmir and Houseboat Owners Association offer discount on select hotels and houseboats. For bookings contact respective association at the Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar.



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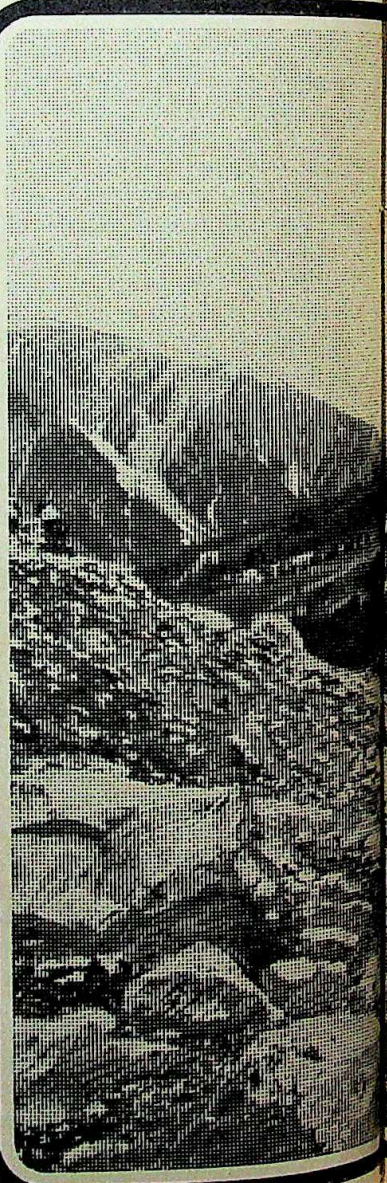

Kashmir ou

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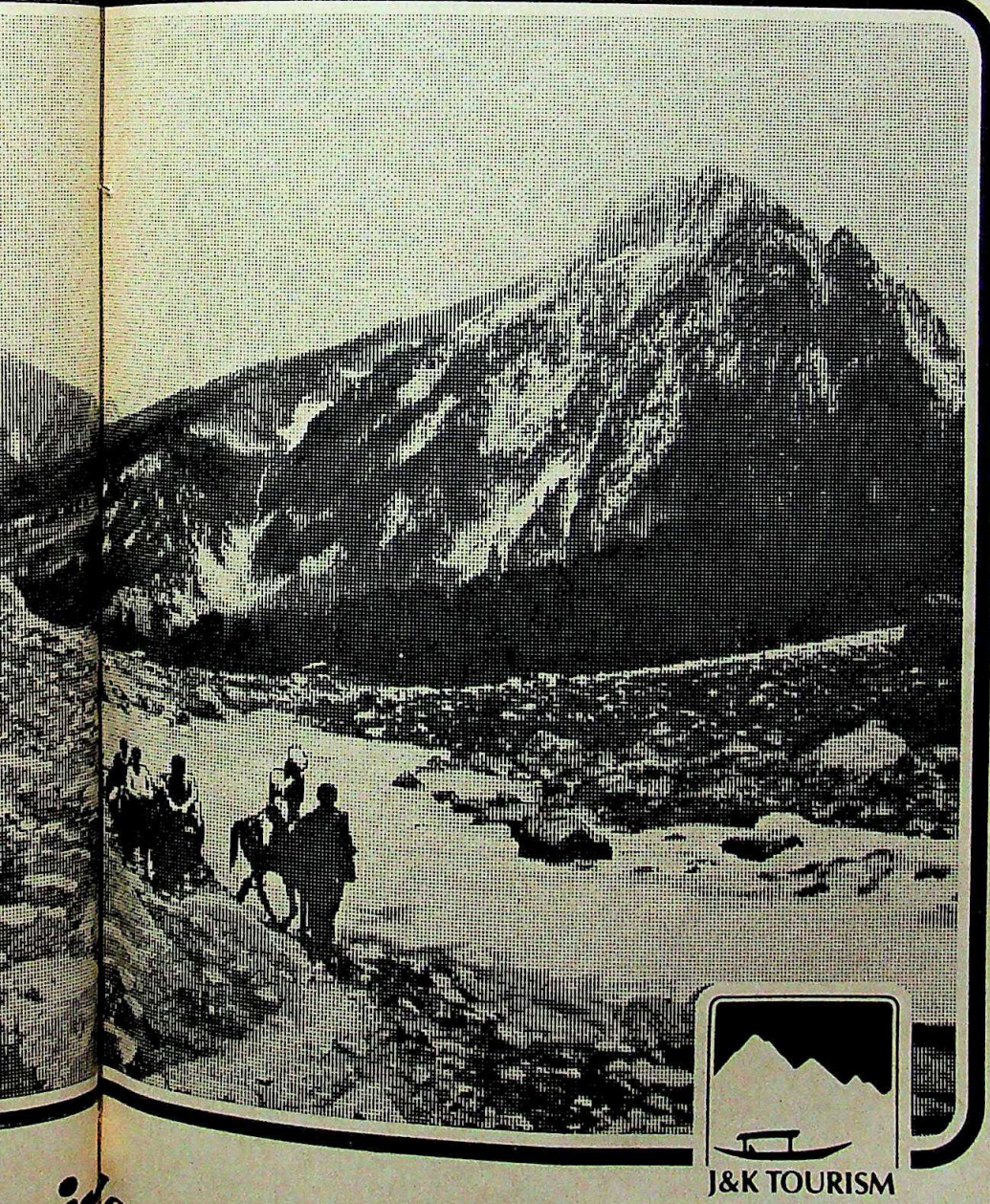
...has it all



J&K TOURISM

For details contact or write to:

The Director of Tourism
J&K Government, Srinagar
Tel: 72449, 73648, 77224
After office hours Tel: 77303, 77305
Grams: JAKTOURISM
Telex: 375-207 TSM IN

or

J&K Tourist Offices at:

Ahmedabad
Airlines House, Lal Darwaza
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3-6-369/A Part 31
IInd Floor
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Tel: 236686

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Tourist Reception Centre,
Vir Marg
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Telex: 0377-228 TSM IN

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Tel: 562335

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...ou can't have enough of it!

AKSHARA/ITDC

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SCINDIA STEAM

Going Bust

WHEN Scindia Steam Navigation Company's first ship, *Loyalty*, set sail for the UK on April 5, 1919, an Indian flag was unfurled in international waters for the first time in modern maritime history. Ever since, the Scindia flag has been a symbol of the almost Homeric struggle to establish Indian shipping against cut-throat competition from British companies.

Founded by Narottam Morarjee and Walchand Hirachand, the Scindia's history is linked with the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi was one of its patrons, and leaders from Vithalbhai Patel and Motilal Nehru to Indira Gandhi were present whenever ships were launched.

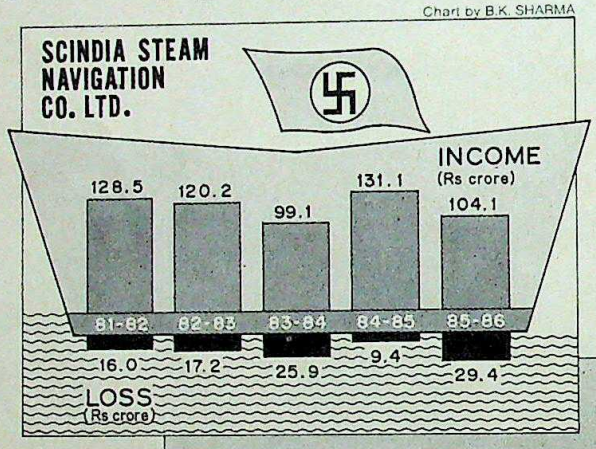
But the legend has now gone bust. Scindia has been sinking for over a decade, after showing record profits in 1974-75, with its management unable to react imaginatively to the recession in international shipping. Today, even with its fleet of 24 ships, Scindia seems completely grounded, with accumulated losses last year of Rs 65 crore, and Rs 120 crore in outstanding loans.

At least six ships have been arrested at foreign ports recently after foreign creditors have moved courts to recover their money. Some, carrying defence cargo had to be rescued by the Government after paying off creditors. The latest was the bulk carrier *Jalavijaya*, at Rostock in East Germany. Though the court lifted the arrest order after the creditor failed to deposit a million dollars, the crew was stranded. With provisions running low eight crewmen had to be flown to Bombay by the Indian mission.

But with Scindia in trouble, it is apparent that positive action is needed. Only two of its ships are operative at present, half are serviceable and 16 are over 15 years old, which is the average life of a modern steamship. Four of the newer ships are fuel guzzlers from the Hindustan Shipyard. And 20 ships are mortgaged to the Government or the Shipping Credit and Investment Corporation of India (SCICI), the successor to the Shipping Development Fund Committee (SDFC). As Chief Executive S.I. Bijwadia told the annual general meeting: "We have to heartlessly stop anything which makes cash losses."

Of its more than 2,000 employees, the shore staff have not been paid for the last three months and the officers and men for up to six months. After various unions barged into the board meeting last fortnight, Leo Barens of the National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI) declared that the union would move the courts for the arrest of Scindia ships if wages were not paid immediately. A day later, it stalled the departure of the *Jalajyoti* demanding a bank guarantee from Scindia for the payment of the crew's wages and an assurance about adequate provisions on board.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The first step towards rescuing Scindia was taken with the induction of three new directors at the latest board meeting, representing SCICI and the Surface Transport Ministry, as a prelude to a proper financial reassessment of the company's precarious position. With Chairman Sumati Morarjee away in London, a delayed meeting was held on the insistence of a member, former Union finance minister H.M. Patel.

Scindia needs an estimated Rs 22 crore to stay afloat. Earlier this year, SCICI had offered it another loan if it could raise Rs 10 crore as promoters' contribution. This it has failed to do, while the revival plan submitted by Bijwadia—involving acquisition of product carriers, more containerisation, modernisation of the workshop, and charter of cellular ships—needs Rs 50 crore.

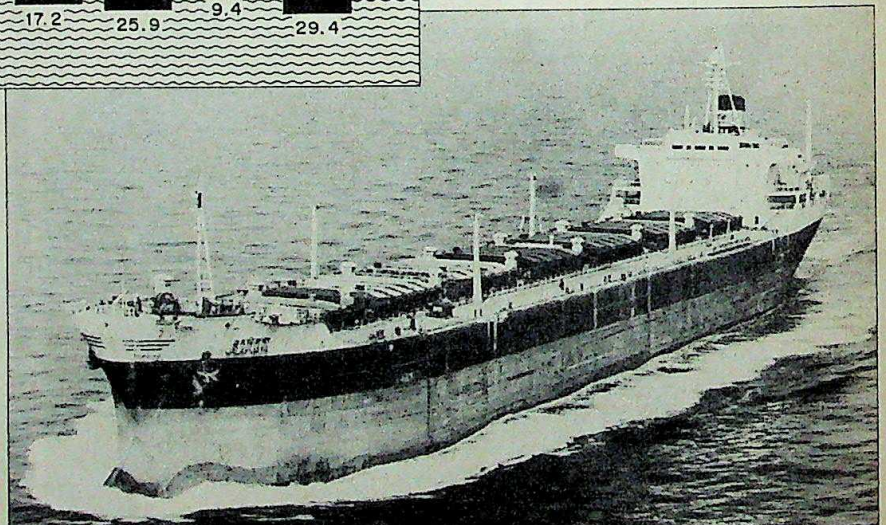
With Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi opposed to nationalisation of sick companies, SCICI is now faced with three options: merger of Scindia with a profitable private company like Great Eastern or Essar, liquidation or taking it over.

Liquidation remains the least attractive, since Scindia's total assets are now valued at less than Rs 50 crore. Great Eastern and Essar are interested in a merger because Scindia's losses can be offset against their profits. But neither has yet put forward a serious proposal.

A management takeover by SCICI nominees appears attractive: it would allow Scindia to retain its identity while trying for a turnaround. The management under Mrs Morarjee controls 3 per cent of equity, the financial institutions 35 per cent, and the public the rest. A revival by a new management would mean pruning staff, selling surplus assets, scaling down debts, scrapping unserviceable ships and trying to steer out of trouble with a truncated fleet.

In the past, the Scindia management has had clout with the Government because of its historic associations with the Congress. Sadly, the pioneer of Indian shipping has now become a harbinger of bad news. Only an emergency salvage operation by the Government can now keep Scindia afloat.

—M. RAHMAN



An arrested ship of Scindia Steam: running aground

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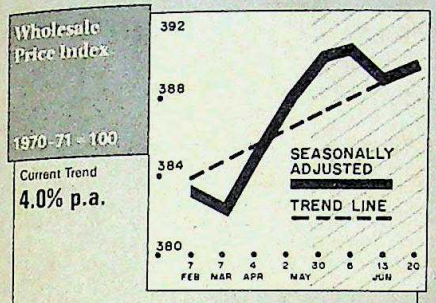
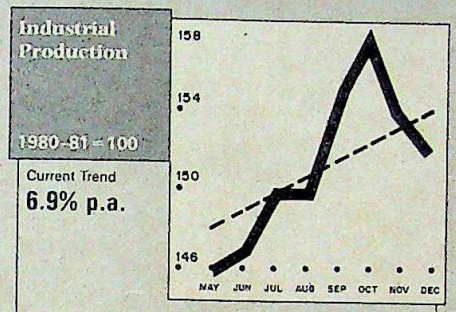
IN contrast to the political turmoil, the economy is rumbling along, and in quite a few areas, it is doing surprisingly well. If the weather gods comply, and reforms of some of the out-dated policies continue, then 1987-88 should be another good economic year.

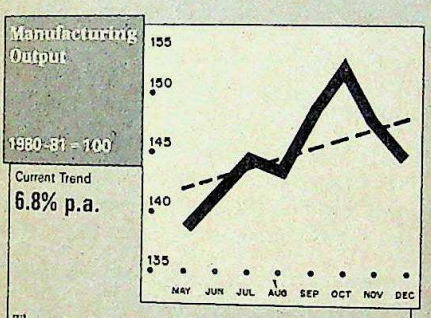
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



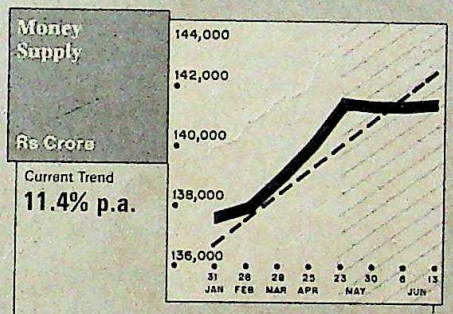
The fears of a few months ago appear to have been just that. Present inflation levels are back to where they belong—under 5 per cent.



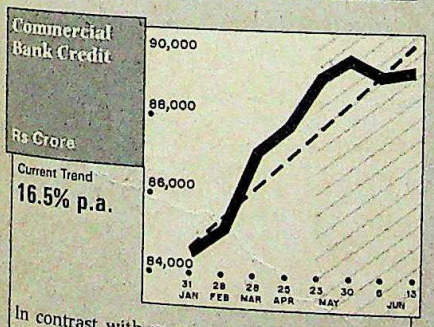
Recent data is unavailable, making a current assessment impossible, but the figures till December show a dip in production.



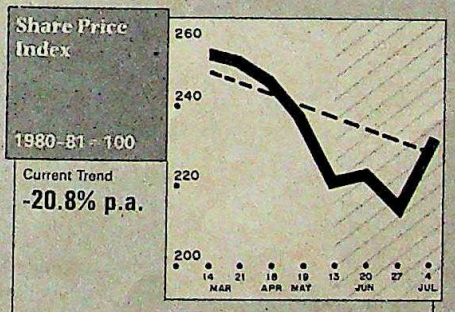
The manufacturing sector too shows a 1986-end slowdown, with no figures available after December.



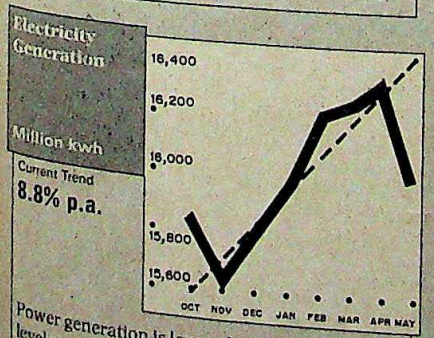
A marked deceleration from the rapid growth of just a few months ago. Should augur well for stable prices.



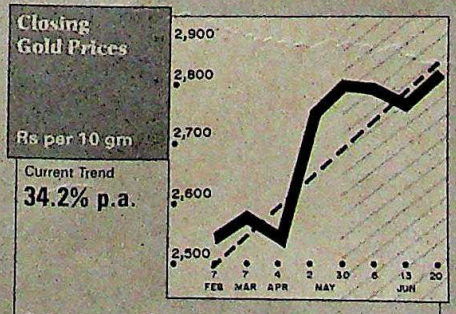
In contrast with money supply, credit to the industrial sector is showing welcome signs of acceleration.



With the bears licking their chops, the bulls are readying to storm. A more than warranted 20 per cent correction has already taken place.



Power generation is lower than the double digit level needed for a respectable growth rate, and the plant load factor has dropped too.



Gold continued to glitter. But with stability in international prices, the metal could lose some of its lustre.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of items in Jan-Dec 1986 over Jan-Dec 1985

	% Growth
Railway Wagons	90.30
Forged handtools	43.60
Scooters	42.30
Air/Gas Compressors	38.10
Polyester Fibres	35.90
Metallurgical Machinery	28.40
Wrist Watches	26.50
Twist Drills	24.90
Tetracycline	23.80
Motorcycles	23.00
Cement Machinery	22.40
Lifts	22.10
Polyester Filament Yarn	21.60
Nitrogenous (N)	21.40
Newsprint	21.00
Boilers	20.10
Phosphatic	17.70
Calcium Carbide	17.40
Lead	16.80
Storage Batteries	16.40
Baby Food	16.00
Vat Dyes	15.80
PVC Resins	15.80
ScooterTyres	15.50
Fluorescsent Tubes	15.50
DDT	15.30
Cars	14.40
Electric Motors	13.40
Paints & Varnishes	13.20
Rubber Machinery	12.80
Industrial Explosives	12.60
Tooth Paste	12.10
Viscose Filament Yarn	12.00
Mining Machines	11.30
Printing Machinery	11.00
Caprolactum	10.50
Cement	9.40
Vitamin A	9.10
Typewriters	8.70
Paper & Paper Board	7.50
Earth Moving Equipment	7.20
Transmission Towers	7.10
Auto Ancillaries	6.70
Rubber Footwear	6.40
Polystyrene	6.00
Soda Ash	6.00

Of the 141 series considered, 91 items with a total weight of 71.9 had a positive growth and 50 of them with a total weight of 28.1 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Fertiliser Thousand Tonnes, May	551.0	448.8
Letters of Intent Issued Nos. June	130	95.0
Industrial Licences Issued Nos. June	35.0	51.0
Thermal Plant Load Factor Per cent, May	53.4	55.2
Revenue Earning Goods Traffic Million Tonnes Originating, May	24.22	22.52

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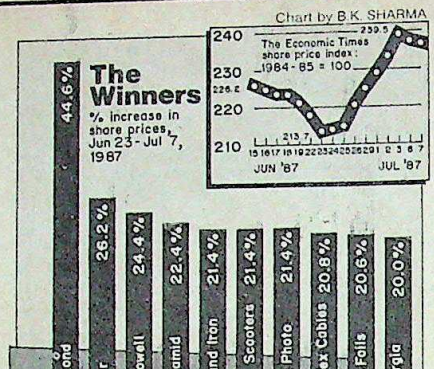
THE MARKETS

Up and Away

THE headlong dive had resulted in the inevitable crash. But the stock-markets have survived the crash, and have now recovered with confidence and style. The bulls have new life in them and, suddenly, the worst seems over—if only because share prices have gained ground so quickly after *The Economic Times* stock price index bottomed out at the year's lowest level of 213.7 in late June.

Within 10 days of that, the index had soared again to 239.5 (half-way to the year's peak level of 264.4) before the inevitable profit-taking provoked some adjustment again. But the pundits are optimistic once more, and perhaps with reason.

The Unit Trust announced good news (a sharp growth in total business and higher dividends, plus a maiden dividend for Mastershares), along with the assessment that there were good times ahead. Tata Steel results were less gloomy than had been feared, and the drop in profits was taken in stride as the dividend was maintained and the company's share gained ground rapidly over the fortnight. Given the various measures that the Government and the stock-market authorities have taken (including a ban on short selling and the auctioning of shares to give delivery to buyers), and with the prospect of further support from the institutions, the bears may finally have to beat a retreat.



The institutions played their cards well last fortnight, focusing their buying on shares where sellers were not making delivery of scrips that they had sold. When the institutions stepped in and demanded delivery, forcing the sellers to quickly try and cover their positions, prices soared.

Reliance had its own role to play in the recovery, with the announcement of premature conversion of its 'G' series debentures, then the offer of a rights issue, and finally the prospect of a fresh bonus issue that has long been awaited. The rights issue was clearly designed to encourage conversion of the debentures, and the bonus promise will encourage investors to hold on to Reliance shares—which should therefore be able to rule high on the market. Presumably, this will help Reliance raise fresh capital from the market at a later stage for its massive investment proposals. But the market nevertheless sobered a bit because the terms of some of the Reliance proposals were not considered very attractive. Over the full fortnight, therefore, the company's share lost ground marginally.

In contrast, most shares gained considerable ground last fortnight, ranging from Associated Bearings to Raymond, and from Pfizer to Maharashtra Scooters. Clearly, things are revving up on the market once again.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 7.7.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	35.50	28.00	33.00	0.50 +
Associated Cement	241.50	138.00	153.00	6.00 +
Atlas Copco	152.00	105.00	119.00	2.00 +
Associated Bearings	1155.00	500.00	1065.00	145.00 +
Avery India	169.00	108.00	130.00	17.00 +
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4475.00	100.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	172.50	260.00	50.00 +
Bata India	160.00	110.00	133.00	12.00 +
Bayer	785.00	375.00	400.00	355.00 -
Bharat Forge	88.00	63.00	82.00	nil
Blow Plast	126.00	92.50	113.50	8.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	83.50	40.50	75.00	nil
Britannia Ind.	190.00	101.00	118.00	12.00 +
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	92.50	3.50 +
Ceat Tyres	70.00	45.00	55.00	6.00 +
Century Enka	1160.00	815.00	900.00	55.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	79.00	6.00 +
Citurgia	75.00	53.00	72.00	8.50 +
Colgate	391.25	327.50	355.00	7.50 +
DCM	47.00	23.00	37.50	0.50 +
Dunlop	78.00	71.25	77.50	2.00 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	49.00	2.00 +
Escorts	84.00	39.50	42.00	1.00 +
Finolex Cables	242.50	114.00	228.75	22.50 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	145.00	11.00 +
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	25.00	3.00 +
G.E. Shipping	29.25	16.00	25.50	0.75 -
Gujarat St Fertilisers	183.50	101.00	101.00	20.00 -
Grasim Ind.	103.00	80.00	103.00	4.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	126.00	71.00	115.00	11.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	188.75	18.75 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	84.00	86.00	77.00 -
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.20	26.70	1.30 +
Hind. Dorr	407.50	270.00	293.75	3.75 +
IEL	61.50	45.00	58.00	8.00 +
Indian Organic	78.00	41.00	46.50	2.00 -
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	55.00	2.00 +
Indrol	510.00	160.00	205.00	23.75 +
Ingersoll-Rand	352.50	265.00	310.00	25.00 +
ITC	78.00	40.00	52.25	5.75 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	47.00	2.75 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	195.00	nil
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	47.50	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	330.00	35.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	74.00	3.00 +
Lipton	79.50	57.00	65.00	2.50 +
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	16.00	2.00 -
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	53.00	nil
Mc Dowell	84.00	41.50	79.00	16.50 +
Motor Industries	455.00	317.50	455.00	62.50 +
Mukand Iron	81.00	62.00	76.50	4.50 +
National Organic	577.50	382.50	435.00	35.00 +
Nirlon	26.00	11.00	13.50	nil
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	29.50	34.00	1.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	47.00	6.00 +
Otis Elevator	250.00	155.00	210.00	7.50 +
Ponds	375.00	222.50	270.00	20.00 +
Premier Auto	30.00	17.00	22.50	2.50 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	88.00	11.00 +
Raymond	84.00	48.00	80.00	23.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	143.00	168.00	15.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	110.00	123.00	2.00 -
Richardson Hind.	327.50	210.00	285.00	5.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	28.25	2.25 +
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	65.00	2.50 -
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	70.00	3.00 -
SPIC	53.50	36.50	43.75	3.75 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	607.50	697.50	10.00 +
Telco	665.00	350.00	455.00	55.00 +
Wimco	56.50	30.00	34.00	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.2818	9.1826
Austria	Schilling	100	100.7153	99.6329
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.5098	34.2490
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.1200	42.0380
Canada	Dollar	1	9.8275	9.7272
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8651	1.8462
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3500	9.2800
France	Franc	1	2.1598	2.1048
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6681	1.6502
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0700	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	17.96	16.8300
Italy	Lira	100	0.9800	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	8.80	8.60
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7980	0.7630
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.0000	45.5300
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1370	5.0807
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.01	1.00
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6190	0.5932
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.2971	6.2312
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7100	0.6900
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.1397	6.0756
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1020	0.1000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4390	0.4132
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0354	2.0144
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.5114	8.4209
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2185	0.2000
Thailand	Baht	100	50.24	49.000
UK	Pound	1	21.0225	20.8925
USA	Dollar	1	13.0225	12.8925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5290	3.4992
USSR	Rouble	1	20.2460	20.1282
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1880	7.0077

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 8.7.87.

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CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

UNITED INDUSTRIAL BANK LIMITED

STATEMENT BY
SHRI J. N. BISWAS
CHAIRMAN
UNITED INDUSTRIAL BANK LTD.
AT THE FORTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE BANK
HELD IN CALCUTTA
ON JUNE 26, 1987.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure in welcoming you to the fortyseventh Annual General Meeting of the Bank. For the Bank the year under review is one of all round growth and progress and this has been possible through the relentless and dedicated efforts of all the members of our growing UIB family.

Economic Environment:

The economic scenerio of the country gave a picture of hope and optimism. The growth in gross national product during the year 1985-86 was 5.8% as against 3.7% in 1984-85. It is gratifying to see that our industrial policy has been suitably liberalised to sustain a higher rate of growth.

While the industrial climate in the country shows improving trend, economic situation in the eastern sector where major part of our activities is concentrated, also shows signs of optimism and revival. Agriculture which is the main-stay of our State has witnessed a record food production of 91.27 lakh tonnes in 1985-86. After decades of dependence in declining traditional industries like jute, engineering, cotton textiles etc. which had their adverse impact on investment and employment opportunities in our state, we are now witnessing establishment of modern industries like petro-chemicals and high-tech communications. The pragmatic industrial policy of the State Government adopted in recent years to promote industrialisation in non-traditional fields through joint sector enterprises has given a fillip to the growth of new industries.

Against this backdrop, we, as bankers, are poised to contribute our best towards growth of the region. Now it will be the task of the banking sector to identify professional entrepreneurs and provide suitable assistance to them so that this tempo of industrial revival is sustained.

Business Trend:

Although there has been a deceleration in the growth rate of aggregate deposits of all Scheduled Commercial Banks in 1986 which grew by 19.5% percent as compared to 19.67% percent in 1985 and bank credit expanded by 12.4% as compared to 12.3% in 1985, the aggregate deposits of our Bank crossed Rs. 250 crores mark and thereby achieved a growth rate of 23.27%. Our outstanding Credit also increased during the period by Rs. 25.04 crores with a growth of 20.37% over the previous year. Over the past six years, the growth of deposits in our Bank has been as much as 181% rising from Rs. 89.14 crores in early 1980 to Rs. 250.47 crores in 1986. This is all the more encouraging as about 50% of the total incremental deposits has been mobilised through our rural and semi-urban branches. Our achievement is all the more commendable because this growth has been possible without any significant increase in the number of branches in 1986. The total advances of the Bank have increased from Rs 122.93 crores in 1985 to Rs 147.97 crores in 1986. The credit deposit ratio remained almost the same as in 1985 i.e. at 59.08%.

In keeping with the national objectives, we have been able to augment the advances of the bank to priority sector from Rs. 32.91 crores in 1985 to Rs 43.50 crores in 1986. Out of this, deployment under various poverty-alievation programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme, 20-Point Programme, Special Component Plan, Differential Rate of Interest Scheme, stood at Rs. 8.42 crores in West Bengal alone. Our achievement in recovery of priority sector advances is also encouraging.

It is also worth mentioning that in the year under review not only the advances to Priority Sector showed improvement but the beneficiaries under Bank finance have also demonstrated an encouraging performance in their respective areas of business.

Service And Efficiency:

During the year 1986 we have been able to bring about a perceptible improvement in the customer service. Besides, providing following facilities, we have been able to implement majority of the recommendations of the Working Group on Customer Service:—

a) Arrangement for introduction of Teller System at selected branches to speed up payments.
b) Revamping Childrens' Counters at selected branches with an idea to help the future citizens of the country imbibe banking habits.
c) Observance of Customers' Day on monthly basis for redressal of Customers' grievances.
d) Introduction of courier service for speedy transport of important documents, communications etc. between metropolitan cities and also for reducing delays in collection of cheques and other instruments between such centres.
e) Introduction of nomination facility in deposit accounts and safe deposit locker so as to ensure immediate payment and release of the contents of the locker to the nominee.
f) Offering special assistance to industrial units and borrowers by financial counselling and providing other Merchant Banking Services.

Working Results:

The gross income of the Bank for the year 1986 as you would notice from the Annual Accounts amounted to Rs. 24.40 crores. This is an increase of Rs. 4.43 crores over that of 1985. The Bank earned a net profit of Rs. 23.75 lakhs in 1986, subject to bonus.

I may add here that with more and more emphasis on credit to preferred sectors and revision in the lending and deposit rates to the disadvantage of the bankers, the banking system which functions within the structure of administered rates of interest has been led to a situation where advance-mix is shifting in favour of low-interest rate borrowers and this is a source of concern for the banking sector as a whole. As it is indicative of declining trend in profitability. This also poses a challenge to all banks and I am sure our Bank would be able to meet it successfully. In fact this can be matched with a judicious mix in the structural adjustment like preference for foreign exchange business and diversification of other activities.

Human Resources Development:

As a part of our human resources development activity, we have revamped our recruitment and training so that adequate number of suitable employees is recruited in the bank and trained to meet the challenges of the present day in various discipline. During the year 1986, 201 employees were trained at the Bank's Staff Training College. Besides, the Bank also utilised the training facilities offered by Bankers' Training College, Reserve Bank of India, College of Agriculture Banking, National Institute of Bank Management and such other Institutions.

Share Capital:

With the growth of the bank and in deference to the wishes of the shareholders, the capital base of the bank has already been augmented upto the limit of authorised capital by rights issue. In order to further strengthen the capital base, it has been decided to increase the Bank's authorised capital to the extent of Rs. 500 lakhs (approx.) and paid-up capital will suitably be increased from time to time.

Action Plan:

Under the guidance of the Reserve Bank of India, the Bank has already drawn up a time-bound Action Plan touching upon various aspects like management, deposits, advances, regularisation of advances, balancing, house-keeping and so on. This plan faithfully chronicles bank's desire to improve in quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The implementation of the plan is also closely monitored by the Reserve Bank of India.

I would take this opportunity to observe that we being a Private Sector Bank, suffer from various statutory and regulatory constraints particularly in the matter of deposit mobilisation. Government and Public Sector deposits, many of which are interest free, are easily available to Public Sector Banks but not generally so with us. Obviously, the cost of raising resources is bound to be high in our case. But till now we have been able to restrain it to a large extent.

Similarly, floatation of Bonds by different public sector organisations is also affecting banks in mobilising deposits. The rates of interest that such bonds carry are even higher than what we give for long term fixed deposits. Thus, the major challenge that we face today is the competition from these Public Sector Undertakings which are making serious inroad into the potential deposits of the banks by offering higher interest or Income-tax concession.

To improve our profitability, I may venture to suggest that interest on first three percent of Cash Reserve for which no interest is paid by Reserve Bank of India should be made interest bearing. So also, income tax should not be deducted at source on bank's investment in Company Bond and approved securities—a facility that is extended in case of State Bank of India/Nationalised Banks. So far as deposit mobilisation is concerned, our choice obviously falls back on small depositors who provide the core deposit for us. We are proud that our bank thrives on small depositors. To explore this area further, we have introduced door-to-door campaign and are going to introduce tiny deposits scheme to mop up sizeable amount of small deposits.

Acknowledgements:

I express my gratitude to the West Bengal Government Authorities who by specific notification have kindly treated our Bank at par with Public Sector Banks for the purpose of making investments by statutory Corporations/Undertakings under its control.

I also convey my sincere thanks to Reserve Bank of India, Industrial Development Bank of India, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Export Credit Guarantee Corporation, Deposit Insurance & Credit Guarantee Corporation, other Banks and Financial Institutions and Central Government for their kind help and support.

Let me place on record my appreciation to my colleagues on the Board for their continued guidance and encouragement.

I also place on record my appreciation to all our employees for bringing about better working results which I expect them to repeat and excel in the coming years.

I also welcome the spirit of co-operation shown by the trade unions, particularly in respect of maintaining industrial harmony by settling issues through bilateral discussions. I am sure, they will continue to maintain this approach.

Our overall performance speaks for itself the excellent confidence reposed in us by our constituents and shareholders. My colleagues on the Board join me in expressing our deep sense of gratitude to our constituents and shareholders for their whole-hearted faith and co-operation while re-dedicating ourselves to their services.

Thank you.

Note: This does not purport to be the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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NATHDWARA

Inflamed Passions

RELIGION, politics and caste. The deadliest of Indian cocktails has turned yet another historic shrine into a hotbed of tension. It is something of a minor miracle that the recent caste-related violence in the area around the Nathdwara temple of Srinathji, 40 km from the tourist town of Udaipur, did not result in any deaths. But the clash, relating to the pre-publicised entry of Harijans into the white-washed, fortress-like temple—one of the most important shrines of Hinduism—resulted in two MPs being very nearly burnt alive, and has turned the maze of cluttered bazaars that surround the temple into a dangerous flashpoint.

The events that eventually provoked the attack on the MP from Raipur, Keyur Bhushan Misra, and former Rajya Sabha member Ganeshi Lal Mali, started in March when the Harijan Sewak Sangh, an organisation founded by Mahatma Gandhi in the '30s and heavily patronised by the Congress(I), decided, under the banner of caste equality, to take a large group of Harijans into the temple of Srinathji. They contacted the temple's head priest, Maharajshree Govind Lal Goswami, who lives in Bombay, and the Temple Board and asked them to cooperate. The head priest replied that he had no objections to the venture as long as every prospective Harijan entrant agreed to go through a *shuddhi* (purification) ceremony before being ushered into the sanctum sanctorum. The ceremony involves placing a string of *tulsi* beads around the neck and the chanting of a special *mantra* into the ear of the impure. (Former prime minister Indira Gandhi went through a similar ceremony when she visited the temple.)

But the leaders of the Harijan Sewak Sangh made the fatal error of giving the event—scheduled for June 30—considerable advance publicity. They organised their annual convention in Udaipur two days earlier, and it was attended by Rajasthan Chief Minister Harideo Joshi, a former president of the organisation. The press, inevitably, also gave the event extensive coverage.

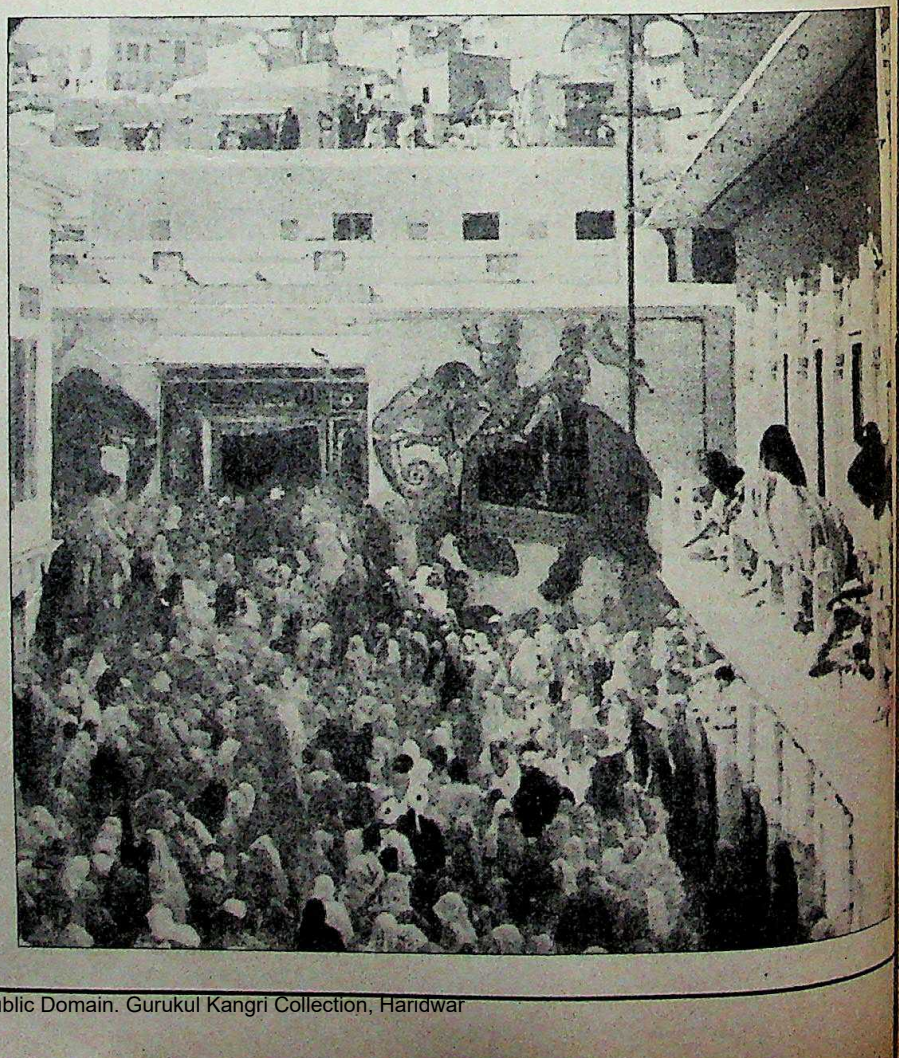
This incensed the upper caste residents of Nathdwara and the town expressed its anger through a four-day general strike. An action committee was sent to Udaipur on June 29 to convey the inhabitants' feelings to the chief minister. The temple's head priest and most of Nathdwara's political leaders maintain that Harijans have never been prevented from entering the temple when they have come individually and without revealing their identities, so there was no reason at all for the Harijan Sewak Sangh to make a media event out of Harijans entering Nathdwara. In the words of local BJP leader Ramchandraji Bagora: "They announced in the newspapers for days in advance that there would be a Harijan *pravesh* (entry) into Nathdwara. Had we allowed them to go ahead with this plan, it would have created the impression that Harijans have so far been prevented from entering the temple. We saw it as an attempt to malign us, so naturally everyone was angry."

According to Collector P.C. Jain, who is also a member of the Temple Board, the action committee's main objection was to the publicity attached to the entry of Harijans. They were agreeable, he says, to the Harijans entering but without any accompanying fanfare, either before or after June 30. The Harijan Sewak Sangh, sensing the mood, agreed to go to Nathdwara immediately instead of on the following day as originally planned. A busload of them set off for Nathdwara accompanied by policemen and officials. But they arrived after the allotted time for the afternoon *darshan*, so they returned to Udaipur.

Nathdwara returned to normal, but beneath the surface lay a volcano of anger which exploded two days later, on July 1, when some local people saw ex-MP Mali entering the temple with Misra, who they mistook for a Harijan. Misra is the vice-president of the Harijan Sewak Sangh and was among the group that had visited Nathdwara on June 29.

Word quickly spread that Harijans had entered the temple and a large mob collected outside and started shouting "*bhangi hain, bhangi hain*" (they are sweepers) as the two men came out. They took refuge in the shop of Fatehlal Bapu, a Gandhian and former freedom fighter,

Pilgrims in the Nathdwara temple



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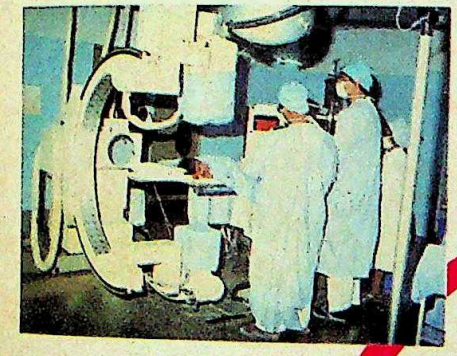
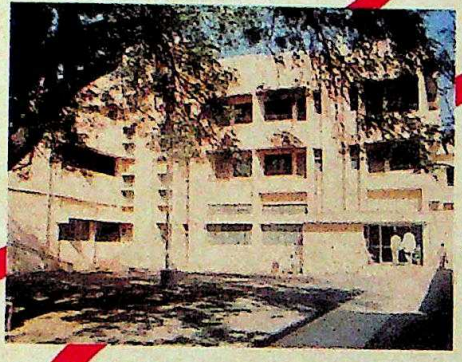
... On successful commissioning of Cardiac Care Centre with the latest Cath. lab system from ***Shimadzu Corpn.*** *Japan*





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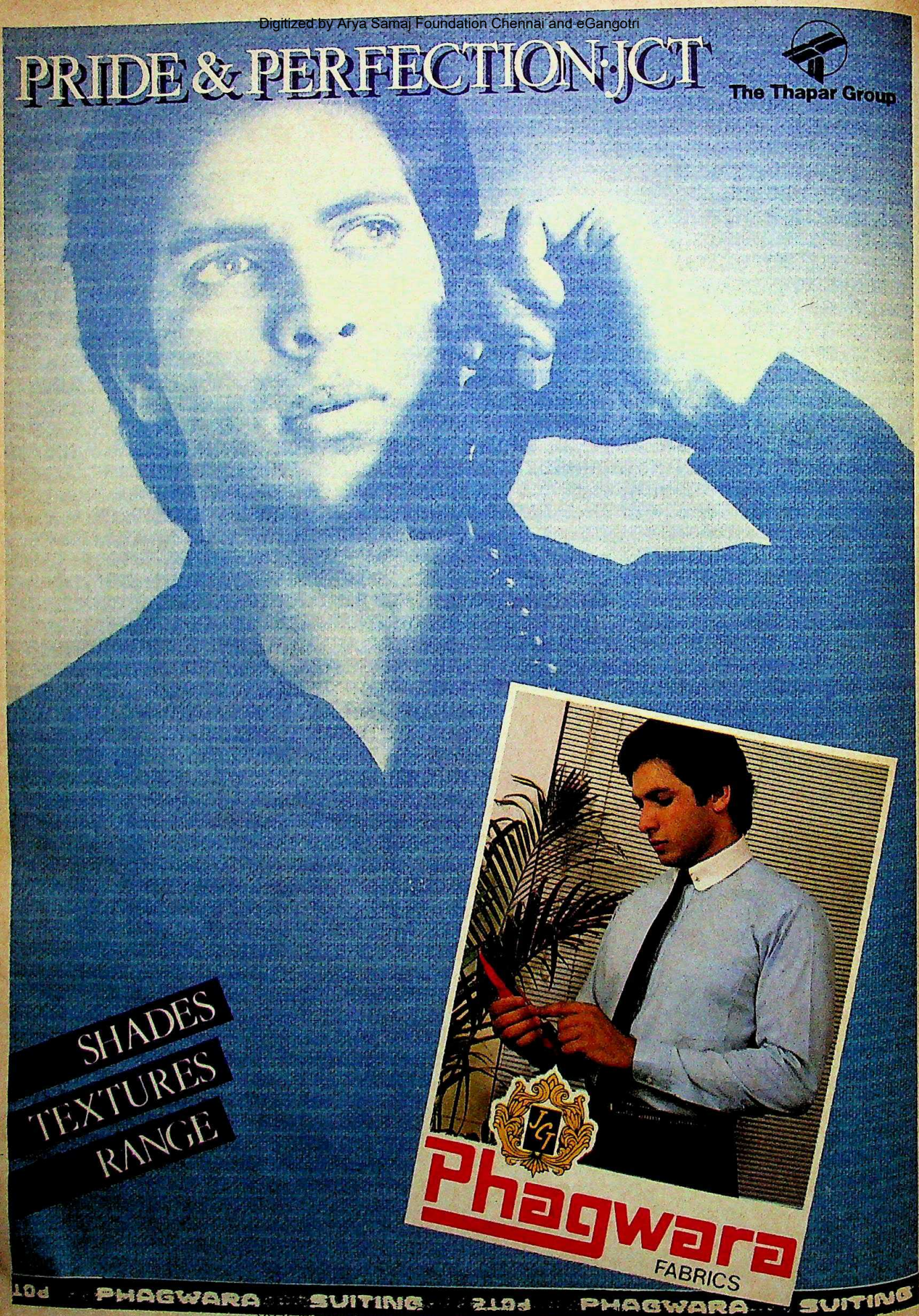

SHADES
TEXTURES
RANGE

Phagwara
FABRICS

PHAGWARA SUITING PHAGWARA SUITING

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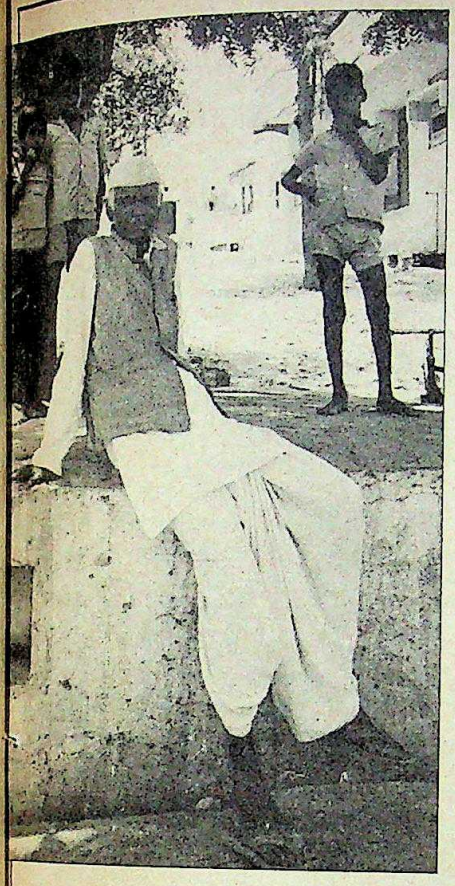

Narendrapal Singh (left); and a view of Bhangiwada: discrimination

just outside the temple, but the mob pursued them. According to Bapu: "They (the mob) came here and said 'why do you have *bhangis* in your shop'? I told them that I could have who I liked, but they gathered more and more people and tried to burn the shop down even though Bhushanji showed them his *jenoi* (sacred thread) in order to prove that he was really a Brahmin."

Meanwhile, a police contingent had arrived at the spot and was greeted by a rain of brickbats from roof-tops. At least seven policemen and several other people were injured. When the police tried to rescue the MPs, the police jeep used in the attempt was set on fire. Fortunately, at this point, senior officials arrived with reinforcements from Udaipur and the crowd was finally dispersed.

In the post-mortem that followed, political leaders blamed opposing parties for the ugly incident. The BJP and certain dissident Congress(I) factions blamed Chief Minister Joshi for having encouraged the Harijan Sewak Sangh to start trouble. Joshi denied that the state Government had anything to do with the Sangh's programmes, while local political factions turned around and blamed the BJP for instigating the trouble.

But what was conveniently forgotten in all the hot words that followed is that the Nathdwara temple does not, in fact, allow Harijans to enter its hallowed premises unless they pretend not to be Harijans or accept the rites of purification. This rule has remained rigidly enforced ever since the idol of Srinathji was brought to Nathdwara from Mathura over 400 years ago to save it from the wrath of Aurangzeb.

The town's population of around 35,000 consists mainly of upper caste Hindus, but even then, the residential localities are distributed caste-wise into virtually water-tight, segregated compartments. The Harijans (about 1,000-strong) live in Bhangiwada—a strip of rocky wasteland which is almost never seen by the (mainly rich Gujaratis) pilgrims who pour into the town at the rate of nearly a thousand a day for a glimpse of Srinathji.

The temple priests and upper caste leaders like Bagora say that local Harijans have never even expressed the desire to enter the temple. Said the son of the head priest: "They are happy by just touching the door of the temple with their foreheads every morning. Some people can find peace just with that and some cannot find it even if they have *darshan* three times a day."

But Bhangiwada is literally a cauldron which is bubbling over with centuries of pent-up anger and badly scarred pride. For the Harijans who live here, being treated as subhumans is an accepted fact of life. Till 1947, they used to have to scream out every time they walked through the streets of Nathdwara so that people of superior castes could avert their faces and move out of the range of their shadows. Then, under the influence of a dedicated Gandhian called Narendrapal Singh Chaudhuri they set about improving their lives. In 1933 he opened a school for Harijan children and was ostracised. Singh persisted 'for the sake of Gandhiji' and insisted that all the children of Bhangiwada come to his school so that now he can claim with justified pride that all the Harijan families of Nathdwara have educated children and a standard of cleanliness that matches those of the upper castes. Yet they remain outcasts. Said Bhawan Lal: "My son has a B.A., but the only job the municipality will give him is that of a *chowkidar's* (caretaker). This is our biggest problem, our children are educated but they cannot get jobs in Nathdwara."

There are other more degrading signs—Harijans cannot eat in hotels in the holy city, they sit outside and their food is thrown down to them. They are now permitted to enter shops but cannot sit down, tailors will not measure them for fear of becoming polluted, and every time they need a haircut they have to spend Rs 14 and go to Udaipur, where anonymity guarantees that a barber will at least touch them.

Hazari Lal, one of Bhangiwada's elders, says bitterly: "We don't know what the Harijan Sewak Sangh is, they never came and talked to us, but had they come we could have told them what our real problems are. We have a long, difficult ladder to climb, and entering the temple can wait."

—TAVLEEN SINGH in Nathdwara

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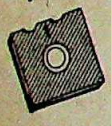
LEVEL I

Content

A quiz with multiple choice questions! Plus a crossword on Computer Science.

Prizes

1st Prize: Set of software packages worth Rs. 10,000 for your School. SCL Universal Calendar-Alarm Wrist Watch for you.



2nd Prize: Software packages worth Rs. 5000 for your school. Electronics Table Alarm Clock for you.

3rd Prize: Software worth Rs. 3000 for your school. SCL Sports Watch for you. Consolation Prize: 20 subscriptions of Computers Today.

Early Bird Prizes: for the first 500 Level I entries.

Last date for Level I: 31st July '87

LEVEL II

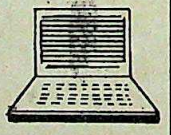
Content

An interesting graphic package — Mathland, a printout of a visual, with a blank floppy will be sent free to qualifying participants from Level I.

With this package, you will reproduce the visual and save commands on the floppy. You will also have to draw a picture of your choice using the same package based on any of the themes provided. Save it on the floppy and return it to us. Performance will be evaluated more on the logic rather than on the visual.

Prizes

1st Prize: Hardware worth Rs. 10,000 for your school. Rs. 2000 cash award for you.



2nd Prize: Hardware worth Rs. 5000 for your school. Rs. 1000 cash award for you.

3rd Prize: Hardware worth Rs. 3000 for your school. Rs. 500 cash award for you.

LEVEL III

Content

Participants qualifying from Level II will do a series of tasks which will involve writing and debugging programs on a computer.

This level of the contest will be held at Delhi. All participants will get free 1st class train tickets to and fro, including free boarding and lodging at Delhi.

Prizes

1st Prize: 'Running Trophy' for your school, exclusive prize for the title winner to carry home — an SCL Unicorn Computer, a VDU & a disc drive, and above all, 'Master Computer' or 'Miss Computer' title.

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HARIJANS

A Unique Fightback

THE images are familiar. Whether it is Belchi or Deoli, Pipra or Puliangudi, Sadhupur or Narainpur, nondescript villages rise and recede into oblivion after Harijan residents become victims of caste conflict. Violence against Harijans is so routine in the rural scene. But in Karamchedu, a rich and fertile village in Andhra Pradesh's Prakasam district where six Harijans died and 20 others were wounded, the story is different. Senior Correspondent AMARNATH K. MENON *who wrote "Karamchedu seems destined to become an important landmark in Harijan history", after the July 1985 atrocity, returned to find the accused upper-caste Kammas humiliated and the Harijans, who fled the village, fighting doggedly for justice. His report:*

AFTER every incident of brutal violence, Harijans, the invariable losers, flee from their villages only to return after a couple of weeks or months—for they have no other place to go. But the 400-odd families who left Karamchedu on July 17, 1985, vowed not to return, rigged up a rehabilitation camp 8 km away in Chirala, campaigned with the support of Dalit leaders to get new houses and jobs from the Government, and even carried the battle into their tormentors' camp by dragging the Kammas of Karamchedu to court in a private criminal case.

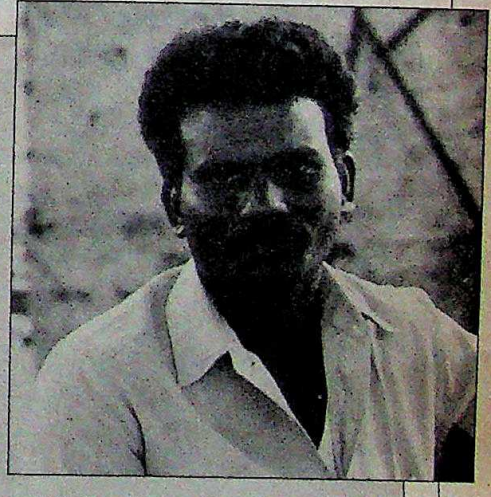
Karamchedu victims' colony (below) and collective well: rehabilitation moves

Photographs by S.V. ANJAN BABU

Their new colony—where twin, two-room houses are coming up fast—is aptly called Vijayanagar and the determined Harijans in their unique struggle to rebuild their lives are planning to take up collective farming on 65 acres granted to them by the Government. And in Karamchedu, it is the turn of the Kammas to feel hurt. They feel that the Telugu Desam Ministry of N.T. Rama Rao, a Kamma, has let them down, by allowing them to be charge-sheeted.

Incidentally, Karamchedu is the native village of Rama Rao's son-in-law D. Venkateswara Rao, a reason why the carnage received such wide publicity. At first Rama Rao seemed to delay taking action, until Harijan women staged a dharna outside his Hyderabad house to insist all official help for rehabilitation be given to them at their new colony in Chirala. Only then were the Kammas involved arrested.

There are two cases with identical charges of conspiracy, rioting, rape and murder against them. While the police have 94 people as the accused in their case ready for trial, in the other case, filed by the Harijans, another 70 have been named. After examining 90 witnesses from among the Harijans, the third Additional Munsif Magistrate, Chirala, M. Ramadas felt there was a prima facie case against 140 out of the 164 accused. Of them, 49 were charged with murder, and the others with rape, rioting and



"The fact that we ate from a community kitchen for the first eight months helped build strong bonds."

T. JEDSON
Harijan activist

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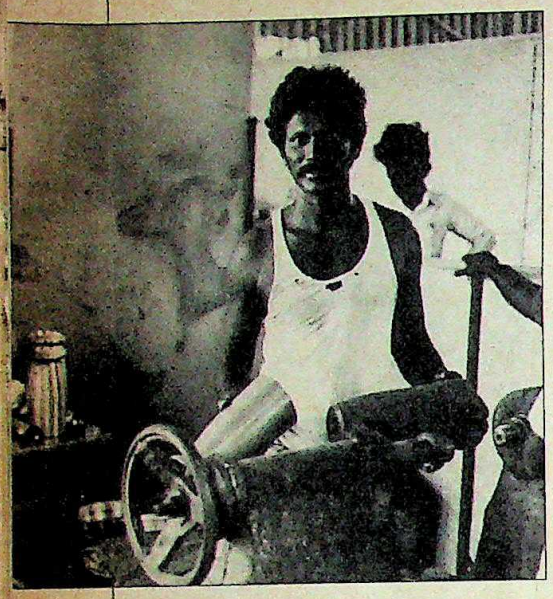

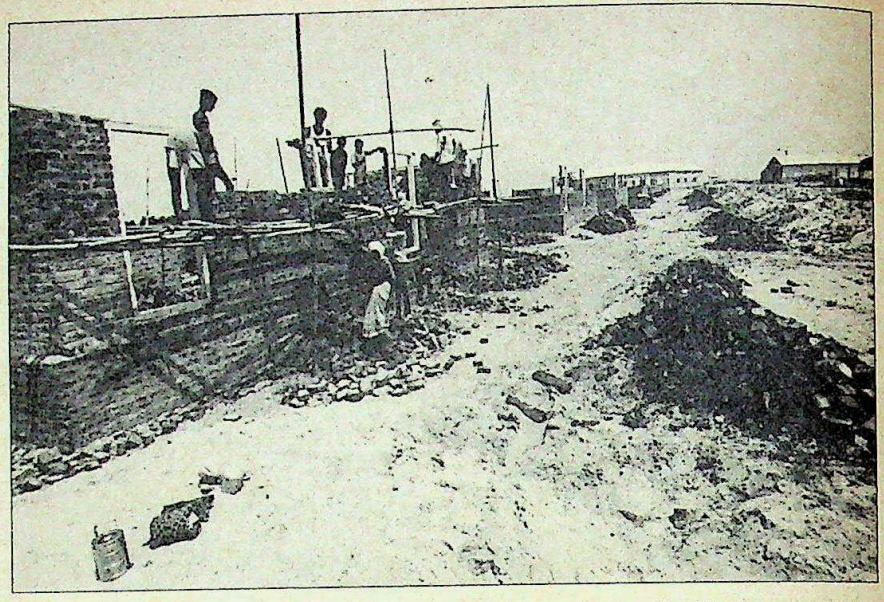

Harijans building huts; (left) lathe operator: united stand

unlawful assembly. Last fortnight, arrest warrants were issued for 58 of them.

The Harijans are relying on the court to bring the culprits to book. They boycotted the enquiry commission of retired judge D.P. Desai after the state Government's earlier attempts to start the inquiry failed (two judges had turned down the job in 1985). "Their ultimate conviction by a court is the only way to teach the arrogant Kammas a lesson," says Kathi Padma Rao, a college lecturer and Dalit leader, who organised the Harijans to fight unitedly for their demands. "The fact that we ate from a community kitchen for the first eight months helped build strong bonds," says T. Jedson, who heads the Harijans in the private case against the Kammas.

T. Sulochana and Bhagat Singh

"We cannot rest until we see the arrogant Kammas go behind bars."

T. SULOCHANA
widow of one of the massacre victims

The first signs of their unity were evident when they refused to return to Karamchedu and bought eight acres with the funds raised by the Karamchedu Victims Relief Committee to build their new homes. They asked politicians to keep away and demanded land near their camping site, owned by the Government, to build a new colony. The Government agreed and Rama Rao, to avoid public embarrassment about showing pro-Kamma sentiments, okayed a fresh demand for jobs.

Cash grants and other concessions to the widows of those killed in the outrage came faster than usual. They were either given permanent government jobs in the hostels for poor students run by the Government in Chirala or at other offices in and around Chirala. However, the most beneficial programme taken up for them by the Government, jointly with the Committee on Science and Technology in Developing Countries (COSTED), is "Swayam Krushi"—a project designed to provide training and skill-oriented developmental opportunities to rural families. The Rs 60-lakh project is intended to train both men and women in developing skills like carpentry, masonry, welding, screen printing and similar trades to help them branch out on their own from their past as unskilled farm labour. Nearly 300 persons have been trained or are learning the skills.

The Government is planning to start a community school, a common dairy farm complex, a rural dispensary, a community library and other common facilities to make Vijayanagar a model *harijanwada*. But all this alone will not mollify the Harijans from Karamchedu. Their wounds still smart and they are determined to fight the legal battle. "We cannot rest till we see the arrogant Kammas go behind bars," says T. Sulochana, who lost her husband Ramesh, less than a year after her marriage. Last December, she married another Dalit activist, Bhagat Singh, and the couple spend their free time "educating the Harijans in the camp about rights and collective action". Emphasised another widow of Karamchedu violence D. Aleshamma: "Our real losses will be compensated only if the criminals are jailed."

Now, a well planned colony with 436 houses and an open well for every 10 houses is coming up on a 47-acre site adjacent to their camp. Says Jedson: "We are planning to erect a six-faced 60 feet tall obelisk to perpetuate the memory of those who gave their blood for us." But eventually, if the Harijans win their battle in court, Vijayanagar will become a shining monument to a unique assertion of Harijan rights.

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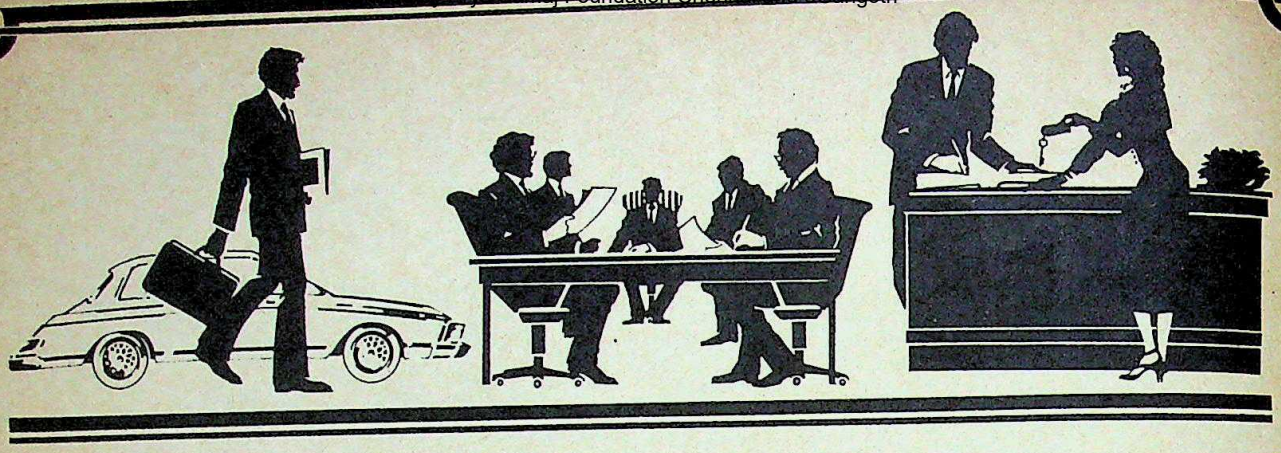

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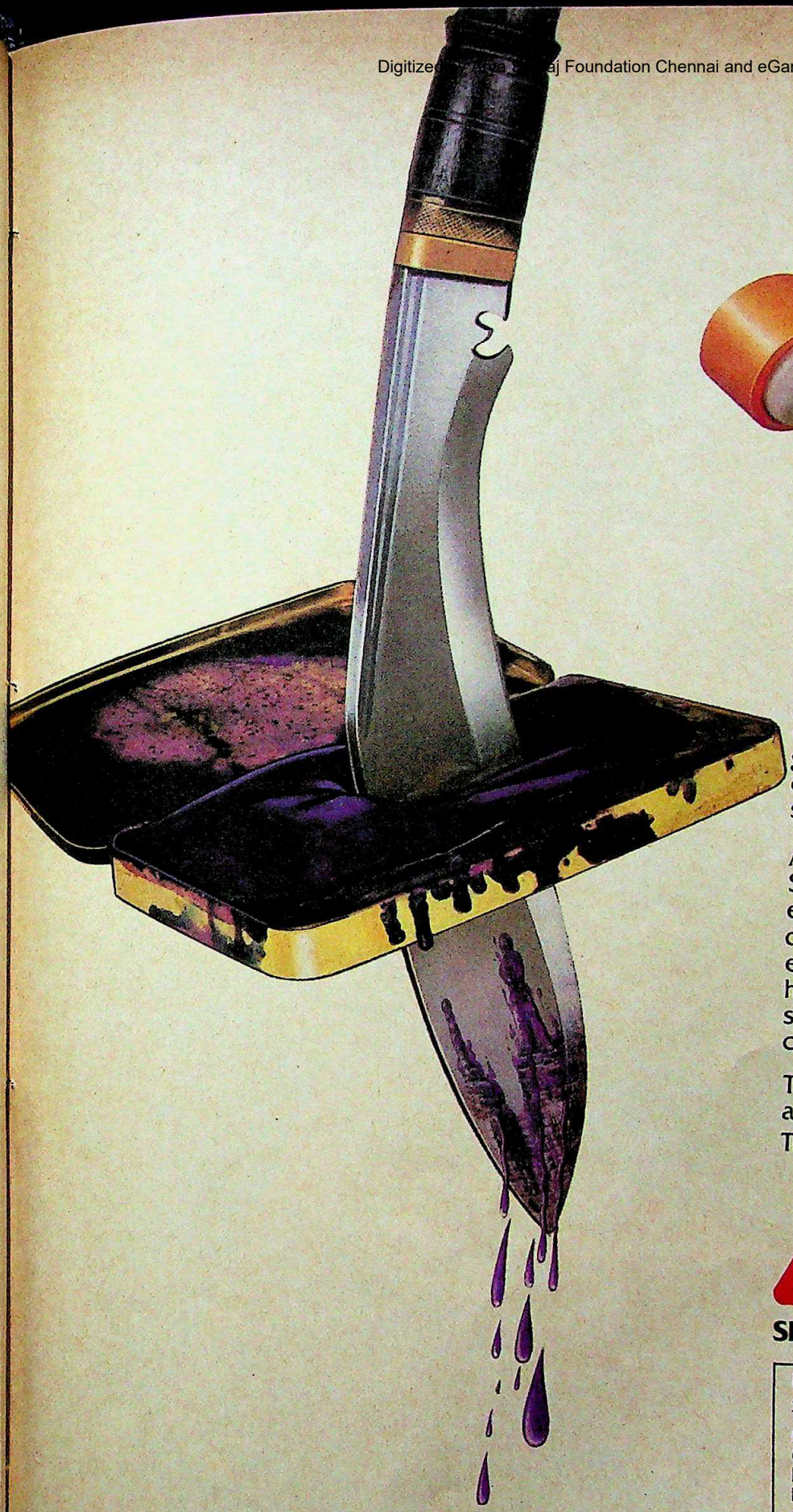

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TELUGU FILMS

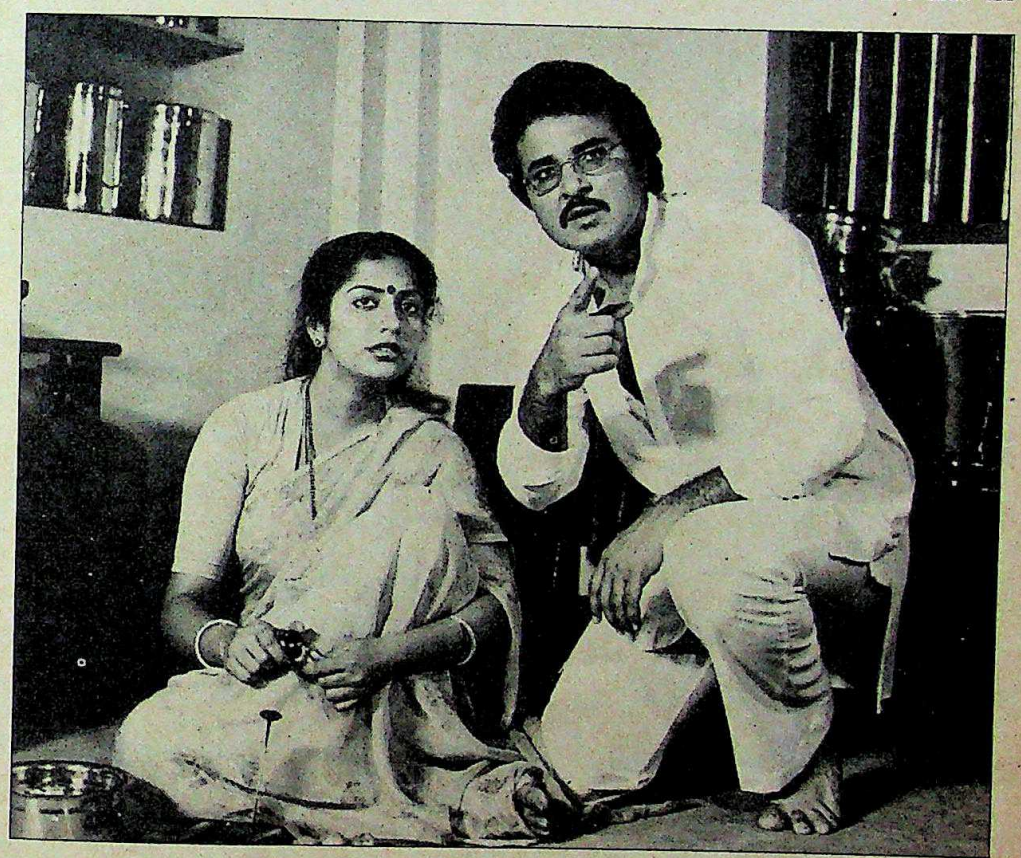
Down in the Dumps

THE Telugu film industry in 1986 was literally a dream machine. Nearly everything churned out turned to gold. There was a record number of hits, and 23 films registered over 100 days of continuous showing. But the good times couldn't last. 1987, in contrast, has been like one long horror story. Of the 70-odd films released so far, only two have run for more than 100 days while 60 have bombed at the box-office. Seventy others are waiting for buyers. In money terms, about Rs 30 crore to Rs 40 crore is blocked at various levels in the industry. "It is the great crash and all of us have to tighten our belts," philosophised M.S. Reddy, the chairman of the Telugu Film Producers' Action Council.

The industry's current woes are clearly a case of success breeding excess. The main villain of the plot is the excessive and uncontrolled flow of money into the industry for financing the films. Says C.V.R. Prasad, secretary, Andhra Pradesh Film Chamber: "To be a Telugu film producer all you need is money and even a single paisa need not be your own." Investors come a dime a dozen—ready to back anything—only interested in quick returns, and an acknowledgement in the film credits. The only precondition laid down by this new breed of financiers—some of them arrack contractors, smugglers, builders, real estate developers and money-lenders—was that the producer had to specify the date of the film's release in the contract. "The stakes in film production was reduced to the level of betting on a race-horse," commented D.V.S. Raju, a producer and chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Film Development Corporation.

As a result of this new deal between the producer and "buyer"—an industry term—the deadline became all important in the making of the film. Nothing else seemed to matter. New releases were advertised even before the producer and the director had agreed on a story. And the crew and cast demanded and got more for working in such quickies. "Those in the movie business for many years found we had to deal with this unscrupulous set of one-film producers," said Rama Naidu, a producer.

Consequently, the quality of the films suffered. Decline in viewership has triggered off the present crisis in the Telugu film industry which used to release 10 to 12 new films every month to the state's 2,335 cinemas. The viewer



Still from *Sansaram Oka Chandarangam* : rare success

it appeared was not satisfied with only sex and violence. "The filmgoers have become cine conscious. A reasonably good film still draws crowds if there is a story," said leading film distributor A. Sambhasiva Rao. The two films that have done well this year are based on stories that the film-enthusiast can easily identify with. *Samsaram Oka Chandarangam* (The Family is a Game of Chess) starring Suhasini is a sentimental film on the crumbling joint family system and *Donga Mogudu* with the industry's highest paid actor, Chiranjeevi, is based on a pot-boiler written by the prolific story writer Yendamuri Veerenbranath.

The industry has only itself to blame for the present crisis. "We have no one but ourselves to blame, firstly for the publicity build-up and then dishing out poor fare," Naidu admitted candidly. Trying to reverse the losses, Reddy has now asked both producers and owners of newspapers to restrict the publicity blitz, including a ban on all page one and colour advertisements and restricting ads in film journals to a half page.

Producers are also economising elsewhere; they have been forced to make a 30 per cent cut-back on the fees for technicians and performers. Only a handful of films are on the sets and the industry's busiest star is a little known actor called Rajendra Prasad who was signed on for three low-budget films in one day.

The industry is now hopeful that having learnt their lessons the hard way, a revival can be staged. Says Ramoji Rao, the state's media moghul and film distributor-producer: "In Andhra Pradesh, cinema will not lose the number one position in mass media for a long time to come. But if it is to flourish, the big budget extravaganza must end." In Telugu cinema, those have always been famous last words.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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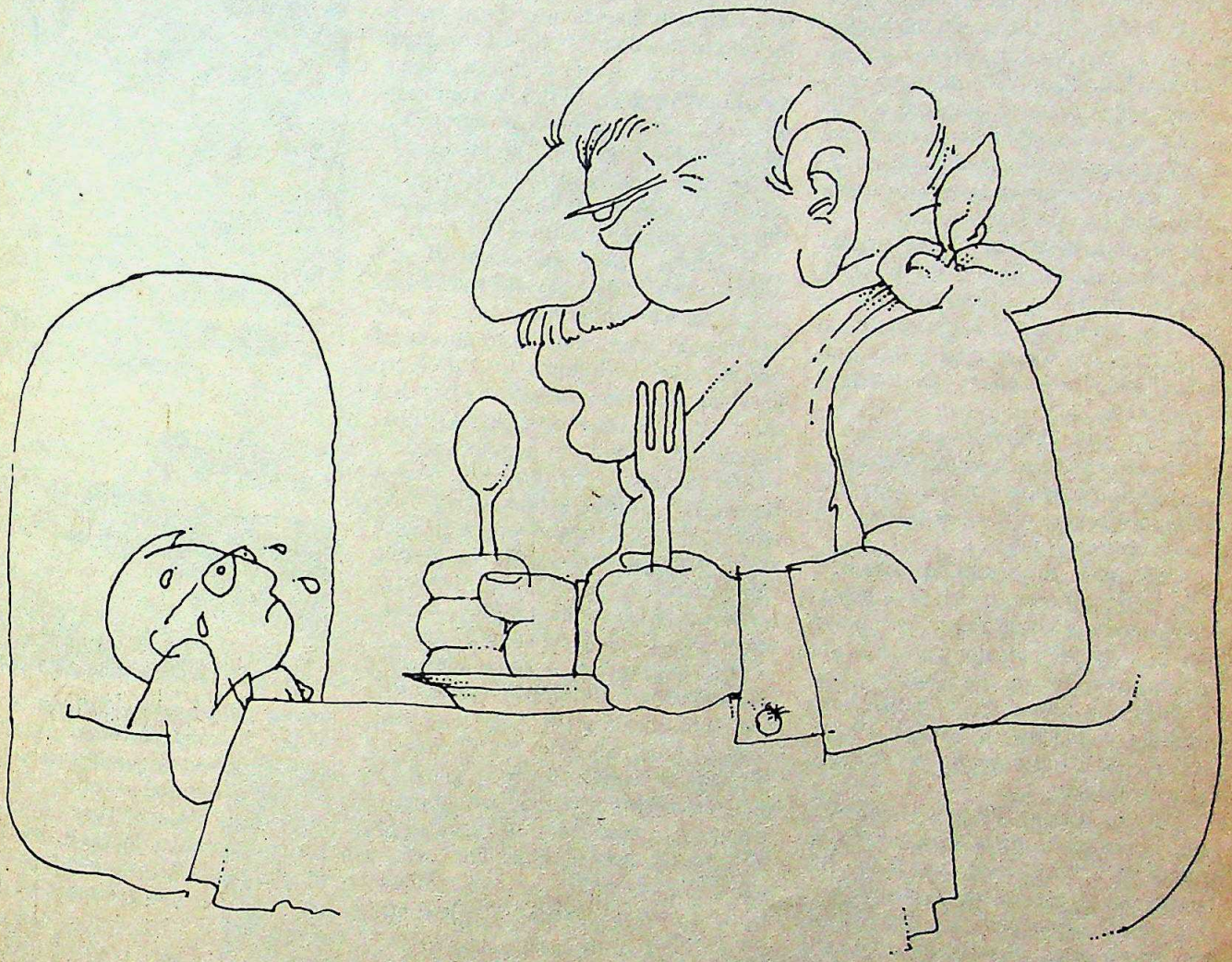

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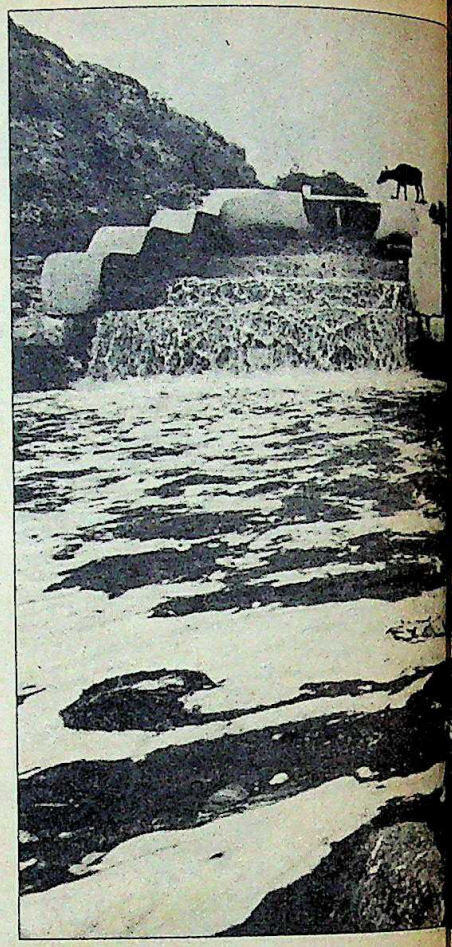
GANGA CLEANING

An Unholy Mess



THE Ganga: clean, pure, benign. It is a dream that would warm the Hindu heart. But for the 50,000 people who take a holy dip in Varanasi each day, nothing seems to have changed at all. Half-burned bodies still float on the river, municipal garbage is freely thrown into it, while people defecate and continue using soap to bathe in the holy waters.

In the industrial city of Kanpur, the Ganga has moved about 9 km from its bank, yet official maps seem to be oblivious of this reality. Local authorities have elaborate plans to develop ghats and gardens, even if it is a ghat without a river flowing past.

In Calcutta, industries continue to treat the river like one big sewer and dump their enormous wastes into it everyday, making a mockery of the new teeth given to environmental laws.

While these three cities are unkindest to the Ganga, there is nearly 28.4 billion cubic metres of waste water discharged into the river daily all along its 2,525 km stretch across the country. Only 16 of the 98 cities and towns on its banks have anything resembling a sewage system, forcing most of the waste water to fall into the river directly.

Yet the Ganga Project Directorate (GPD) promises a miracle by the magic year of 1990. Three years from today, the GPD claims, 80 per cent of the river will be clean and free from pollution. The sewage will be diverted directly to treatment plants. The treatment plants will then transform the waste into energy and automatically send the effluent for irrigation. Along the banks will arise public latrines, electric crematoriums, cattle sheds and ghats. Project Director K.C. Sivaramakrishnan says: "Our progress has been satisfactory."

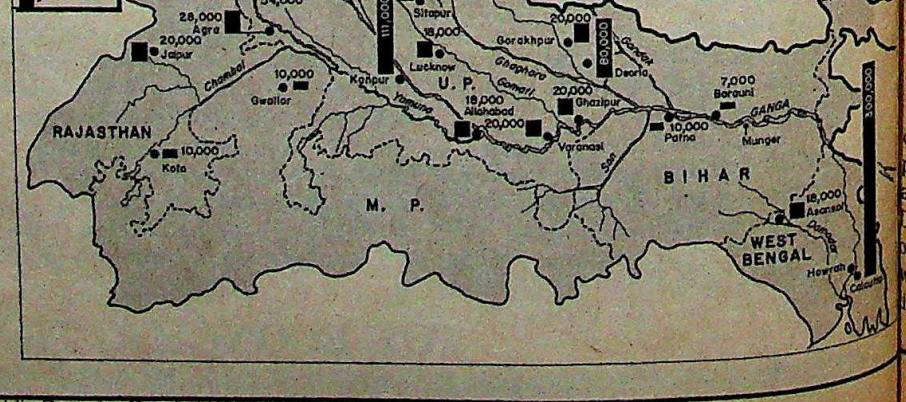
It has not. In fact there has been hardly any progress at all since the monumental project—with a total budget of Rs 292 crore—took off in June 1985. Out of the 66 projects in West Bengal, 47 have been delayed and in 33, no work had begun till March 1. In Calcutta, where the Ganga pollution is the highest, construction had not started on even a single project till February-end. And in Bihar and Varanasi, work is only crawling. The Ganga is still as filthy as it was two years ago.

Obviously no one in the right places is taking decisions. Not only is the construction of the sewage treatment plants—which form the backbone of the project—far behind schedule, but the Government is not even clear about which firm is going to be handling them. In 1985 a memorandum of understanding was signed between France and India amid a lot of fanfare, and French firms had submitted a project proposal for the Rs 21-crore Dinapur treatment plant in Varanasi.

The French proposals were put into cold storage and a global tender was floated instead, on which a decision still has to be reached. For the treatment of tannery waste in Kanpur, the Dutch are providing assistance despite the fact that the Central Leather Research Institute has already made such treatment plants. Indian scientists are growing disillusioned. T.N. Khosho, who had originally conceived the Ganga cleaning project, and is now a member of the monitoring committee, says: "There was no need to go in for foreign technology when proven technology is freely available here."

The GPD is still convinced that its work will be done by 1990. It has overlooked the fact that a sewage plant takes about three years to construct. Even the 27 cities for which work has been taken up in the first phase, were chosen randomly on the basis of population of above one lakh and not on the total sewage generated. For instance while Baharampur, in West Bengal which generates only 3.60 million litres sewage daily has been included in the first phase. Champdani in the same state has not been taken up despite the fact that the sewage generated is about 7.58 million litres daily. Nearly 10 more cities are going to come up in the A city category (above one lakh) in 1990. Says a top official in the Central Board for the Pre-

Map by B.K SHARMA



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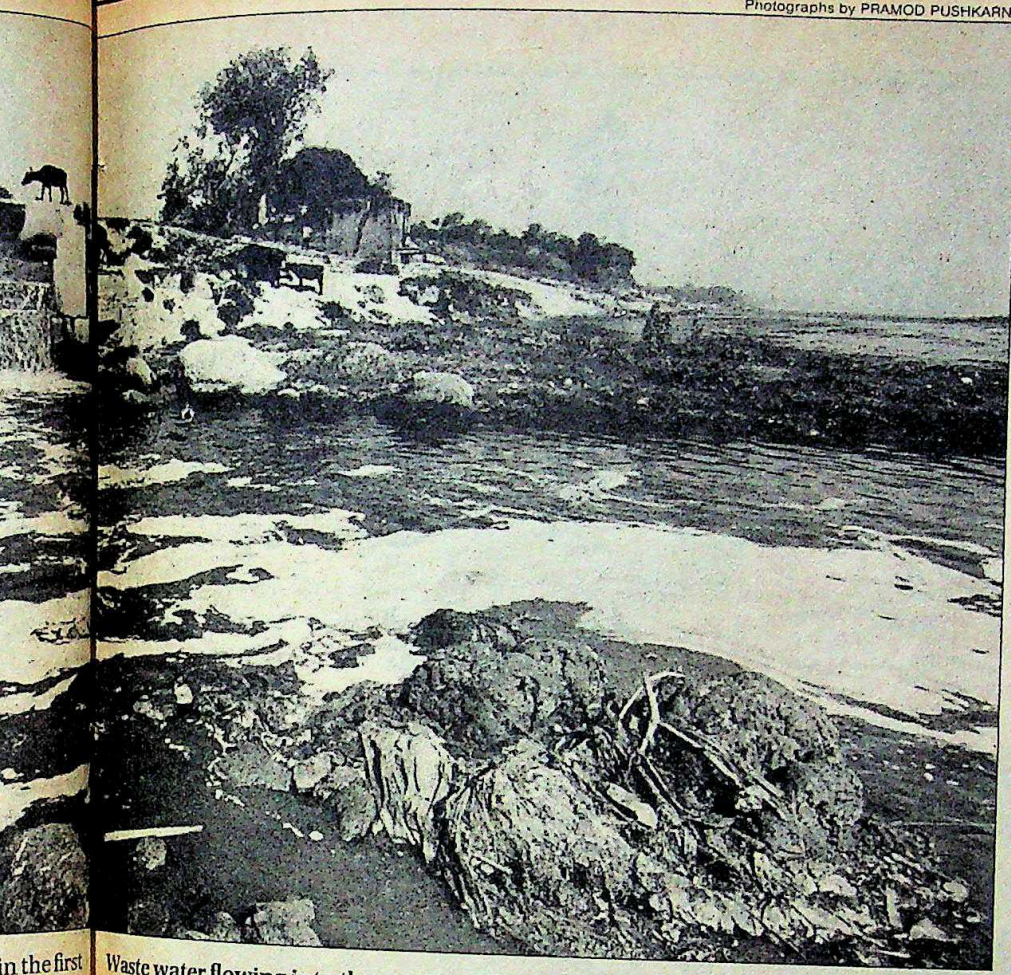

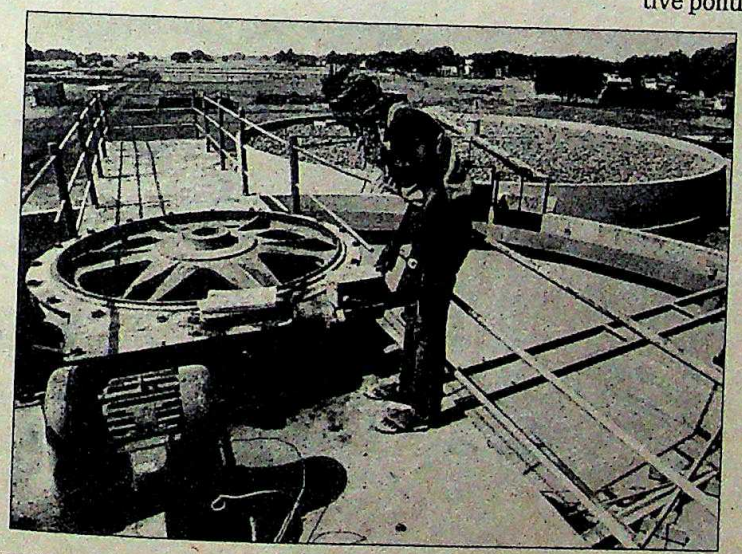

Waste water flowing into the river in Kanpur (above); and sewage treatment plant

vention and Control of Water Pollution: "The planning of the project has not taken the future into consideration."

Ironically enough, although many of the major projects have not begun yet, others which were not even originally conceived in the Ganga Action Plan have been taken up post-haste. In Kanpur, a Rs 14.45-lakh project for the redevelopment of the ghats which includes landscaping of parks, construction of roads is soon to be sanctioned. Laments Raghubir Singh, a local MLA: "What will we do with beautiful ghats when there is no water on its banks?

The quality of water—which is a crucial test for the success or failure of the project—has shown no improvement. If anything it's worse. The Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD), which is a measure of the organic matter present in the water and which ideally should not exceed 3 mg per litre, for healthy water was 9.7 in May 1981-82 in Varanasi. After the Ganga project was taken up, it increased to 12 mg.

More important, no one knows where the money is going to come from once the GPD stops pumping it in. "We are looking into the matter, and something like a national or state level company for maintaining the infrastructures is being envisaged," argues Sivaramakrishnan. And B.P. Verma, member of the steering committee, says: "If the sewage plants are worked properly they can generate an income of Rs 34 per capita in a city while expenses should not be more than Rs 27." Yet this calculation given in the original action plan is no longer mentioned in the revised one.

Others are also not so optimistic. Says an official in GPD: "We will be happy if we make an income of even Rs 16." And D.S Bagga, divisional commissioner of Varanasi and in-charge of the Ganga city task force, argues: "All these infrastructures can be maintained only when funds are available from the state or the Centre." The cleaning of the Ganga, which should be carried out under the aegis of a solid body, seems in fact, to be no one's baby.

Meanwhile industrial pollution continues to cast its poisonous shadow over the river. In Varanasi, a new industrial estate is rising in Ramnagar which will become a major threat to the river in another decade.

The popular participation programme flagged off by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in June 1986 in Varanasi has also turned out to be a big farce. No doubt there are exhibitions, Ganga *seva shivirs* and *padyatras*—but that's all there is.

Scientists who were associated with the project are beginning to lose patience. More and more bureaucrats have moved in and taken over all the decision-making. Those who remain point out that alternative pollution control measures have not been considered at all. Argues Khosho: "There is a difference between sweeping the floor and cleaning the river. This is surely not the way we had conceived the project." Professor Rama of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay, suggests tackling the pollution problem through increasing the flow of water during the dry months when pollution is at its highest. Rajesh Khosla, an environmental scientist, explains: "The monsoon flow is very high and the problem of pollution is nearly non-existent then. It is this problem which the Ganga authorities have not attended to." In fact irrigation channels are drawing out nearly two and a half times more water from the Ganga in Varanasi during the dry season than they had ever before, aggravating the pollution problem.

Two years have gone since the project was announced and three are left. Clearly there will be no miracle cleaning of the Ganga by 1990.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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DELHI ZOO

The Stress Syndrome

THE director found something peculiar happening at the Delhi zoo: animals had begun to have abnormal babies. Last year, a cape buffalo had a giant baby, twice the size of a normal foetus. Some time later, a rhinoceros had a breech baby. Both mothers and babies died. Then, an eland had a premature baby. It did not survive either.

Five deaths in six months, an unusual phenomenon, no doubt, but what Kamal Naidu—who became director of the Delhi zoo last March—had begun to wonder was if it was any coincidence that all three animals lived next to the railway track that runs along the outer edge of the zoo. Roughly 30 passenger and goods trains thunder along the track every day at shattering noise levels of 95 decibels and more, enough to make any human being irritable, tense and finally, deaf. "What applies to us applies equally to the animals," said Naidu. "Noise was a major factor in these deaths. Stress takes its toll over time."

Noise is only the tip of the stress iceberg. It comes through the heavy goods trains that scream through the night, but most of all, it comes through the thousands of people who descend on the animals on national holidays and after Boat Club rallies, armed with their transistors and packets of food.

August 15 and January 26 are apocalypse. Over 30,000 people come rushing into the zoo after the parade, all together. "It's like being in an escalator," says Naidu. "You enter and get pushed all the way through till you leave." The animals are visibly tense and bristling with fear, and the zoo authorities confess that they lose all control on these days. "You can see panic on the animals' faces," said Dr S.R.Saini, in charge of security. "People pelt them with stones and hit them with sticks." Peace descends only after 5 p.m.—like the peace that comes to a battlefield after a day of intense fighting.

That animals are prone to stress has been proved before. During the Emergency, Sanjay Gandhi okayed a mini-train for the zoo. That year, the migrating birds never came. Finally, Dr Salim Ali wrote a letter to the prime minister about that "noisy train", which was ultimately discontinued. On December 31 last year, hundreds of people chased the spotted deer from corner to corner of their enclosure till, blind with fear, they escaped. One was found in the wild boar enclosure and another in Sunder Nagar, a nearby residential colony. "Animals need time off or they start indulging in psychopathic behaviour," said Sharad Gaur, honorary warden, Delhi state wildlife. "They bite themselves, become aggressive, climb up the walls. The larger part of stress is vandalism."

The zoo authorities know that only too well. They've lost enough rare specimens. The animals, it seems, can't take the amount of stress—and cruel mob behaviour—that comes with this human typhoon. The latest victim was a zebra: the beautiful animal was found dead in March, a polythene bag entwined inside its stomach. A week later its mate died too, of shock. The diagnosis: "psychic stress, caused by the cruel and sudden death of her partner".

In the past, too, animals have succumbed. A hippo's tongue was gashed with razor blades. A Pallas' cat—an extremely rare species—died because someone fed it a piece of nylon rope. A lighted cigarette was deliberately thrown on an ostrich till it burnt to death. Most of the monkeys have tuberculosis as they are almost routinely hit with cigarette stubs and Bill Swam, a Canadian who visited the Delhi zoo recently, fired off an enraged letter to *Environment Today*: "I was horrified to find roughly 400 people stoning the chimpanzees....It left me wondering who should have been in the cages."

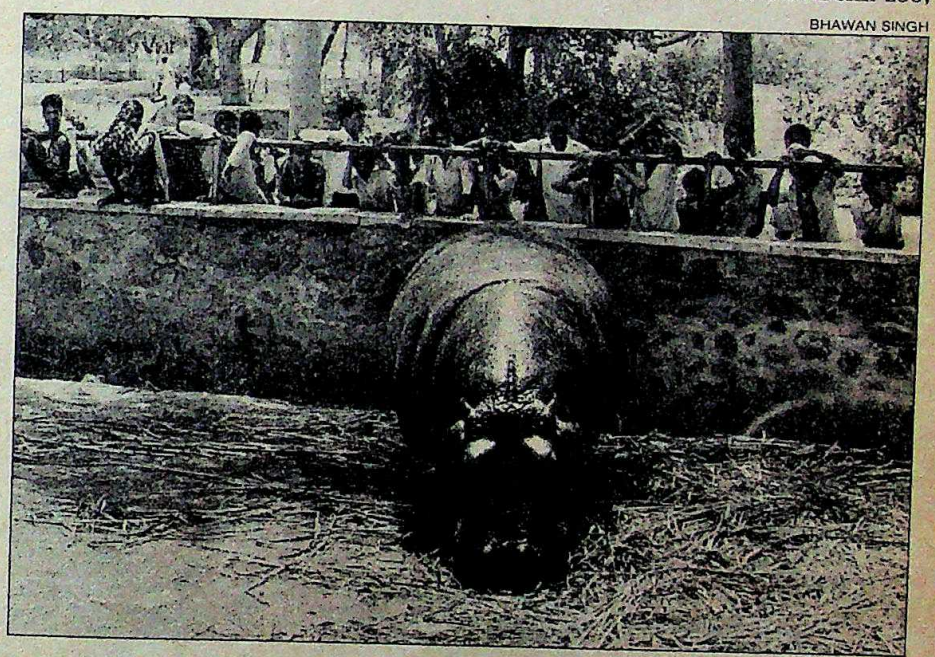
Crocodiles are stoned with an almost morbid pleasure because, as one visitor said: "Don't you know they are evil? They eat people." Hundreds of incidents of birds with broken limbs go unreported. "It is perverse, the way people come armed with rusty blades, nails and sticks," said Gaur. "University students have even been caught having stone-throwing matches at the animals."

Clearly, zoos are no longer the places they were meant to be. The Delhi zoo, nestling in the serene shadows of the Purana Quila, was meant to be a showpiece of a zoo with the Centre pumping in a handsome Rs 60 lakh annually to support the 1,600 animals there. "A zoo is an educational place, not an entertainment house," says Naidu. "I have no problem with the animals here. It is the two-legged variety that is my problem."

There are finally some indications that the concern might be translated into action. The management is considering a separate breeding enclosure to keep animals far from human pressure. It will grow a thick belt of trees to act as a buffer to the railway track. Naidu has also asked zoology students to devise an Electro-Cardiogram-type instrument to measure stress in animals. And this Independence Day, for the first time, the zoo will be closed. After all, animals are human too.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

BHAWAN SINGH



A hippo at the zoo: increasing dangers

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DUDHWA NATIONAL PARK

Tigers in Trouble

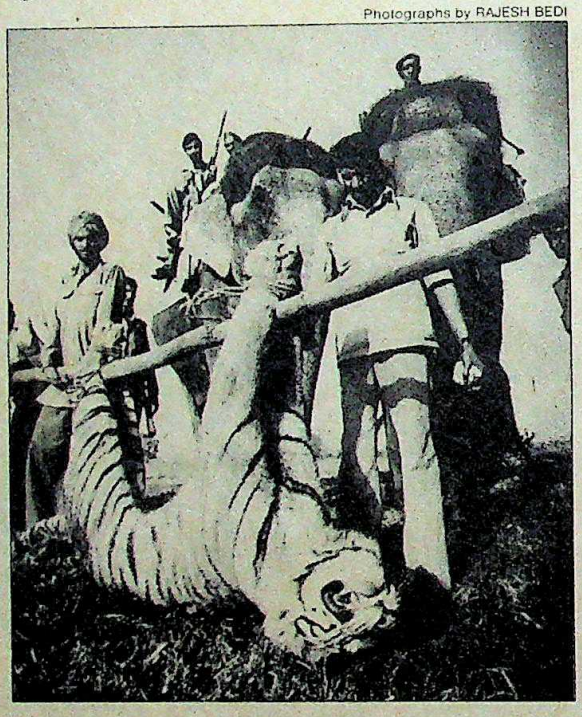
THE tigers are dying. In the Dudhwa National Park near Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, 13 tigers have gone—shot, poisoned or drowned. But more mysterious is the fact that officials cannot explain how they've been killed, and more important, why.

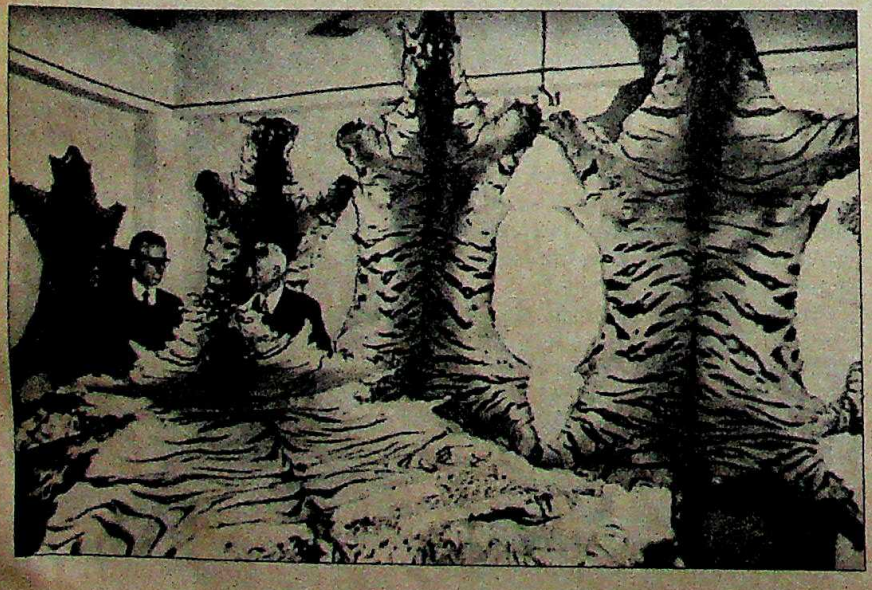
It was only when local politicians and farmers ganged up against the park officials early this year, that things began bubbling over. Satish Ajmani, Kheri Congress(I) MLA, took a delegation to Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, complaining that officials had let poachers and smugglers take over the park. Says Dr Rakesh Tomar, a local botanist and college lecturer: "It is nothing but dereliction of duty by the staff, especially in the way they have neglected investigating tiger deaths."

Chief Wildlife Warden R.P. Sharma denied this: "We suspect an organised bid to kill tigers or acquire their bones in eight deaths, but the remaining five are accidents."

But the locals insist there is foul play in all the 13 cases. Tomar also claims that three other uninvestigated tiger deaths took place early this year. He says the first two tigers were killed by Nepalese ex-army settlers on the border and poachers trapped the third, killed it and sold its skin for Rs 4,000. Says Deputy Director Arun Verma: "Most cases have been detected by us. Killings have been going on for years but we are going after poachers. Does this show callousness?"

Photographs by RAJESH BEDI





Man-eater slung on a bamboo (right); and tiger skins recovered from poachers: rising toll

But accusing fingers continue to point at the officials. Last July, the staff seized the carcasses of five tigers being smuggled away from Kheri forest. Two teenage boys were arrested and punished, but the foresters still can't say whether they were shot, poisoned or died a natural death. Says Sharma: "It is quite possible that a gang was involved in smuggling tiger bones to China, where they are used for making a medicinal liquor." It is alleged that officials did not refer the bones to forensic experts until February '87 to establish the cause of death. The report is still awaited.

Next month, a tigress's body which had been shot was recovered from the banks of the Kharja canal in Pilibhit. Two months later, officials arrested five poachers and a village chief in Husanpur who was treating a tiger skin with chemicals. Says Verma: "We have each time apprehended the criminals."

But the tiger deaths that occurred within the park are the most intriguing. On December 18, the decomposed body of a tiger was lifted from the railway tracks in the park. The post-mortem said it was an accident but wildlife experts pointed out that a tiger, a cautious and alert animal, could not have kept sleeping and let a steam engine run over it.

Then there are three mysterious cases of drowning near the bifurcation of the Kheri branch canal in the past year. "The tiger is known to be a born swimmer and cannot drown," says Tomar. Since the bodies were putrified, a post-mortem was unhelpful. But Forest Department officials themselves are baffled: if these cases were of killing or poisoning, what was the motive? If the tigers were killed, why did the poachers not take away the skin and the bones?

Officials say that villagers too poison tigers to prevent them from raiding their crop and cattle. The officials-villagers conflict escalated when locals were prevented from entering the forests to collect fuelwood and grass. Over 70 tigers have been killed in the state since 1973.

But poaching is on the rise. Between May 8 and 13 this year, the forest staff nabbed a dozen poachers. This could be dangerous work. On April 18, a forest guard was gagged to death after he found some poachers killing a deer.

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Forests Zafar Ali Naqvi is as helpless as the wildlife: "I only come to know about these cases through the newspapers." The question now is: if the forest officials are not able to protect their animals, who will? —DILIP AWASTHI in Dudhwa

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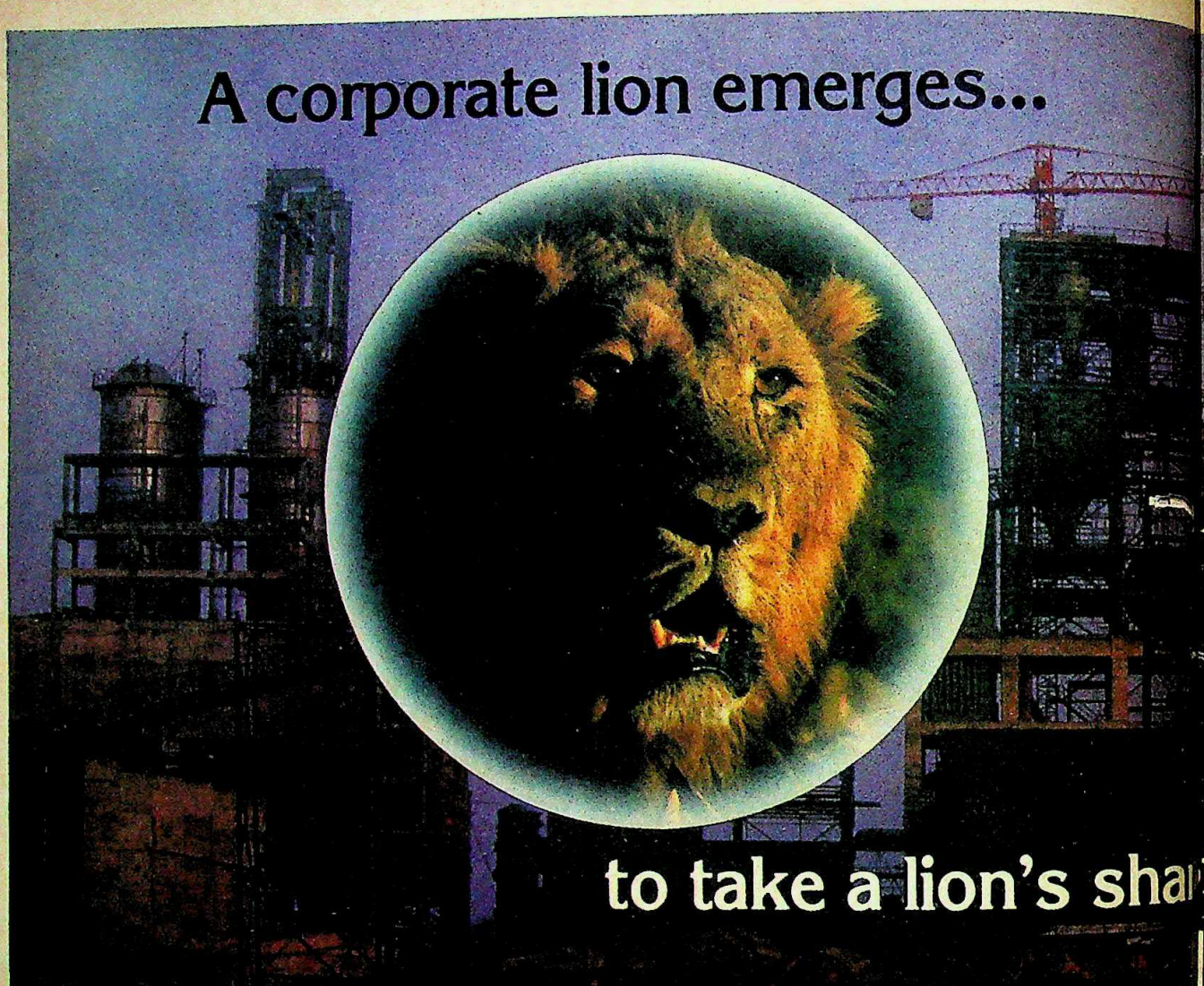
A corporate lion emerges...



to take a lion's sha

Soda Ash production is a vital industry. Because Soda Ash, a basic alkali is indispensable for a vast range of industrial and consumer products — glass, detergents, soaps, sodium silicates and bicarbonates, bichromates, paper, textiles and dyestuffs. It is also widely used as a cleaning agent/washing powder in houses, factories and commercial establishments including laundries.

Abundant Demand

In India, the Soda Ash market has enjoyed a 9% compounded annual growth rate over the last 30 years. And is heading for a still higher rate of growth. Spurred by advancing industrialisation and living standards, demand is estimated to rise from 10.9 lakh tonnes in 1986-87 to 14.9 lakh tonnes by 1990-91.

Production, however, lags behind. And the demand-supply gap is expected to increase from 1.9 lakh tonnes in 1987 to 5.9 lakh tonnes by 1990. Significantly, the level of imports has been consistently high over the years.

Corporate Lion

Poised for a leonine leap on this scene is GHCL — a Rs. 246 crore project of GIIC and Dalmi manufacture 1200 tonnes per day of Soda A Strategically positioned at Sutrapada. Dt. Junagadh, Gujarat — in the heart of major r material sources and consuming centres — t corporate lion enjoys another unmatched advantage: total technical tie-up with the wor largest producer of salt and salt-based chem Akzo of the Netherlands.

Akzo brings to India for the first time its unic proprietory 'dry liming' process — the latest, cost efficient Soda Ash technology in the wo And Akzo's associate in the GHCL venture is another world leader, Klockner of West Ger

Lion's Share

GHCL is rich with all the inputs of project su eminent promoters, unrivalled technology, a raw materials and power, perfect energy bal economies of scale — and an ever expandin market. So the corporate lion is assured of a roaring success... and a majestic share of the Soda Ash market.

Sobhagya/123/87

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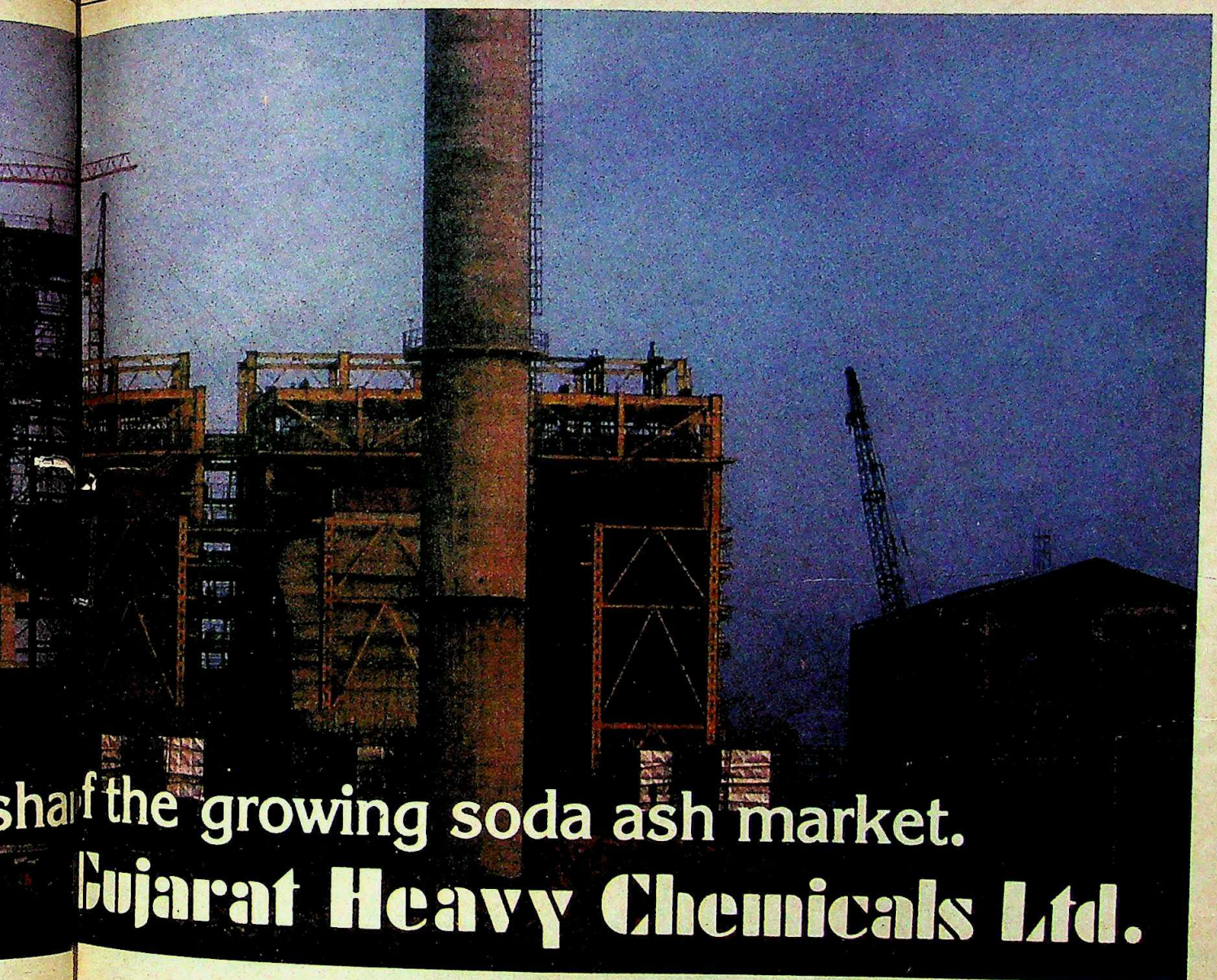

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GHCL

Gujarat Heavy Chemicals Ltd.

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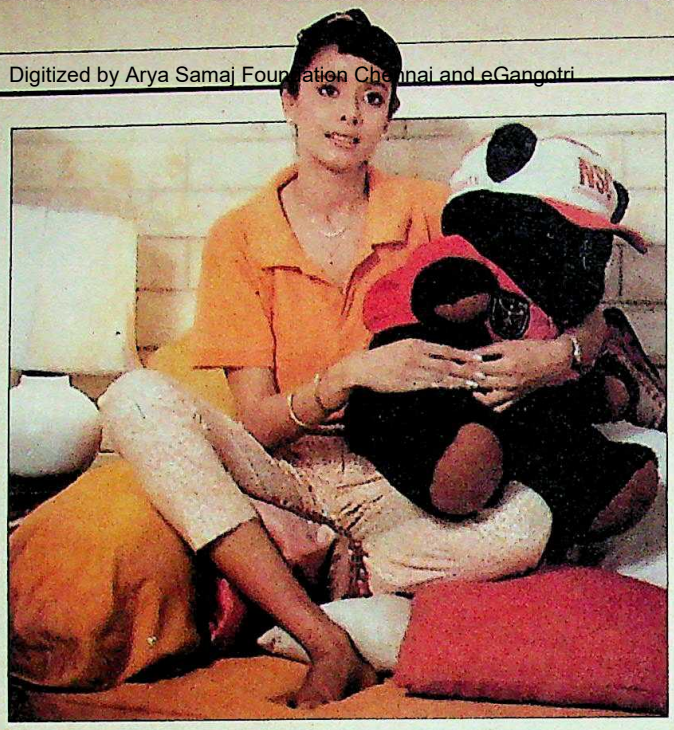
◆ What is Mrs Khanna (**Kiran Thakur Singh**) doing with PSmith? Leave it to P.G. Wodehouse. Coming on TV is **Anand** *Idhar Udhar* **Mahendroo**'s serial *Isi Bahane*, based on the exploits of the inimitable PSmith.

Five sentimental crooks set out to restore a diamond necklace to its rightful owner. **Malavika Tiwari**—fresh from Frooti—is the damsel in distress and the necklace is with her stepmother, Mrs Khanna. According to Mahendroo, Tiwari is made for the role: "She is frail, good-looking, smart, lacks a strong voice, comes across as weak but proves to be the strongest." Eggs, beans and crumpets—in this case, **Saeed Jaffrey, Mohnish Behl** and **Radha Seth**—of *Quiztime* fame—all come together in a mad, mad whirl until it is time to sit back, order a gin and tonic and do what they should all have done in the first place—Ring for Jeeves.

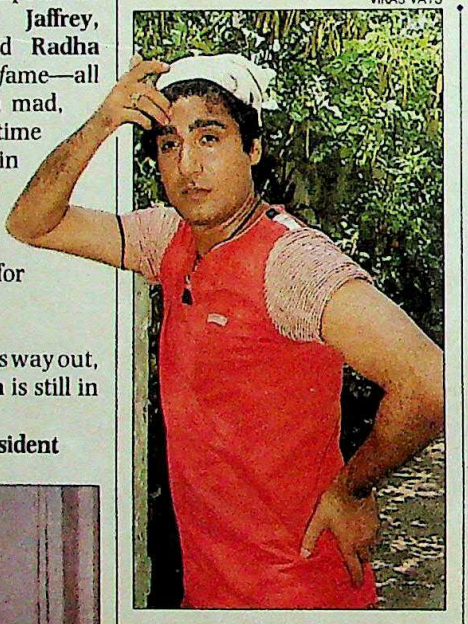


VIKAS VATS

Malavika: tailor-made

◆ He may be on his way out, but **Giani Zail Singh** is still in

Portrait of a President



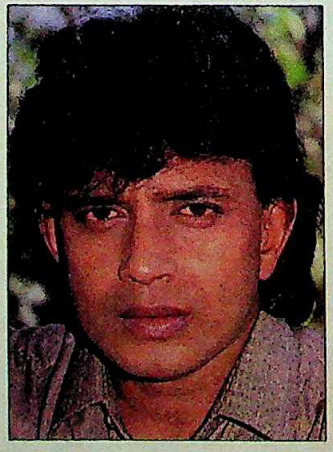
Babbar: real-life *neta*

Rashtrapati Bhavan, after all. Looming larger than life—at eight ft—in the presidential portrait gallery, is Gianiji, making his last stand, with the red rose in the buttonhole.

Said Mysore artist **N.S. Subbakrishna**, who has painted the portrait of the President as a prince: "He kept talking about philosophy while his grandchildren kept running in and out." But what really pleased the painter was that though most originals are critical of the reproductions, "Gianiji was very happy with the portrait".

◆ **Raj Babbar** the film star is no longer just only a "Khaitan fan"—it's **V.P. Singh** that he is now airing. The Indian screen sombre hombre's first venture as a real life *neta* is his launching of the *V.P. Singh Mitra Mandal*—a motley collection of doctors, accountants, journalists, directors, among others.

Babbar however insists that unlike other tinseltown

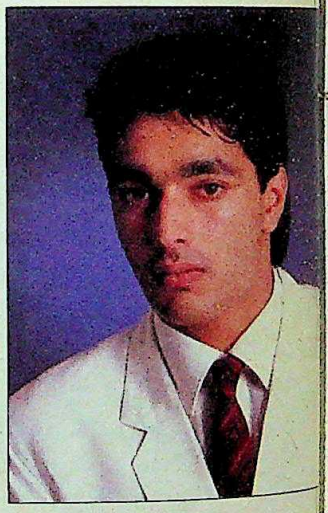


Mithun: love from Russia

colleagues, he has no political ambitions at all: "V.P. Singh is one of the best political leaders we have had in recent times and I think that it is important that his thoughts reach everyone." Starting next month, Babbar plans to mobilise support for we-love-Singh clubs all over the country. All those fans will help spread the message.

◆ You've heard of singing stars, what about designer models? It's a whole new world in cutting one's cloth according to—the advertiser's pocket. **Deepak Malhotra**, 23, arguably the most-seen male model—even though most of the time all you see is his back—is keeping the visibility and the profits, all in the persona.

Only Vimal got the model man where he is—unconfirmed reports put his contract at an unprecedented Rs 1.5



Deepak: model-man

lakh. But he knows it won't last. So he has his other career cut to size: "I would like to be known as a businessman. A model's life is very short. We tend to burn out fast."

◆ Move over Raj Kapoor and Bachchan. The Bengali Babu is here. **Mithun Chakraborty** has "disco-danced" his way to Russian hearts. From Raisa Gorbacheva to the giggling prols who mobbed him in Red Square, they are dancing to his beat. Last week at the Moscow film festival, young girls pounced on him and practically tore the shirt off his back. Said one starry-eyed fan: "He is so muscular, strong and thin."

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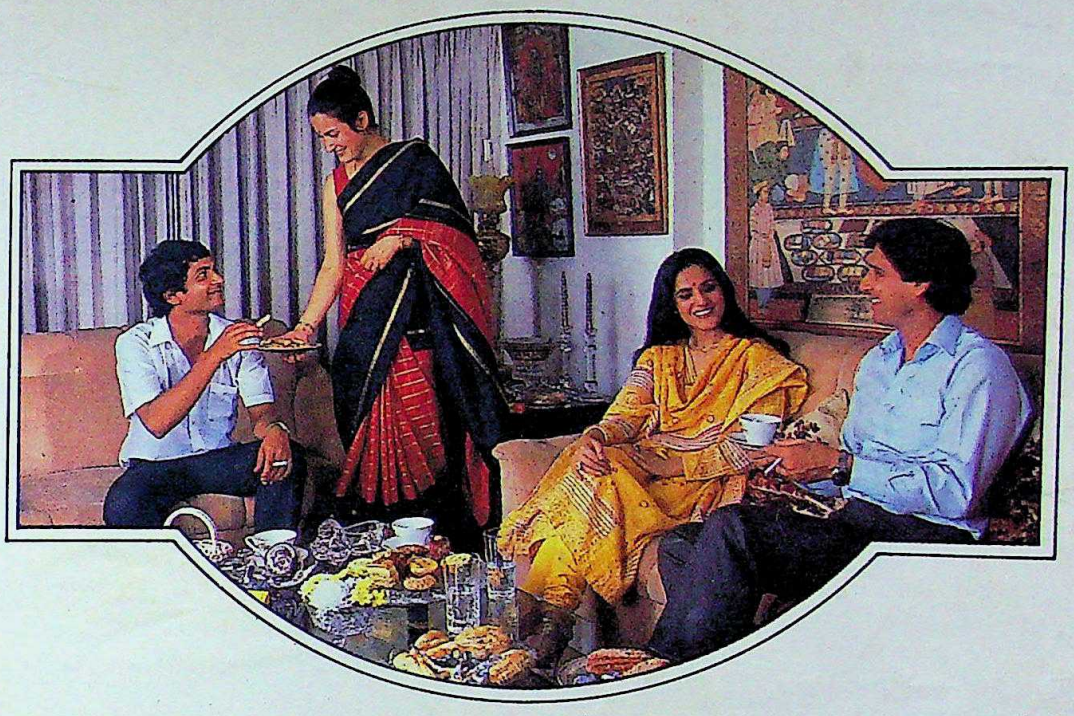

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Karamchand Foils Bank Heist

Bajaj M80 too powerful for crook's moped

GLOBE NEWS:
New Delhi: A hold-up attempt made today on one of the city's major banks was foiled by master detective Karamchand.

Karamchand disarmed the hoodlum at the bank, but couldn't prevent him escaping to a nearby moped. Karamchand and Kitty followed in hot pursuit on his M80. The chase ended when the crook's moped failed to make it to the top of a steep incline and Karamchand easily nabbed the desperately pedalling man.

Later, Karamchand gave all credit to his kick-start, 3-geared M80: "It has twice the power of a moped and the pick-up of a scooter. There's no way he could have escaped!"

Added Kitty: "I never thought the M80 could take my weight!"

Retorted Karamchand: "Kitty, you just can't beat a Bajaj!"

bajaj auto Value for money, for yea

bajaj M80

The power-for-money bike

YOU JUST CAN'T BEAT A BAJ

LINTAS BAJ 63

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The Challengers

The expulsion of V.P. Singh and other dissidents from the Congress(I) has unleashed a chain of events that threaten to snowball into a major political movement. The prospects for Rajiv Gandhi's already shaky apple-cart are foreboding.

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A Clash of Interests

Seventeen months after he took up the chief ministership of Maharashtra, S.B. Chavan finds himself in the unenviable position of being beleaguered by his own partymen. An analysis of the factors that have rendered Chavan vulnerable.

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Accord Discord

With the LTTE leader V. Pirabhakaran giving his conditional consent and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi leaving for Colombo to sign an accord, peace finally seemed to have got a chance in the strife-torn nation. A report.

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The Model Revolution

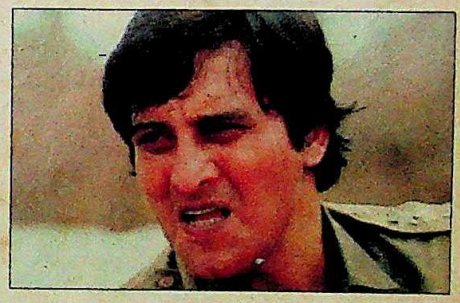
The much-abused telephone is poised for a model revolution. Within the next few months, a whole new range of sleek push-button phones will make their appearance on the market to replace many of the existing stodgy-looking instruments.

BUSINESS 104

The Dragon's Teeth

For several weeks now, rumours of an impending border clash between India and China have been making the rounds. An exclusive report from Chinese-occupied Tibet on the Chinese build-up and what it could imply for India.

NEIGHBOURS 82



A Star Return

Vinod Khanna's sweeping comeback to the screen with two block-busters has naturally given rise to the feeling that he may emerge as a challenger for the top spot in filmdom. An assessment of the industry's fastest rising star.

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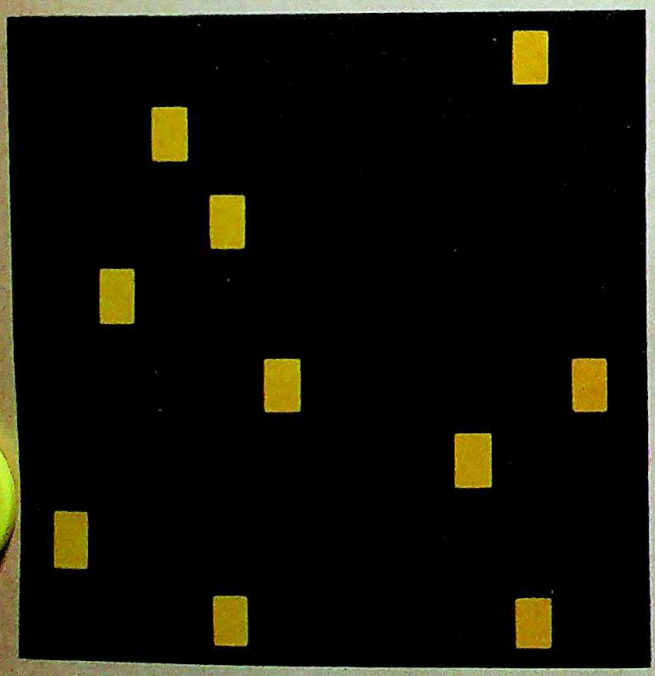
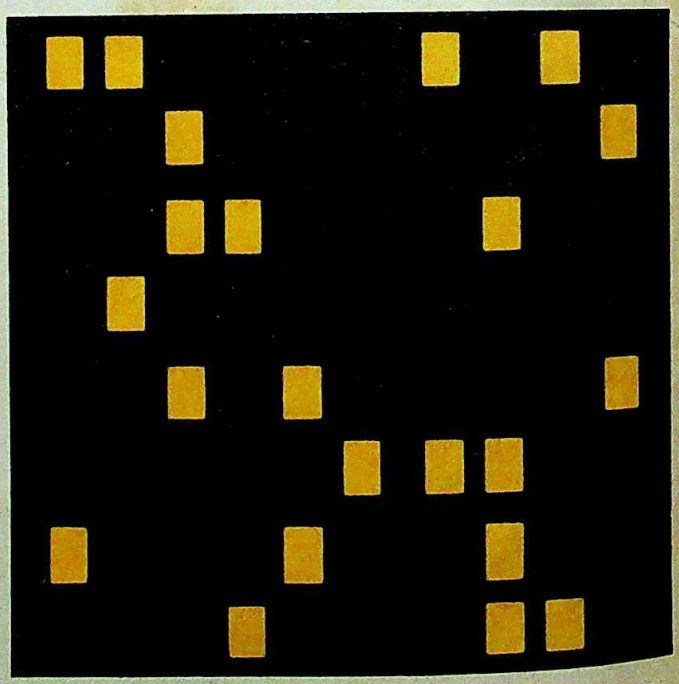
1946

The year that DLF was founded. In 1952-54, DLF developed land in Model Town and sold plots at Rs.15/- per sq. m. and in Hauz Khas at Rs.20/- per sq. m. But a lot of people thought it was too far away and therefore not worth buying. Today land there costs over Rs.4,000/- per sq. m.



1963

Not so long ago, DLF developed and sold land in Greater Kailash II at Rs.30 per sq. m. Again, there were some people who refused to buy land there, thinking it was wilderness. But those who did, are today sitting on gold mines. For this land is now valued at over Rs.7,500/- per sq. m.



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1987

DLF creates history again.
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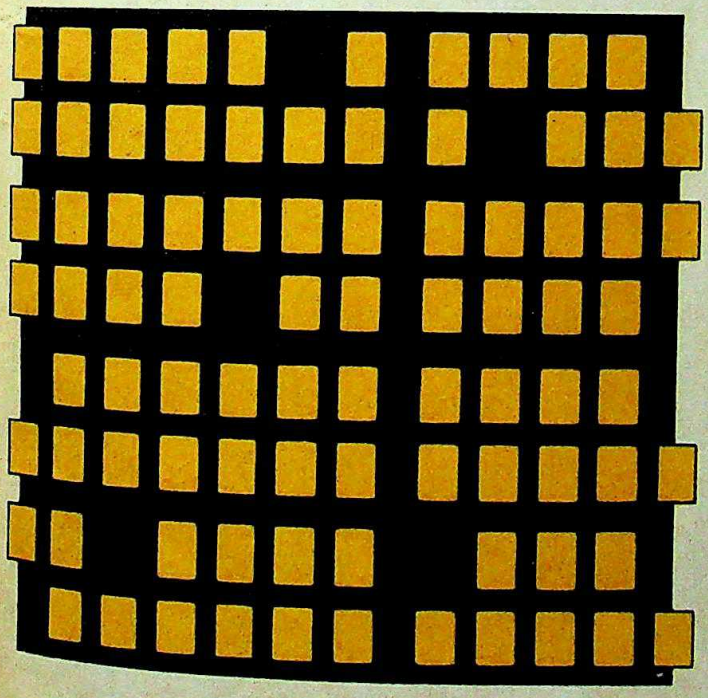

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

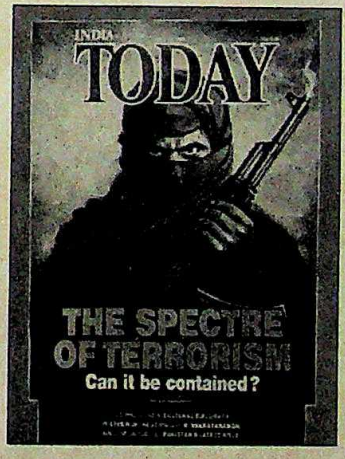
PHOTOGRAPHER PRAMOD PUSHKARNA *(then 27) was at the* National Herald *in 1977 when home minister Charan Singh ordered Indira Gandhi's arrest. Pushkarna rushed to Mrs Gandhi's Willingdon Crescent residence to photograph the high drama that ensued for several hours. His pictures of that event were used by* INDIA TODAY, *and he was quickly inducted on to the magazine's staff.*

Last fortnight, when President Zail Singh gave Pushkarna the Durga Ratan Award for his excellent photographic coverage of the event, it was belated recognition of Pushkarna's penchant for the action spots, his ability to get to vantage points when others are still struggling to get the best angles, and his fearlessness even when there is clear danger from an angry mob.

Pramod Pushkarna receiving the award

A lively member of the INDIA TODAY *team, a veteran in covering the tragedies of Punjab and Assam, communal riots and key elections, and an individualist to the core, Pushkarna is the sort of photographer who can be relied on to use his initiative in a developing situation—a strength for any newsmagazine. Says he: "Such awards are recognition of the growing role of news photography."*

LETTERS



TACKLING TERRORISM

Your cover story ("The Spectre of Terrorism", July 31) was an excellent piece of well-researched reporting. So far, all Ribeiro's moves have proved counter-productive and his threats only egg on the terrorists to kill further. Even President's rule has failed to achieve anything. Before its imposition, Doordarshan used to telecast the daily toll of deaths in Punjab. Now, it is silent.

Batala **BILBAR SINGH DHUDIAL**

■ Your article sent shivers down my spine. The scourge of terrorism must be wiped out from our country but the mere arming of the police and the military will not do the job. We must strengthen our intelligence network so that terrorist hideouts can be infiltrated.

Pune **S.K. DAS**

■ The recent massacres in Punjab prove that the bullet-for-bullet formula won't work in countering Sikh terrorism. The answer lies in the Government's skill in persuading the terrorists to come to the negotiating table.

Kanyakumari **P. VIJAYACHANDRAN**

■ The visits of VIPs to the sites of killings, false assurances, bandhs and agitations in protest against the administration's inefficiency are not going to stop the terrorists. It is the lack of determined political will that is helping terrorism to assume cancerous proportions in the state.

Saharanpur **NARENDRA A. PANT**

■ Your analysis of the Punjab situation was thought-provoking. It is be-

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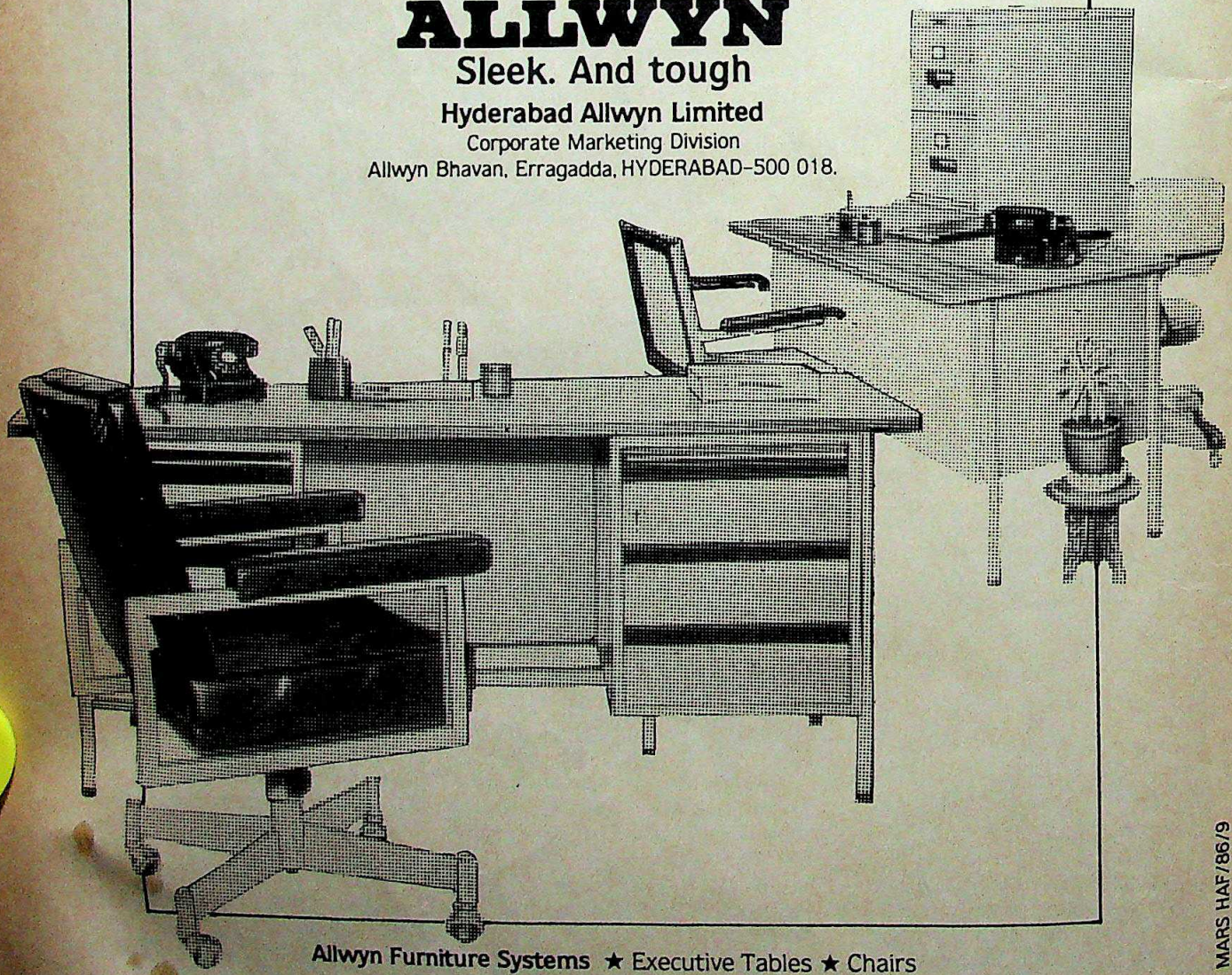

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coming increasingly evident that the police and the paramilitary forces are ineffective in curbing extremist activity. Yet, it is only after eliminating the hardcore terrorists that the Government can move towards a political solution.

Bombay — ROBIN PALARAMB

■ Your choice of headline was very fitting. In the old James Bond movies, 'Spectre' was an enemy of the state. The word was an acronym for 'Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion'. And, in Punjab, there are many such spectres, taking on the might of the state.

Baroda — AMIT LOIWAL

DESERVING AWARD

You have mentioned in the column Signpost ("Eye-catchers, July 15), that Dr Salim Ali received the Paul Getty award for his discovery of the baya weaver bird. But actually he received it for his outstanding contribution to the cause of conservation. He did not discover the baya bird but only did a study of its breeding patterns.

Darbargadh, Gujarat — SATYAJIT KHACHAR

QUESTIONABLE VALUES

Your special report on Karnataka ("A Disillusioned State", July 31) implies that, for many, Ramakrishna Hegde is the 'god that failed'. Yet, all along, his value-based politics really worked according to politically-based values. Corruption, casteism, group infighting—you name it, all have the Janata touch.

Bangalore — B. SURESH KUMAR

■ The events in Karnataka and the compulsions of the man who leads it have been put in the right perspective. Hegde gives elusive and superficial answers—like saying that corruption in the state is chicken-feed compared to that found at the Centre. His value-based stance is mere political propaganda.

Bombay — S.M. DINNI

DESPOTIC RULE

Your critical analysis of MGR's regime ("A Decade of Decay", July 31) proves that, in recent times, no government has done so much damage to the social and economic environment in any state as has the Tamil Nadu Government. The charismatic leader who is feared by his own ministers, who has broken his promises to the people and who seems to have no concern with the real problems of the state will leave behind only a suffering public.

Madras — FRANKLYN STANLEY

■ MGR has gained his position of total dominance in Tamil Nadu by exploiting the sentiments of the illiterate, poor rural people who lack political consciousness and do not comprehend what is happening in the state administration. His government can only give them short-sighted schemes. The opposition parties must start a campaign to show the masses the reality behind the facade.

Tiruvannamalai — S.A. BASHA

SOVIET SCENE

Recently, the Festival of India in the USSR was inaugurated with much fanfare ("Cultural Diplomacy", July 31). Ostensibly, the purpose of such a festival is to create an awareness about Indian culture and bring the two countries closer together. The festival is also undertaken at the risk of damage to our priceless artifacts and paintings when they go abroad. To take this risk is highly questionable in view of the fact that Indo-US relations have not tangibly improved since we held a festival in the US.

Kolhapur — NILESH KORGAONKAR

■ You have rightly assessed that the 'tighter bear hug' by the Soviets means that Rajiv—with all his problems—is here to stay. At crucial times of her regime, the USSR proved a valuable ally to Mrs Gandhi, especially on occasions when the US let her down. Despite the initial euphoria in the American press about Rajiv's efforts to close the Indo-US rift, it is once again the USSR that has supported Rajiv in his time of need. It seems history does repeat itself.

Calcutta — DEBASHISH BOSE

ANIMAL ANGUISH

It is sad to read about the stress and strain encountered by animals in the Delhi zoo ("The Stress Syndrome", July 31). Even in captivity, animals have to suffer from human cruelty.

Coimbatore — N.P. LAKSHMINARAYAN

■ All animal lovers rue the needless torture animals are subject to in zoos all over the country. It is terrible to see visitors harassing the caged creatures. It is high time zoo authorities took stern action against offenders.

Calcutta — ANJANA SINHA

FAULTY IMAGE

Your analytical cover story ("Crisis of Leadership", July 15) reveals that no government that tries to hoodwink the public can last for very long. As long as Rajiv follows the advice of his aides, who are political novices, he will continue to lose stature.

Eluru, Andhra Pradesh — K. PRADEEP KUMAR

■ Your article pithily underscores the innumerable things that have gone wrong with Rajiv Gandhi and his government. The man who could do no wrong barely 30 months ago now appears incapable of doing anything right. Considering the magnitude of India's problems, we need a leader who is decisive, sagacious and popularly supported. Rajiv fails on all counts.

New Delhi — SUSHIL MEHTANI

CHEAP JARGON

Jethmalani ("Dogged Pursuit", July 15) has finally achieved the cheap popularity that he set out to gain. The prime minister has done the right thing by ignoring his stale and repetitive questions. If the lawyer has any proof to support his allegations, he should come right out with it.

Allahabad — G.S. CHATURVEDI

HUMANE ANGLE

Tears welled in my eyes as I read the poignant stories of the terrorist victims of Punjab ("Terrorism's Human Tragedy", July 15). We have become so indifferent to daily reports about the people killed in the state every day. Your article was a sensitive portrayal of the human grief.

Cambridge — SEEMA BEDI

BOGUS RESEARCH

Your penetrating analysis of the main battle tank programme ("Chinks in the Armour", July 15) clearly brings out the inefficient functioning of the Defence Research and Development Organisation. It is strange that there has been a limited public response to this project, which directly affects our national security. If the engine transmission and gun control equipment to make Arjun is to be imported, it would mean that the only thing the organisation has done in 13 years is the blacksmith's job of welding armour plates.

Chandigarh — COLONEL A.P. SINGH

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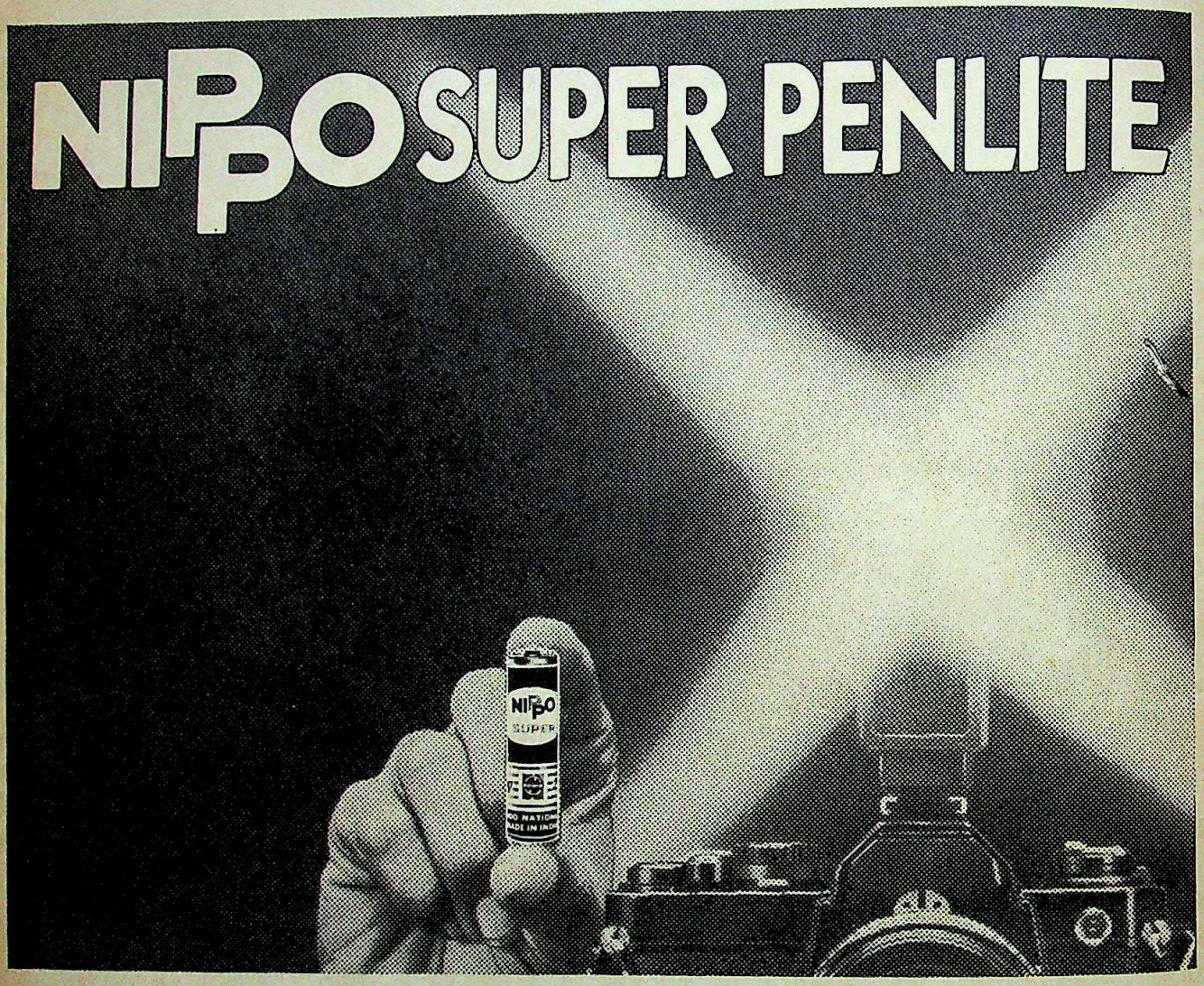
POWERED TO KEEP GOING A LOT MORE



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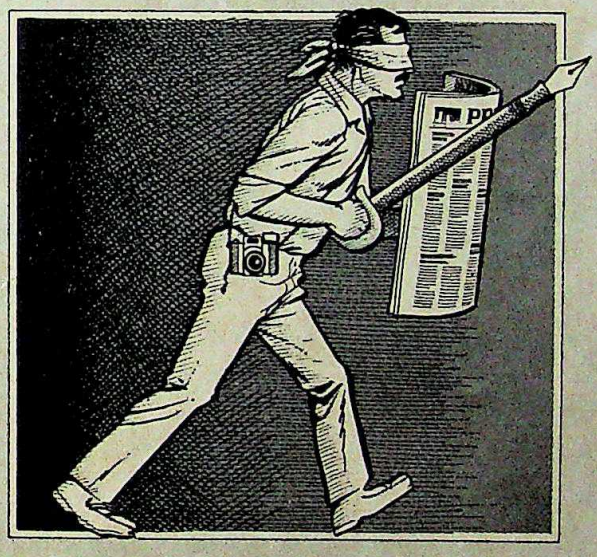
The Credibility Question

WHENEVER there is heightened action of any sort—political, military, economic, criminal, diplomatic—some of the spotlights turn on the press. The quality and reliability of the news that is presented becomes a matter of daily debate, even as there is pressure on the media to rise to the occasion, to score over the next publication. Strong editorial stances are adopted, 'leaks' are planted in order to score points in battle or to wrest advantage, and often the press shifts from the role of neutral observer to active participant, shaping and influencing important events.

All this and more has been amply evident in India over the last several months. The press has been almost a central player in the controversy between the President and the prime minister (pace the publication of the letter from Zail Singh to Rajiv Gandhi), in bringing to light some of the questionable financial dealings of people close to the prime minister, in keeping on the heat vis-a-vis the Bofors scandal, and a great deal else. In addition, news columns on the front pages have been used for editorial slanging matches, while editors and reporters have sought to become personal bit-players in the unfolding drama, running to either Rashtrapati Bhawan or South Block, depending on personal predilections and perceptions of the issues involved.



Meanwhile, the increasing plurality of the Indian press, the steadily escalating battle for gains in circulation, and the plain competition to be one step ahead on the news and to come up with exclusive stories have meant that the press has become livelier, more aggressive, less willing to respect privacy, more willing to adopt a no-holds-barred approach. The ante has been upped even more by the hiring of detective agencies and the mushrooming of snap opinion polls. Even some of the more serious newspapers have started gossip columns of 'behind-the-scenes' news that is often little better than unsubstantiated rumour. Nothing is sacrosanct, and no secret seems safe from journalistic eyes, from superstar tax returns to prices paid on land deals, from imports of swimming pool tiles to telephone calls that a minister makes from his hotel (if that is a worthwhile 'secret' to expose to public gaze).

A great deal of the new, hyper-active existence is legitimate and welcome, and has given the press in India a fresh lease of life. Indeed, as the total readership has grown for newspapers, magazines and the new crop of Sunday newspapers, the power of the press has grown immeasurably. Though television, because of its sheer reach, has become a vastly more important mass medium than ever before, it is the uninhibited press that is making waves. No earlier period of public upheaval saw the press play as lively and inquisitive a role, and never has the press been as influential as it is now.

Unfortunately, this tremendous increase in reach and influence has not been matched by any comparable improvement in professional standards. Too many publications indulge in scurrilous writing, facts are not properly checked out, wild allegations are made without the slightest shred of evidence being presented, and people in public life are charged with the gravest offences and given no chance to present their point of view. Any interested reader of the press can pick out dozens of examples of such writing in recent weeks: headlines concerning ministerial resignations that did not take place, a decision to buy Gulfstream aircraft being linked to the prospect of the prime minister fleeing the country, and so on. Every publication goes wrong at some time, but there are too many instances of irresponsible reporting in recent weeks for them to be dismissed lightly by anyone who has the welfare of the press at heart.

Publications do not as yet seem sufficiently aware of the danger that the exercise of power without responsibility can provoke a strong, negative reaction. Such safeguards as exist against irresponsible reporting are quite inadequate. The libel laws are often weighted against the victims of unfair press criticism, the courts in any case take too long to decide cases, and the Press Council is far from being the effective body it should be. There is perhaps no publication in the country that has an internal ombudsman (as is now becoming the norm in the West), and often the right of reply by an aggrieved person is wilfully ignored in the editorial columns.

It is, of course, true that a free press must inevitably rub the rich and the powerful the wrong way, or else it wouldn't be free. And the press can take some of the credit today for making corruption the central issue in national politics. V.P. Singh, for instance, would have got less mileage with his charge about money being stashed away in foreign bank accounts if the *Indian Express* had not printed a document showing that Ajitabh Bachchan had bought a flat in Switzerland while resident in India.

But recent months have also seen newspapers become part of motivated campaigns, or captive to editorial whim about public issues. This, plus the publishing of unsubstantiated reports, can only damage the bedrock of a free press, credibility. Readers begin to question press reporting, and legislators might become more willing to tighten libel laws than to liberalise secrecy laws. In the ultimate analysis, the best defence is to avoid misuse of the power of publication, and for a growing and increasingly vibrant press to set its own house in order before others feel the need to do it.

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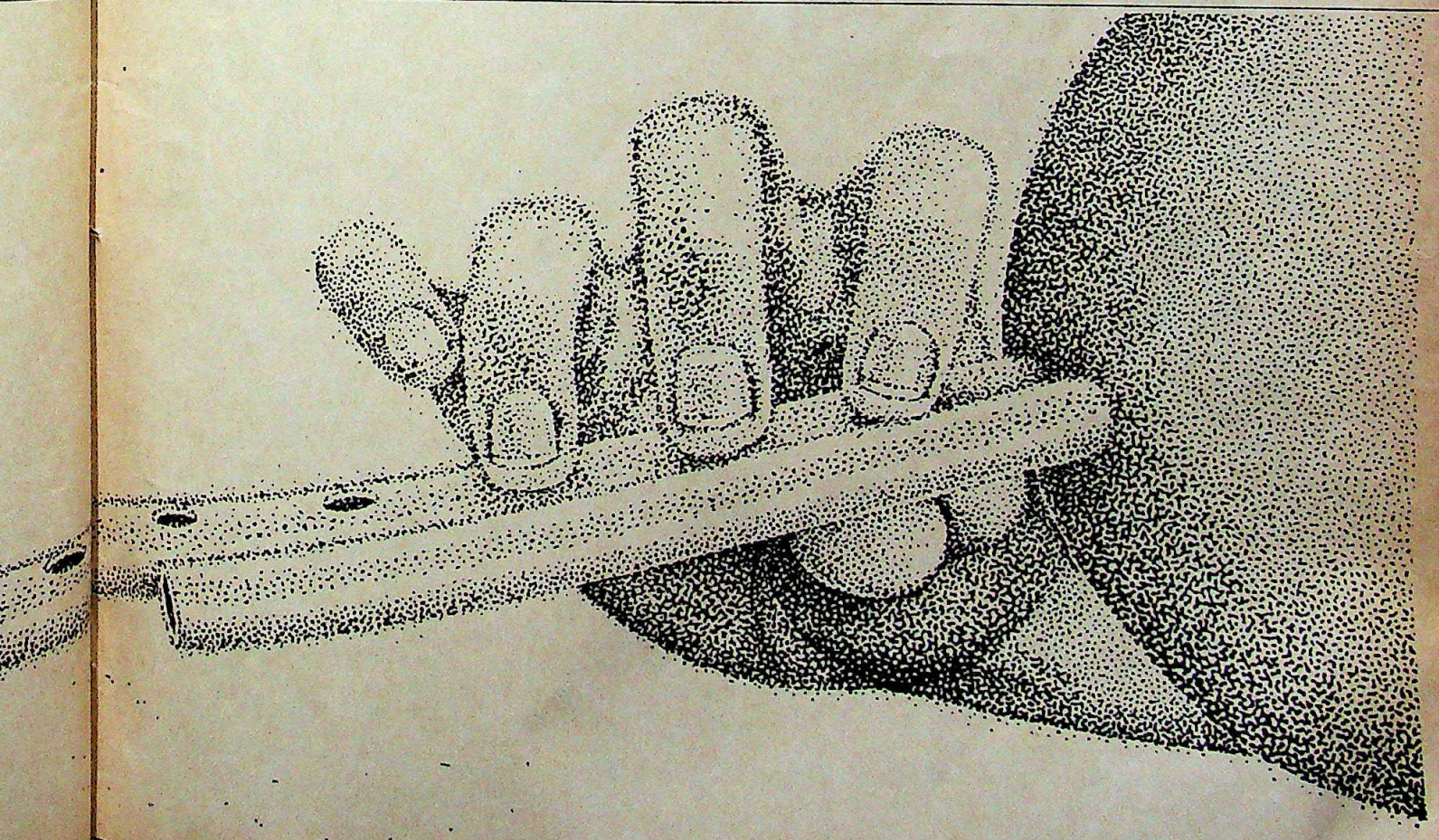

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Bansi Blows

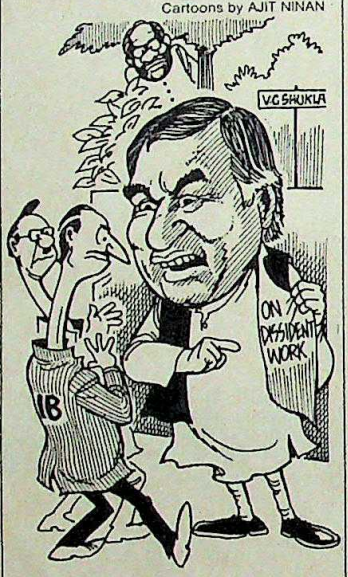
● Bansi Lal, the former chief minister of Haryana, is hopping mad at the prime minister and his advisers. His friends say that Bansi Lal believes that the Central leadership first deceived him and then was responsible for his total political demise. He showed his anger last fortnight in the capital on the occasion of the first meeting of the special committee appointed by the Congress high command to look into the causes of the Haryana debacle. Bansi Lal just refused to show up. When a high-level emissary was dispatched to the erstwhile chief minister's residence to remind him of the meeting, he was informed first that Bansi Lal was shaving, and then that he was sleeping and could not be disturbed. Finally, when the emissary did manage to meet Bansi Lal he was met with an angry outburst. The Haryana leader told the emissary that he had agreed to leave his Central

ministership and take over the reins in Haryana only on the condition that his rival Bhajan Lal would not be rehabilitated at the Centre in any capacity. He reportedly stated that he had received several assurances on this count. But the promises were broken as quickly as they had been made. Today, Bansi Lal's supporters say, he is in no mood to have dealings with a leadership that he feels shamelessly betrayed him.

Snoop Scoop

● The intrepid Arif Mohammed Khan, whose name has now become synonymous with political dissent, appears to have had it up to his ears

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



with the Government's secret service agencies snooping on him. It all came to a boil recently when Khan decided to pay a visit to the house of dissenter-in-arms V.C. Shukla in a VIP neighbourhood in Delhi. Congress(I) loyalist Shiv Shanker's house, which is next door, is packed with a generous complement of IB snoops who stretch their necks out like cranes, each time a caller comes calling at the Shukla home. To save them a crick in their necks, Khan simply drove up to the IB rubberneckers and politely advised them to stop craning their necks. He told them his name, asked them to note down the number of his car, gave them his age and distinguishing marks and told them exactly where he was going and why. Anything more? he asked the dumbfounded IB men. As a parting shot, he gave them a brief lecture on the evils of snooping.

Armed Action

● The floodwaters of paranoia within the Prime Minister's Secretariat have been rising to dangerously irrational levels during the last few scandal-packed months. But what really took the cake last month was the knee-jerk panic reaction in South Block when word leaked out that Giani Zail Singh had invited Chief of Army Staff General Krishnaswamy Sundarji for a meeting. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) promptly reported the matter to the prime minister. Suspicious that some nefarious plot was in the offing, the Prime Minister's Secretariat instructed the IB to sleuth some more and find out whether other armed forces chiefs had also met Zail Singh. The report was negative.

As it later turned out, Giani Zail Singh was merely seeking information on the border situation in the Northeast. Still suspecting the worst—perhaps a coup by western command—it was

decided to move some troops of northern command to Meerut. And in what may or may not have been a related decision, the Government, during that very week, announced a generous pay and perks package for army officers, a decision that had been hanging fire for months.

Patriotic Pitch

● The celebration of the Nehru centenary and India's 40th year of Independence may turn out to be another bread-and-circuses type elitist *tamasha* if some of the cultural neophytes planning the programmes have their way. Among the suggestions put forward are: *prabhat pheris* or bands of wandering minstrels

who will sing patriotic songs every dawn in places across the country; sales of mini-flags in bazaars; installation of Nehru's statue at Harrow, the public school in England; bringing of earth from patriotic and holy spots across the land to Delhi in urns; and a marathon run, the torch for which will be lit by the prime minister via a solar mirror.

Tailpiece

● Among the more disappointed people in the capital last fortnight was R.K. Dhawan, former special assistant to Indira Gandhi. After playing a key role in preventing Zail Singh from sanctioning Rajiv Gandhi's prosecution, he expected to be re-inducted into the Prime Minister's Secretariat with the rank of additional secretary. But long after other comings and goings had been announced, Dhawan still had not got the call.

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The Times of India

• *It is only newspapers which are writing about dissidence.*
■ ARUN NEHRU, after casting his vote in the Presidential election, quoted in *The Telegraph*

• *The prime minister is forever passing the buck on to others. He has to start behaving like a leader.* ■ ARUN NEHRU, after his expulsion, in *Sunday Mail*

• *The Indian version of democracy has never functioned as a two-party system. In effect, the Congress has provided both the Government and the Opposition, and any great convulsion in the party has meant a crisis for the country.*
■ S. NIHAL SINGH in *The Indian Post*

• *She (Mrs Gandhi) had no trust in him (Rajiv Gandhi)...she told me that he did not have that maturity nor did he have anything in him which would show that he would stick to what he had said.* ■ GIANI ZAIL SINGH in *Sunday*

• *The going has been good...but between the warm response and the hard votes, there is a long distance.*
■ JUSTICE V.R. KRISHNA IYER, quoted in *The Statesman*

• *No prime ministerial regime has ever faced such voluminous charges of corruption—including the prime minister....Unless Rajiv Gandhi goes, the Congress will be ruined.* ■ V.C. SHUKLA after his expulsion

• *I have done nothing except signing my nomination papers. The credit goes to Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao.*
■ R. VENKATARAMAN, on winning the presidential election, in *The Hindustan Times*

• *The message is loud and clear that now any Congressman can be politically hanged even without being given a hearing...Even Godse was not hanged on the spot.* ■ V.P. SINGH, on the recent expulsions of dissidents in the party, in the letter offering his resignation to Rajiv Gandhi

• *If this was the way it was to end—with a whimper—President Zail Singh might as well have spared the country all the ballyhoo that was raised by his 'love letters' to Rajiv Gandhi.* ■ JANARDAN THAKUR in *Onlooker*

• *I am no longer treated as a mentally retarded dumbo...I have changed.*
■ POONAM DHILLON in *Filmfare*

• *Lajoji, frankly, was becoming impossible to live with, making a bid to take over my whole life.*
■ ANEETA KANWAR in *Bombay*

• *The wife has not won. I've given her husband back to her on a golden platter.*
■ REKHA in *Stardust*

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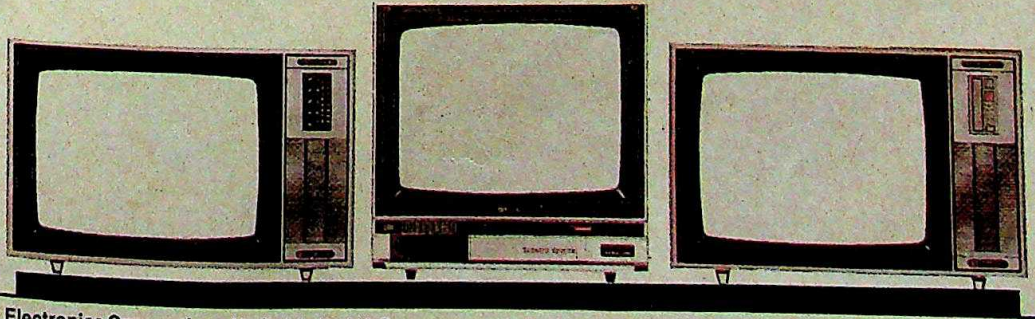

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Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

KIND CONTROL

■ For those who have a chip on the shoulder about getting far more than their just desserts from the police, this particular story has a sweet ending. It is a rather uncommon tale of a civil dressing down by the city's infamous law-enforcers.

A couple of college students, riding home—sans helmets—on a scooter, were naturally hauled up by a group of policemen beside a parked police control room jeep—a routine sight all over night-time Delhi. What the policemen—politely—wanted to know was where the boys were coming from and going to, details of family and such like.

The boys answered their questions, but they didn't think that was going to be all. The standard fine for such offences is Rs 50, and that was the minimum penalty they were expecting. But the policemen were sweeter than that. All they wanted the kids to cough up was 250 gm of sweets. And, as one of them pointed out apologetically, that too was only to make the youths unlikely to repeat the crime again.

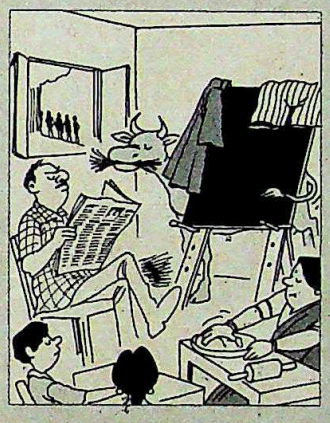
The *burfi* was bought, and the nice-guy cops even offered some of the peace-offering to the culprits. They refused, and moved along. Kind cookies these.

BUSINESS SCHOOL

■ In days of yore, in the *gurukuls*—as they were called—classes were invariably conducted in the great outdoors. In Unchi Lalloi village in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal district, this traditional practice has been going on for the last 10 years. But for a thoroughly modern reason.

Here, students sit under a tree and learn, but only because the schoolhouse has been taken over by the teacher, Jai Singh, who lives there with his family. But that is not all. Singh has even set up a roof-tiles kiln on the school premises.

The minister of state for education has admitted in the assembly that villagers have complained about the unscholarly habits of this teacher. The enterprising Singh had even begun farming in the school. He is also alleged to have charged Rs 5 from each student for mattresses, which never arrived. But what he did buy was a thresher which he used in neighbouring villages during peak season. Obviously, he didn't teach in this period.



Singh has now been transferred and an inquiry started. Let's hope the Government learns from experience before others learn from Singh.

RIP-OFF RIDE

■ Bombay is the Mecca for any number of aspiring Dick Whittingtons—who are all on the lookout for ways to the quickest buck—by hook or by crook. And if perchance, the city is gripped in the throes of a bandh, the natives' enterprise is unbounded. Last fortnight's bandh was, therefore, open invitation to rook those hapless citizens in desperate need for transport.

Thus it was that Santa Cruz Airport, which normally has serpentine queues of taxis waiting with running metres, wore an unusually deserted look because the cabbies feared the Shiv Sena's wrath. Incoming plane passengers were therefore completely stranded.

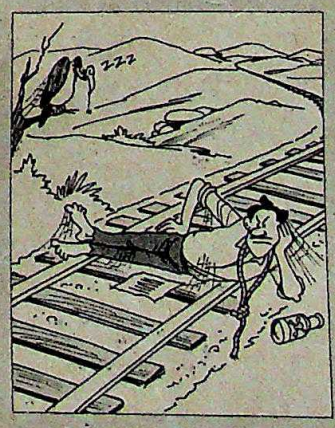
But not for long. One ambulance driver on the make was willing to transport the passengers—for a hefty fee of Rs 50 per head. Some 16 people were crowded in and told to pretend to be ill and keep the curtains drawn. All went well until a mob of suspicious Shiv Sainiks stopped the vehicle and demanded to see the 'patients'.

When the door was opened, 16 hapless people fell out, with all their luggage. The ambulance driver didn't wait, however. He shot away at the speed of sound, leaving his passengers worse off than before. Some ride that.

LIVE ACT

■ 'Never give up' seems to have been the motto of the school that 37-year-old Paranjothi of Sholankuruni in Tamil Nadu went to. Unemployed and tired of life on this earth, Paranjothi decided to move into the netherworld. So, he wrote a farewell note, tied a rope round his neck and hung himself from the ceiling fan. But Yama was not yet ready to receive him, and Paranjothi, instead of slipping away from his world, crashed landed on the floor as the rope snapped.

Disgusted, the young man then tried again. He drank a potent mixture of rat poison and ground glass and sat back on a chair awaiting death. The cocktail, however, was a dampner and Paranjothi recovered with no after-effects.



Still unshaken in his resolve, the youngster changed tactics. He lay down on a railway track awaiting an inescapable end. But as it turned out he miscalculated once again. The train that he was expecting was running several hours late. And all that happened was that he collected around him, an audience of spellbound schoolchildren. Obviously, his time has not yet come.

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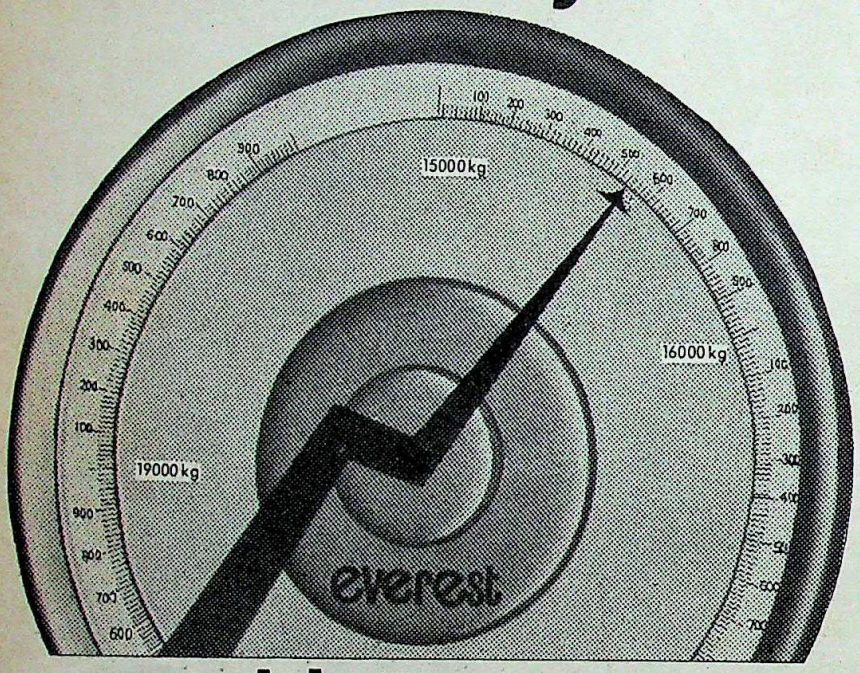

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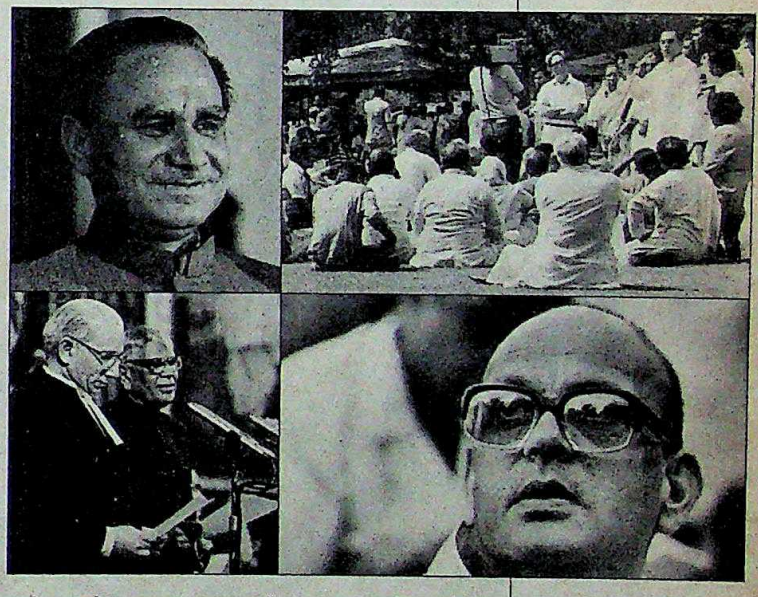
A Sense of Surrealism

WAS it a fortnight? Or a month? Or a millennium? Nothing seems certain any more. There are now no tangibles, only speculation and strife. No facts, only rumours of fact. In just two weeks, India has visibly aged, much more than the 40 years it will celebrate shortly. But little matter. Time is today measured on a political clock, disdaining the digitals. Tomorrow could be a lifetime away.

The current political upheavals could mean nothing. Or everything. The end of a dynasty. Or the beginning of another. A catharsis, a cleansing that is now dangerously overdue. Or a deformation, a drastic devaluation in ethics and political morality.

The images are confusing. Blood and broken glass litter the pathways of politics. Yet, the man who dropped the gauntlet adopts a Gandhian pose. The bookies gather outside Race Course Road while inside, the rent-a-crowds roar hosannas in hypocritical harmony. The Cabinet is depopulated and a reshuffle changes nothing. A political Solomon gets the mines but loses a bigger kingdom. A historic accord with Sri Lanka is announced but the main Tamil militant groups are not signatories to the accord. Logic has lost out to ludicrousness.

The current political upheavals could mean nothing. Or everything. The end of a dynasty. Or the beginning of another. A catharsis, a cleansing that is now dangerously overdue. Or a deformation of ethics.



There is a sense of surrealism in all this, a feeling of unreality. Malice in Wonderland, where kings and knaves parade in protected parody, and men of stature and position indulge in obsequious demonstrations of loyalty. Yesterday's heroes have become today's villains. But tomorrow, who knows? They could be heroes again. A battle is being fought, but with invisible armies. A throne is being contended—but who is the contender?

The only reality is the central issue in all this, an issue that is as ancient as governments themselves—corruption and cover-up in high places. India has been here before, and will again. It has seen, and endured, the sight of vain and venal men masquerading as pious patriots. But there could be something positive in all that is happening. Despite the din and desperate distractions, the central issue has remained unobscured. Corruption has become a national anthem, a rallying cry and a warning. And perhaps—just perhaps—there will now be limits to its abuse, a certain accountability in public life, a reminder of the existence of the greatest leveller of all—the people.

"Where will it all end?" There is irony, and hope, that the question is posed by four ruling party stalwarts. Even bolder, the statement: "This is how Fascism emerged in many countries." Even loyalty has its limits. The street-level at which the current political challenge is being met is, as the four wise men say, a dangerous precedent. Too many have been set already.

There is another wise man, they say, sworn in as the President. Perhaps—just perhaps—wisdom and maturity and statesmanship will return to balance out the opposites, that an office so respected and elevated and so crucial now, will inspire its occupant. There is still plentiful pride in this country and its people and its achievements. What is happening, and being allowed to happen, is an insult to its collective intelligence.

But, as they say, where will it all end? So much has happened in one fortnight, but in agonisingly slow motion, motion without real meaning like the monsoon without the rain. Everything has changed. Nothing has changed.

—DILIP BOBB

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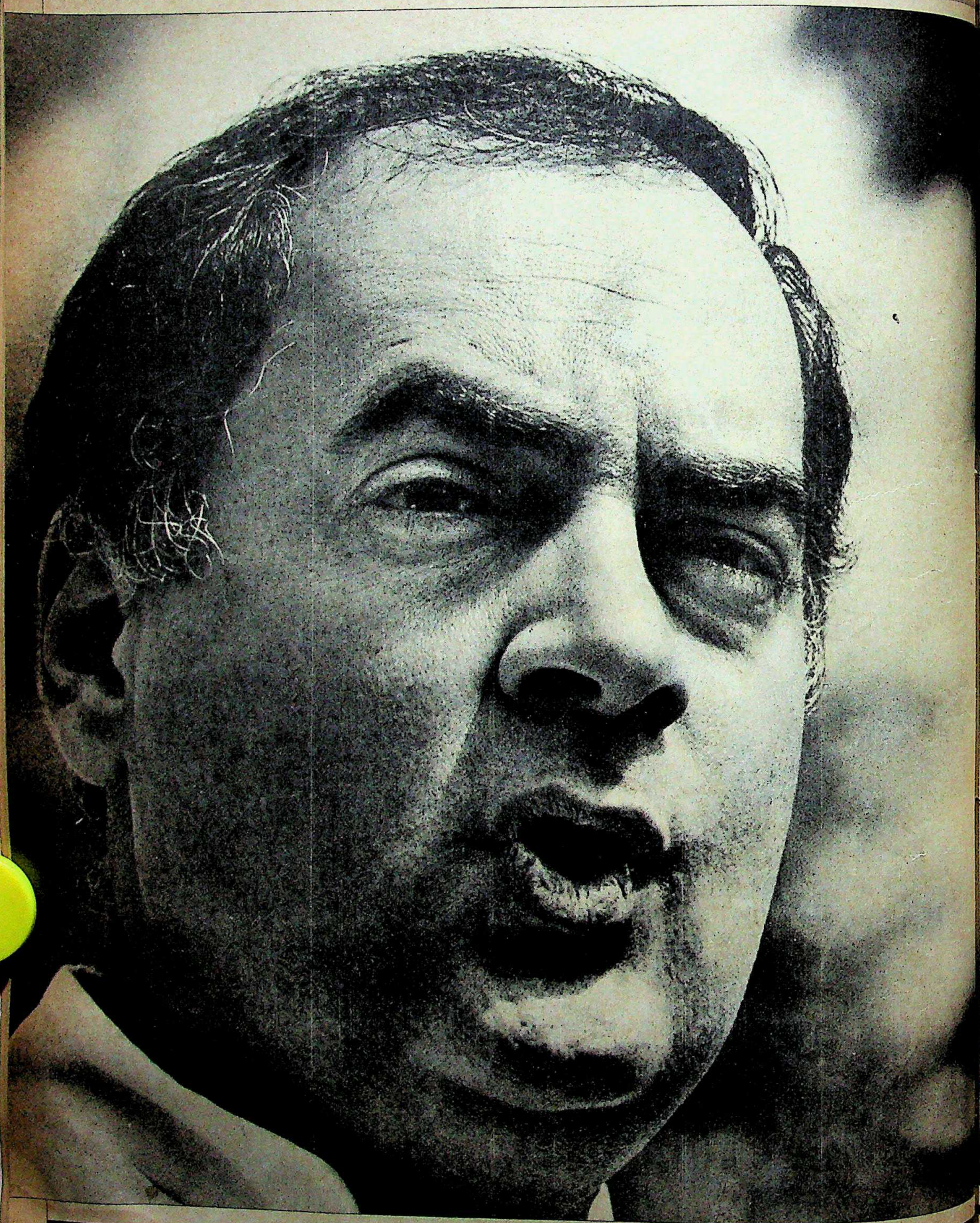

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BHAWAN SINGH

ANGER & CONFUSION

ELIZABETH Kubler-Ross, the noted American psychologist who studied the behaviour of the terminally ill; reported that patients reacted to the news of their suddenly discovered sense of mortality in three extended stages: first, with total disbelief; then, with anger followed by deep despair; and finally, with resigned acceptance. Sometimes, they were saved by miraculous recoveries. For the past several months, this nation, now about to celebrate its 40th year of Independence, has been enslaved by a dizzying pattern of mood-swings. The euphoria of Rajiv Gandhi's early days in office has vapourised into despair and disappointment. Already, it is apparent that the nation is being governed by a man whose judgement, credibility and moral authority seem to have become seriously afflicted.

Today, as the nation watches what appears to be the inexorable spread of the malady in helpless disorientation—a political sickness whose contagion threatens to spread from the Government and spill on to the land—the stage of reaction that has set in is one of anger. Anger and confusion. The idiom of Bofors and kickbacks abroad—of corruption in high places—has already entered the lexicography of everyday parlance. The taxi-driver who refuses to return the change simply tells his passenger: why ask me for it? Why don't you get it from those who have stashed Rs 30 crore in Swiss banks? Anger. But it is anger tempered by dangerous cynicism. When there is corruption in high places and there appears to be no ready-made institutional apparatus to combat it, its cynical acceptance corrupts us all.

There is a sense of frustration all over the land. The main worry in the Prime Minister's Secretariat last fortnight, was not of restoring the confidence of a nation whose political psyche lay battered by the spreading pools of scandals but whether Zail Singh would leave office without taking action against the prime minister. The splitting collective headache among the rulers in Delhi was not about introspection, about what went wrong, about why the prime minister and his associates had misled the people and Parliament about the defence deals and the serious questions surrounding the activities of the Bachchan brothers, about coming clean. It was about devising stratagems to outmanoeuvre their interlocutors in the monsoon session of Parliament. The heartache within the Congress(I) was not about reassuring their bewildered constituents but about how to jockey for new positions in view of the gauntlet thrown by Vishwanath Pratap Singh and his challengers—the ousted quadrumvirate.

In the Irangate and Watergate scandals in a sister democracy, the US, whose Constitution had so influenced India's own founding fathers, the sole question was one not so much of smoking guns and incriminating tapes as one of faith—the refusal of the leader to deal, with intrepid candour, with the people who had reposited their sovereignty in him. This loss of faith propelled people not into obsequious acceptance of their political lot but into demanding investigations. The evidence of wrongdoing came only after investigators, armed with subpoena powers, interrogated people in power under oath and confiscated documents from the Government.

Here, this concept has been stood on its head. Those who have demanded an investigation have been hounded out of the party in a clumsy effort to silence them. The times cry out for candour and openness. Instead, the country is ladled out doses of hurt innocence, puerile propaganda newscasts from a slavish Doordarshan which projects Rajiv as a leader charging at the windmills of destabilisation, stage-managed Congress(I) pep rallies and loyalty oath campaigns that backfire in the minds of a not so gullible public. The stark reality, meanwhile, is the challenge posed by what is rapidly turning into a mass revulsion against corruption. No amount of CIA-baiting, pottering and tinkering with people and positions, or special pujas to remove hurdles, can diminish its vitality. Wait, people say, the prime minister will rise to it. But the wait has been in vain. Where in their hearts the people had reserved a special niche for Rajiv there is now a sense of hurt, of sadness. Never before has a prime minister stood under so glaring a spotlight of public opprobrium with a thousand incriminating fingers pointing at him. He may recover as a politician but, perhaps, not as a leader. For what has already been lost in the tragedy now being played out is the most precious asset of leadership—moral authority.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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POLITICS

POSING A

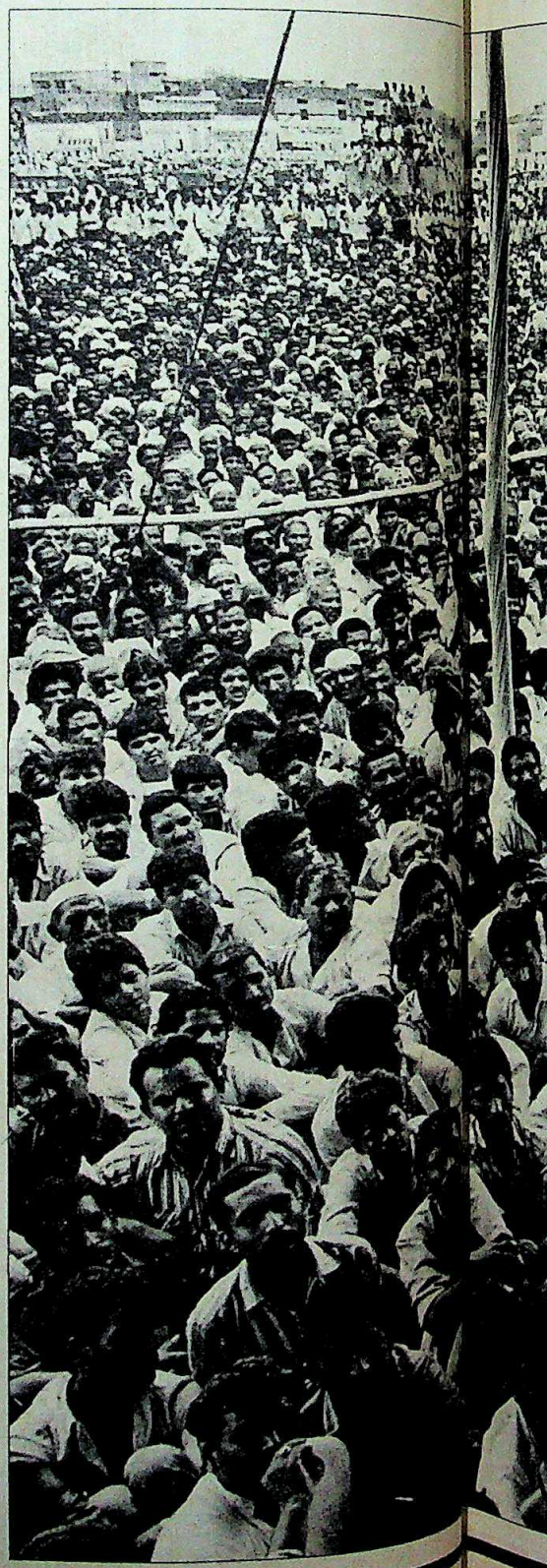
ALL of last fortnight there howled across the land tempests of political turbulence that threatened to shake to their very foundations the Government and the ruling party. The orderly way in which the presidential election was conducted had only been the lull before the storm. The official candidate was in. The much-ballyhooed party revolt had not materialised. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, buoyed, and displaying an air of newfound confidence, decided to get tough and made rapid-fire moves designed to project him as a man of action determined to chase the genies of party dissidence back into their bottles and to rebuild the image of his scandal-coated government. Within a single action-packed week he expelled cousin Arun Nehru and former defence minister V.P. Singh along with others from the Congress(I), forced his friend Amitabh Bachchan to resign from the Lok Sabha, ordered the Finance Ministry to probe the foreign assets of Ajitabh Bachchan, kicked his controversial political aide Makhan Lal Fotedar upstairs into a Union ministership in a minor cabinet reshuffle, and accepted the resignations of two Union ministers—Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and his Doon School friend Arun Singh. And all week, stage-managed pep rallies at Rajiv's residence, demonstrating support for the prime minister, were dutifully relayed by Doordarshan.

The very people whom Rajiv had thought he could shackle into submission now lead a rebellious movement that is fast gaining momentum.

But no matter what he did to salvage the battered image of his government, Rajiv appeared to be thrashing about in a bottomless pool of quicksand. His actions culminated not in bottling up the genie but rather in releasing it completely, and letting it swell to a size that now casts an ominous shadow over the prime minister. For ultimately, the very people—V.P. Singh, Arif Mohammed Khan and Arun Nehru—whom the prime minister had thought he could shackle into submission by throwing them out of the party have now become the unshackled challengers leading a rebellious movement against what they call a corrupt durbar.

While Doordarshan covered the rah-rah-Rajiv rallies at his residence, the real action on the ground had shifted to Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, where for the first time, since their expulsion, the trio, accompanied by Congress MPs Satya Pal Malik and Ram Dhan appeared at a rally of about 50,000 people. The air reverberated with shouts of *V.P. Singh sangharsh karo, hum tumhare saath hain* (V.P. Singh fight on, we are with you) and *Takht badaldo, taj badaldo, baimaano ka raaj badaldo* (change the throne, change the crown, change the rule of corrupt men). Throughout the 120-km-long route from New Delhi to Muzaffarnagar—formerly Choudhary Charan Singh country—the procession of 50-odd cars was mobbed by well-wishers screaming slogans like *Gali gali mein shor hai, Rajiv Gandhi chor hai* (the slogan in every lane is that Rajiv Gandhi is a thief) and *Mr Clean, Mr Clean, gandi kyon hai tope machine* (Mr Clean, why is not the—Bofors—gun clean?)

There was little doubt that in this peasant belt of Uttar Pradesh the Bofors and corruption issues had taken root. What was surprising about the crowd was that it had collected at a time when there were no elections in sight, and that it had not responded to the call of any distinguishable political party. Yet adherents to just about every political party, including Congress(I), were there, wait-



V.P. Singh at Muzaffarnagar: growing support

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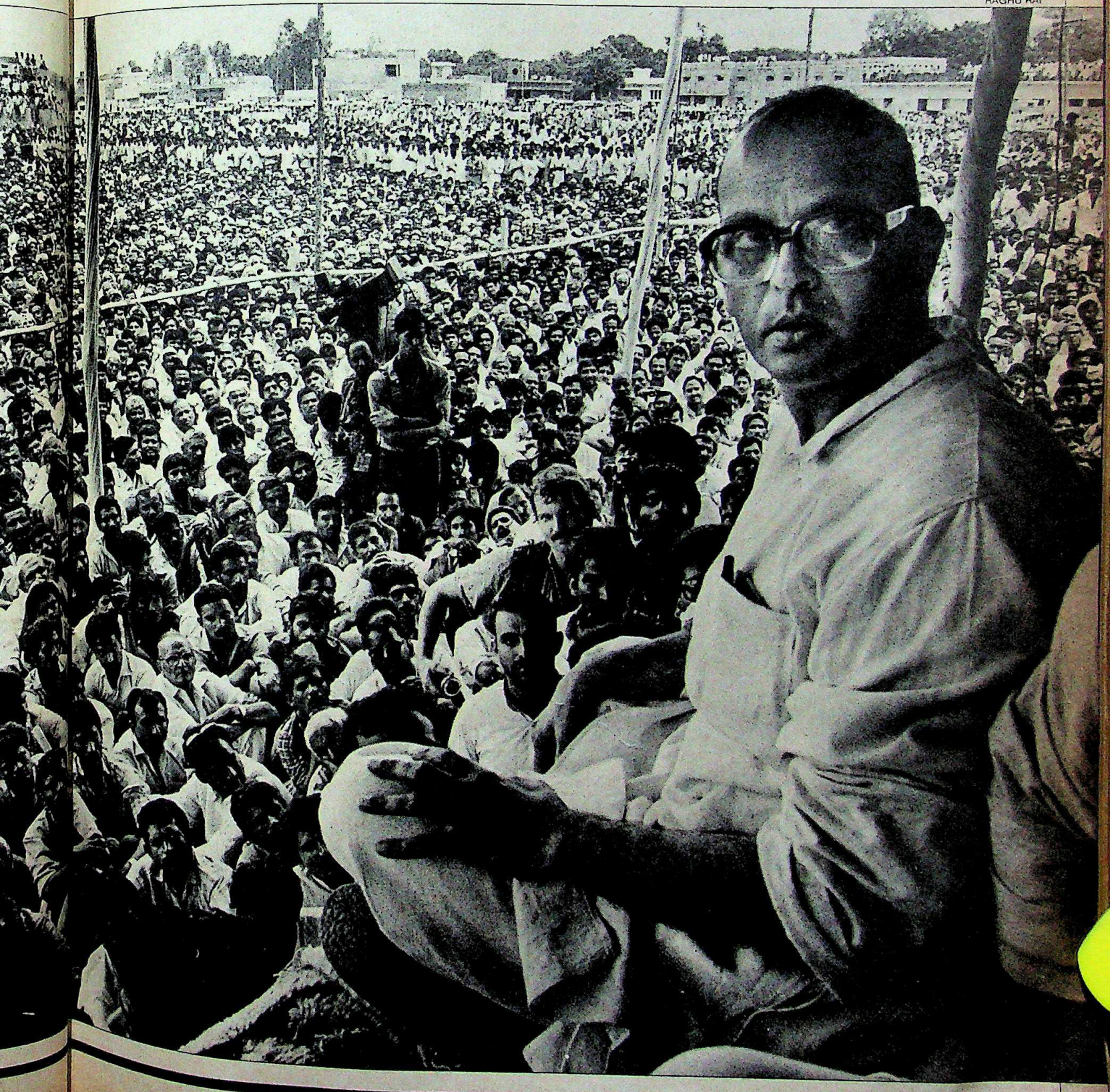
A CHALLENGE

RAGHU RAI



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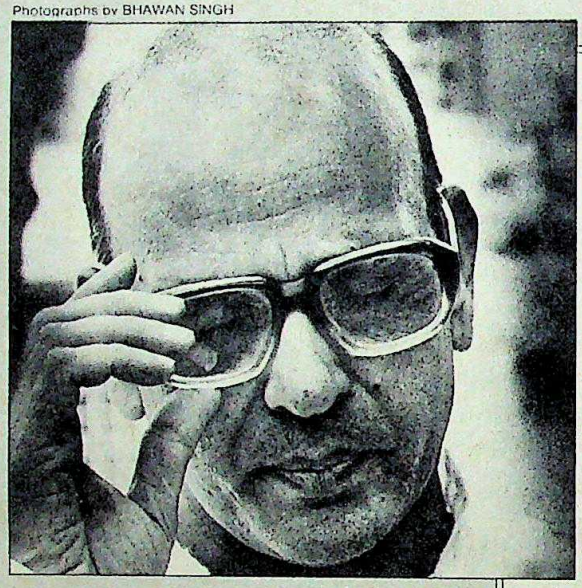
V.P. SINGH

"I have been vindicated"

AFTER his expulsion, Vishwanath Pratap Singh has been in a fighting mood. His newly-shaven head lends a Gandhian aura to his personality and his eyes sparkle with crusading intensity. But in speech he is low key and deliberative as he describes the parameters of what he calls his "movement". Excerpts from an interview with Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA:

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH



Q. Wherever you go, people have been urging you to do something. They feel, that you are not doing anything concrete, that you turn back.

A. You no longer need have any doubts on that.

Q. But where has the campaign led you?

A. My stand is vindicated. I raised the issue of economic offenders and assets abroad, Swiss banks, defence deals and I made public the submarine deal. People in the Congress(I) pounced on me.

Q. How has that changed?

A. The report on Bofors, that Rs 50 crore was paid as commission, has vindicated my stand. The final vindication of my stand came when Rajiv ordered an inquiry into the Swiss deals of Ajitabh Bachchan.

Q. But hasn't Rajiv done the right thing?

A. There was a motivated attack on the civil servants who had worked for me. Vinod Pande and Bhure Lal were grilled by the CBI about their inquiry into the affairs of the Bachchans.

Q. Was this with Rajiv's knowledge?

A. Of course. I personally brought this to his notice, but nothing happened. The intelligence agencies were reporting back to him. Finally, he has had to order an inquiry.

Q. But he's done what had to be done.

A. Inquiries must produce results. Look at Win Chadha. First, he was allowed to escape and then, when the Government was looking for him, he appeared at our embassy in the US and just walked away again.

Q. Is Rajiv involved?

A. I do feel that after this evidence on Ajitabh, some pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are falling in place, in retrospect. In an interview, Rajiv had said that there is no evidence against Amitabh and Ajitabh. Amitabh has said, that whatever they did was with the full knowledge of Rajiv. And now, there's concrete evidence that he bought property in Switzerland.

Q. Are you saying that Rajiv is in collusion with them?

A. This needs clarification.

Q. Is your faith in Rajiv shaken?

A. I am relieved of the burden of having to call him my leader.

Q. Has this shaken your faith in him?

A. Yes, this evidence has shaken my faith. With Ajitabh and Amitabh being so close to Rajiv, it is difficult to say how much they shared.

Q. What do you expect of the inquiry?

A. If they arrest Ajitabh, it will mean something.

Q. How do you feel at this juncture?

A. I'm concerned with the issues. I absorbed the wild allegations against me. I'm given a clean chit. And, as soon as I give a letter asking for an inquiry, I'm expelled as being anti-party.

Q. Are you saying that being anti-Ajitabh is being anti-party?

A. You can see that from the expulsion.

Q. Are you in revolt against the Congress(I)? Will you start a new party?

A. I'm not in the Congress(I) any more. I'm concentrating on the issues and will push them to wherever they take me. I will not form a new party. The process has to be political. One needs a political platform but not a party.

Q. How will you form a government?

A. I will continue to exert pressure on this government, to do what has to be done through the mobilisation of the masses.

Q. Will you accept office in a new government.

A. I will not.

Q. What if the Government concedes your demands on the inquiries? Will you withdraw the movement?

A. I will welcome their coming around to my position. But there are other issues on which I will continue to

"I was relieved of the burden of having to call Rajiv my leader...and I will continue to exert pressure on this Government, day after day."

"I feel the Congress(I) leadership should seek a fresh mandate. If one loses the moral authority to govern, continuation in office will not yield any good for the country."

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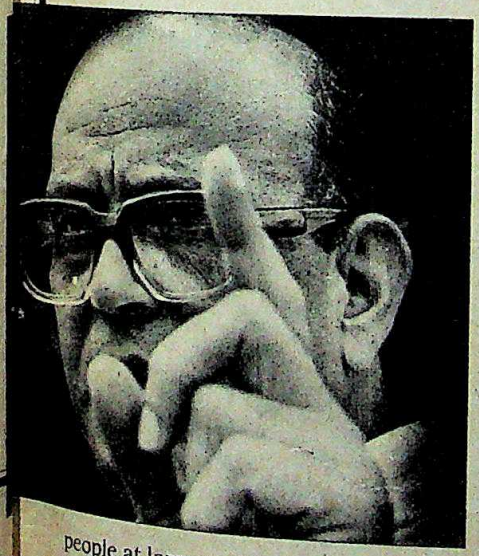
fight, such as the betterment of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, curbing undemocratic influences, improving industrial relations and labour participation in management, fighting for an amendment to the Constitution to make panchayat, block and municipal elections compulsory so that no chief minister can play truant.

Q. *How long are you going to continue your campaign? Are you in favour of a mid-term poll?*

A. The massive mandate which the Congress(I) received has become meaningless. People voted for change and clean government. But recent events have totally eroded the Government's credibility. I feel the Congress(I) leadership should seek a fresh mandate. One cannot stick on only because of a brute majority. If one loses moral authority to govern, continuation in office on the basis of parliamentary support will not yield any good for the country.

Q. *What is your position on party funds?*

A. Money exercises a non-democratic influence on the political process. The funds should be raised from the



people at large so there is no one nodal point of economic power.

Q. *But isn't money essential to politics?*

A. One always needs money. But the way it is raised distorts not only politics but also the economy because of special patronage which is aimed at squeezing out competitors from the market-place. We need to make the market more efficient by giving it the benefit of equal competition. When government policy is influenced by money from special quarters only, the pressures push the Government into a variance with the welfare of the people and public interest.

Q. *So your campaign is aimed at more than just fighting corruption?*

A. Fairness in the economic sphere is a bigger issue than just corruption. The whole system is misaligned. Moralistic standards are irrelevant in this issue. The spender is not morally higher than the giver.

Q. *But doesn't this encompass massive decentralisation?*

A. Yes, in all spheres—financial, administrative. The structure must start from below. It has to be organic. We have to develop. We need industrialisation. But it must be harnessed to national goals with an impetus to industry and a revival of the small-scale sector.

Q. *But hasn't the Government itself burdened entrepreneurs with so many regulations—largely for the sake of raising political funds—that honest people find it hard to operate?*

A. That's also what I'm talking about when I say decentralisation. There must be more liberalisation in the area of unnecessary licences and quotas. But even the industry must be subservient to the social process.

Q. *The legislature is a slavish extension of the executive. How do we make the executive more accountable to the legislature?*

A. This is because, in the matter of election funding, there is a high dependence of elected representatives on the leadership within a party. My programme, calls for greater intra-party democracy.

Q. *How do you ensure that funds raised for elections will not be misspent?*

A. I am calling for compulsory audits on a regular basis.

Q. *But will this affect only the election process?*

A. No, money is not only given at the time of elections, but also later to change the policy process.

Q. *But if you have state funding, you can still use it to change policy.*

A. The new system gives hope. If your funding is from the national sector, the party's interest will be national. If it is from foreign sources, then the pressures will be anti-national.

Q. *Your goals and objectives seem to be rather vague.*

A. The farmer understands me and my language perfectly.

ing patiently for the challengers for more than four hours on a blistering day. And they had come on foot, by buses which they had chartered with their own donations, and in hundreds and hundreds of tractors from all over the state despite the imposition of Section 144 in the area. They were clearly a serious, angry and committed lot. Said Uday Bhan Singh of Baghpat: "I'm here simply to exhort V.P. Singh to continue to expose the *beimaans* in Delhi." Echoed Ahmed Zamir of Muzaffarnagar: "We are placing our hope in V.P. Singh for honesty." Block District Committee Congressman Dr Rajpal Singh added: "The condition of the state is dishonest and we must fight it. We didn't elect Rajiv to steal our money. The bugle has now been blown." Everywhere, it was the same refrain. And most people excoriated the Government's inability to contain communalism.

In the city's inter college maidan, there were no bullet-proof screens for the speakers, including Nehru, whose Black Cats were confined to positions out of sight. And there was not a single club-wielding policeman. Yet the crowds were patient and orderly. It was a people's affair. Only once did the crowds get unruly and that was when news spread that Singh and his party had arrived. Almost maddened with frenzy, the crowd leaped to its feet chanting, shouting, and screaming. They jostled and fought, and climbed over one another to touch, to shower petals at, to get a glimpse of the dissident leaders. The speeches from the podium were low-key. There were no attempts at rabble rousing. The speakers made it clear that their business was serious and that they stood for orderly and calibrated change and were not interested in short-term gains.

Malik, who spoke first, made a strong pitch against communal violence, which he said had spread hatred between "brother and brother in the last two years". Nehru said that he and his colleagues would not be intimidated by Congress(I) attacks on them because "we have the people's *shakti* behind us. Governments shouldn't run for the benefit of 10 people but for everybody." Ram Dhan said that the public had marched far ahead of its leaders and now it was for the leaders to fall in line, if they wished to survive. Arif, in an impassioned speech said: "Every day on Doordarshan I see people laughing. What are they laughing about when people are dying in Meerut, the hunger for bribes is growing at high levels and the unity and integrity of the land is being sacrificed?" Rajiv, he said,

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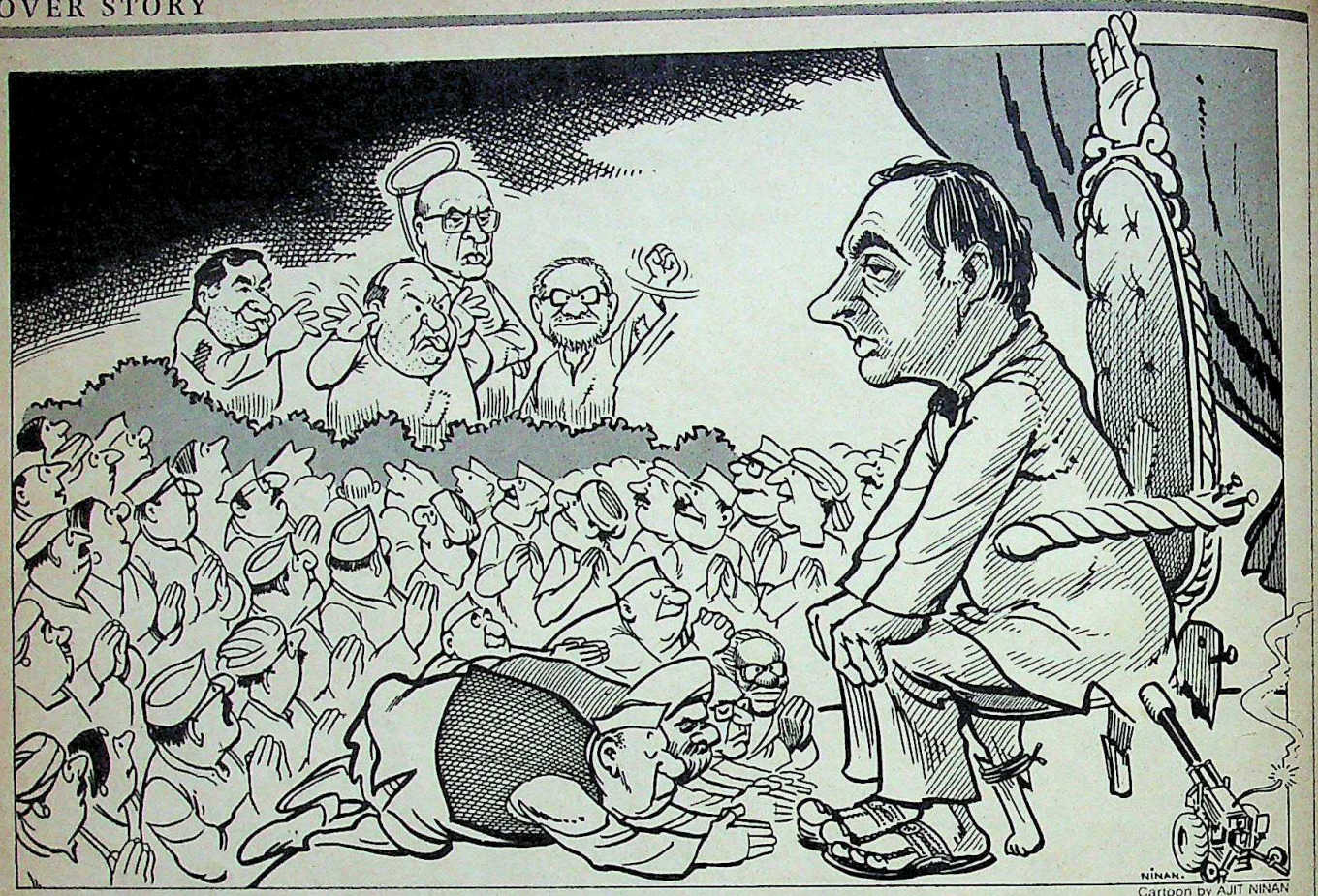

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

was like a hijacked pilot who had changed course. "But the people fighting corruption will never change course." A prize catch for the dissidents was kisan leader Sharad Joshi, who spoke to thunderous applause of the raw deal being given to farmers all across the land. But it was for Singh to fire up the crowd. He started with local farm issues, talked about decentralisation and democracy and explained the Bachchan and Bofors issues in detail. "My only fault," he said, "was sharing this information about corruption with the public," he said. And the crowd responded, *V.P. Singh aur bhanda phoro, aur bhanda phoro.* (V.P. Singh expose more scandals).

ONE thing was clear. Each of the speakers from among the challengers is a consummate orator. And each, as if according to a carefully prepared script, tells a different part of the story. Singh and his associates have been stressing that their movement is a new freedom struggle for the people. And within this politically symbolic reference point their carefully-crafted subliminal message to the people is that Singh, with his vow to renounce public office is the latter day Gandhi, Nehru is Patel. Arif is Maulana Azad, Malik is Charan Singh and Ram Dhan is Dr Ambedkar. Singh, though not a Kathiawari bania is a Rajput but with a clean Gandhian image. Ram Dhan is a widely respected Harijan leader, Arif is known as a principled yet scrappy Muslim leader who is acceptable to the Hindus because of his stand on the Muslim Women's Bill but to whom now Muslims also look to for support because of their alienation with Rajiv's Government after the Meerut riots. Malik is a Jat with a sizeable following in the western Uttar Pradesh belt. Nehru is an accomplished manager and the only dissident with family links to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Combined with V.C. Shukla they can considerably erode the Congress(I)'s base in the Hindi belt, which sent about 250 MPs to the Lok Sabha. They play well-defined roles. Arif has been assigned to handle the media while Nehru has taken over as the behind-the-scenes strategist and fund-raiser. Ram Dhan has already begun to mobilise Harijan support while Malik's immediate task is to bring in Jat support.

The foursome hold a daily late-evening meeting at Singh's residence where they chalk out future strategies. They have earmarked some 200 Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies across the states they will visit during the next few months. The gameplan is to find alert local leaders to identify the particular problems of each constituency. And during their visits, the dissident leaders plan to start with local issues and then link them to national corruption issues. This is what they did in Muzaffarnagar. Singh, just before his visit there, had threatened to gherao the collector's office if farmers were not given enough electricity for their pumps during the sowing period.

Perhaps the most telling point that the challengers had scored at Muzaffarnagar was that the V.P. Singh wave had become a phenomenon unto itself: it exists not because of the Congress(I) but despite it. What Singh in all his interviews—and what appeared earlier as pious proselytizing—had not been able to convey with lucidity was hammered home during a happening that was compelling and visceral. The medium finally had become the message. During his earlier rally at Hardwar he had begun to show maturity, and a sense of purpose. And the development of these two qualities had not been lost on the Congress(I) leadership. It became panicky.

Before the Hardwar meeting Rajiv had sent several peace feelers to Singh through various intermediaries. He was

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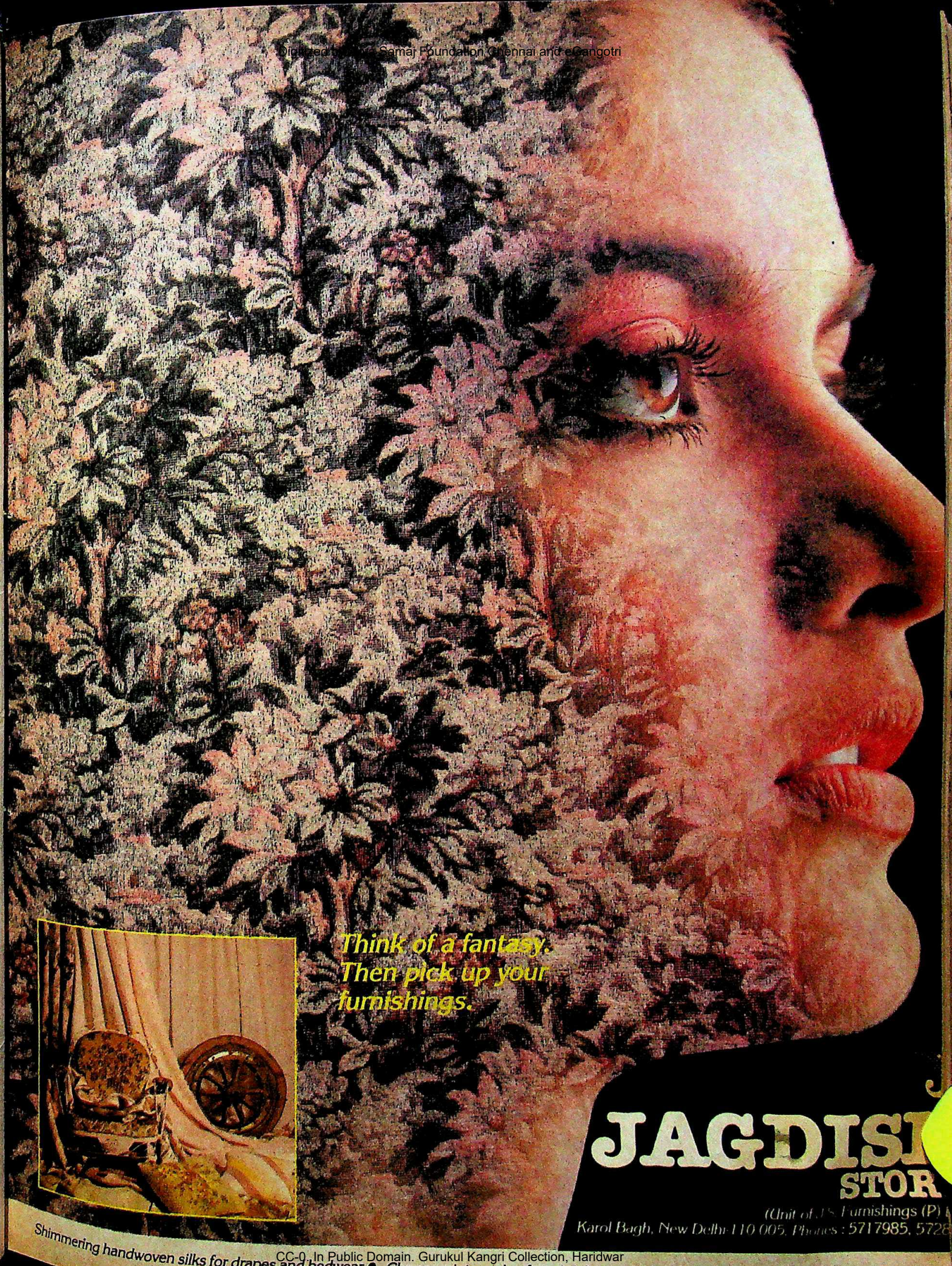

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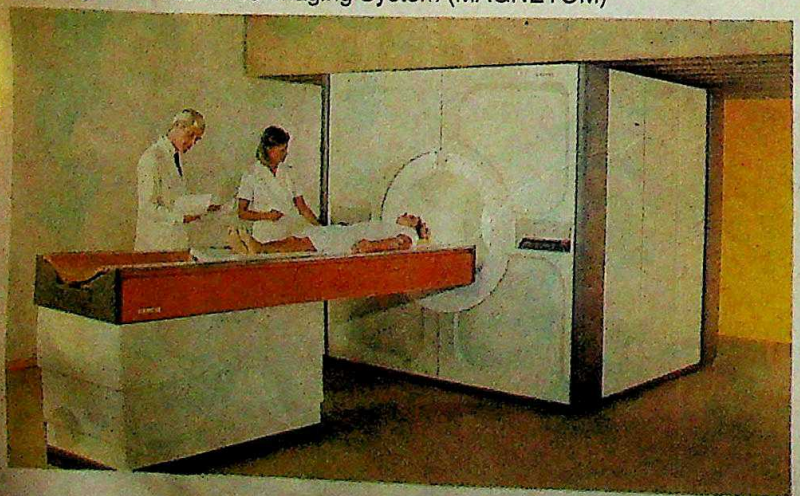

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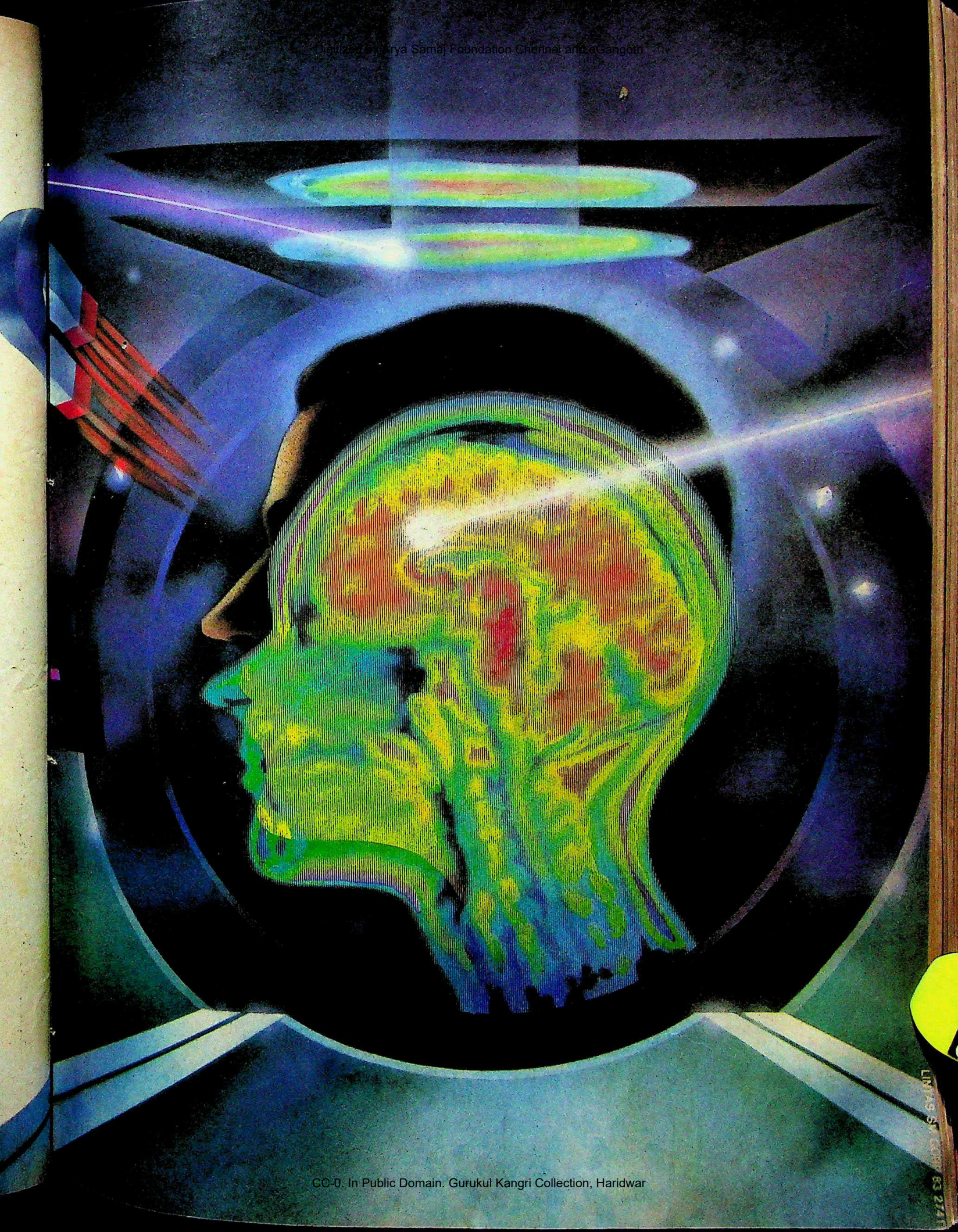

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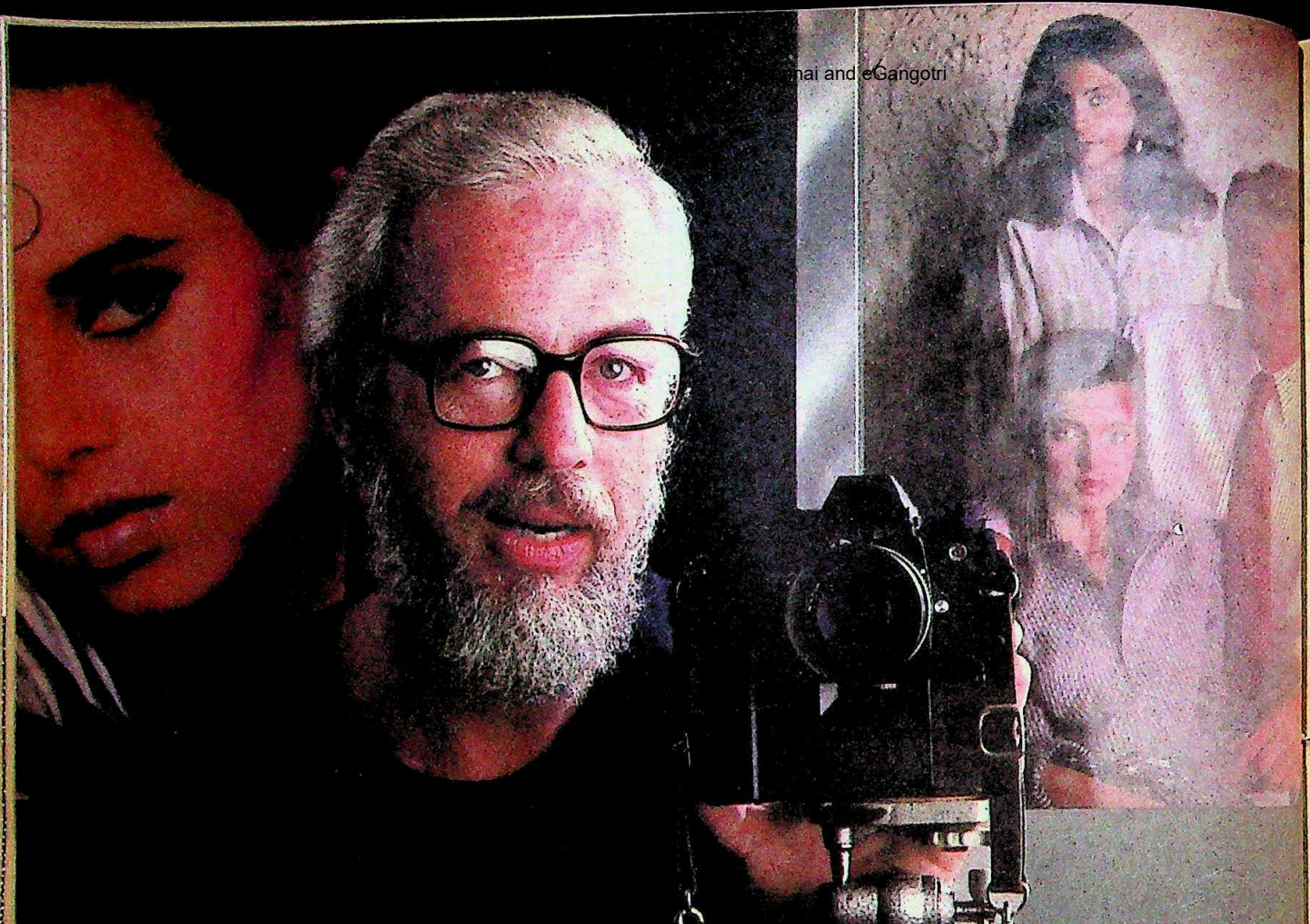

He works with some of the loveliest women in India

One photograph by Glamour Photographer Adrian Steven, says more about a beautiful woman than a thousand words.

Adrian transforms the fashion model from a mere clotheshorse to a warm, intelligent, exciting woman, one who celebrates the glamorous life. That she is beautiful to boot merely adds to her desirability.

With what does Adrian work his wizardry?

A battery of cameras, though his favourite format is the 35mm, which he says gives him the sharpest results.

I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica color film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film., Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

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offered another cabinet post and even asked whether he would consider becoming party president. But with the presidential poll out of the way, and after the Hardwar meeting convinced the party leadership that an alternative power centre had emerged from within, Rajiv took swift and surgical action. His advisers figured that the surest way to isolate Singh from support within the party was to expel Nehru, Arif and Shukla, and thereby break up the dissident gang. The thinking was that this would accomplish two results: it would serve as a warning to partymen not to associate with the dissidents; and it would prevent Singh from staging other rallies in the company of the expelled partymen because then he too would face the charge of condoning anti-party activities. And if he was expelled later on, it would be because he had violated party discipline and not because of his campaign against illegally stashed foreign funds and the nexus between industrialists and politicians. They also figured that the raja would lose his nerve as he had appeared to do in the past.

But Singh pulled off a masterful stroke that sent his opponents scurrying like a bunch of headless chickens. He had finally thrown the gauntlet. The challenge was now in black and white. They had not expected him to send in his now-celebrated conditional letter of resignation excoriating the leadership for stifling legitimate dissent, and challenging it to determine who was anti-party and anti-national, the people who wanted to expose illegally stashed money abroad or those who wanted to cover up the issue. This placed the leadership in a dilemma. If they accepted his resignation, it would mean that he was resigning on legitimate principles, as a conscientious objector. If they kept him in, it would be tantamount to legitimising his stand and giving him a platform from within the party in which case he would surely demand that the expelled "dissidents" be returned to the party fold as well, since their only crime had been associating with him. And if they expelled him, they would martyr him and add verisimilitude to his argument in his letter that the party had become authoritarian and intolerant of differing points of view.

From another tactical standpoint, instead of having isolated him from the dissidents as the leadership had hoped, Singh had swung into the opposite direction as it did the impression that the ship had indeed begun to sink.

Arun Singh: breaking away

The school buddies had jumped into politics at the same time in 1982 and Singh had come to be known as Rajiv's most dependable back-room voice. His resignation thus hit Rajiv with the force of a betrayal.

His going has graver political overtones than that of V.P. Singh and others. It could not have been more ill-timed: Rajiv is almost under siege today. It landed on his desk on July 15 but was accepted only three days later after a meeting between the two. As an afterthought, Singh issued a statement swearing loyalty to Rajiv. Asserting that he had resigned due to undisclosed personal reasons, Singh said: "My action is not connected with my former responsibility in the Ministry of Defence."

Few believed that. Singh's supporters said he decided to quit on discovering major financial irregularities in defence deals—including Bofors—which Rajiv prevented him from investigating. Apparently at Rajiv's behest, Singh had invited a high-powered team led by a Bofors vice-president. It is claimed that Bofors offered to send a team, which Singh told Rajiv about. Rajiv put it to the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs on July 5. The offer was turned down and Singh resigned.

Others dub Singh as a villain, saying he was unwilling to face the House probe into the deal. He had earlier defended the deal and denied that any middleman existed—a position dented by the Swedish Audit Bureau report confirming payoffs. Said a Rajiv confidant: "Arun Singh was looking for an excuse to leave. If he feels the Defence Ministry was a cesspool of corruption, then he was not doing his job properly as well."

Although he may be out now, Singh has stalked the corridors of power as a giant. During the first two years, his shadow dominated the prime minister's office, first as chief parliamentary secretary and then as defence minister, where he reported only to Rajiv. In an order issued by the prime minister in October 1985, all defence officials were directed to route every file through Singh. It was during his control that defence deals worth Rs 4,000 crore were signed—first by him and later by Rajiv. He had eyes and ears to all classified information in the Defence Ministry and other sensitive departments. As such, he must share all the responsibilities that go with it. "Why didn't he resign earlier since he had access to all the information?" asked a senior Congress(I) MP from Uttar Pradesh.

According to sources close to the Centre, the friends had fallen out in January. Rajiv had been slowly sidelining Singh: he was unhappy with him for not briefing him properly on Brasstacks. But what caused the final break were Rajiv's doubts on whether Singh would defend the Government in the defence crisis. But whatever Singh's reasons for resigning, he has left his old friend and neighbour more vulnerable than he has ever been in his troubled years as a prime minister.—PRABHU CHAWLA

ARUN SINGH

Damaging Resignation

SHAKESPEARE could have drafted the lines with Rajiv Gandhi playing Julius Caesar to Arun Singh's Brutus. Last fortnight, when the Union minister of state for defence also walked out on his friend and colleague, it was the unkindest cut of all. Singh was the fifth Union minister to resign in three months but his resignation hurt most, giving

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ARUN NEHRU

"The problem is credibility"

AFTER he was dropped from the Government, and following his expulsion from the Congress party, most people had expected Arun Nehru to go into the political wilderness. But he has made a comeback as a top strategist in the newly-formed V.P. Singh camp. The usually taciturn Nehru, famous for his "no comments", agreed to a lengthy interview with Editor AROON PURIE and Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR.

Q. How do you feel about being expelled by your own cousin from a party your family has been associated with for so long?

A. There is a sadness. We received no letters, not even the AICC(I) knew at the time. Procedures and norms were simply not followed. I really don't know why we were expelled. It remains a mystery.

Q. They said you had indulged in anti-party activities. Do you still feel like a Congressman?

A. That's nonsense. There was no anti-party activity. And I still feel like a Congressman.

Q. Then why did Rajiv expel you?

A. How can I tell what's in his mind?

Q. Did you differ with him?

A. No comment.

Q. Did you appear a threat to him?

A. Ask the Congress(I) president. Look, we learnt our politics from Indira Gandhi and we were taught that we should have nothing to say on individuals. The point at issue is not an Arun Nehru or an Arif Mohammed Khan. But if someone gets up one morning and decides he doesn't like your face, can he be empowered to expel you? Especially in a party that believes in democracy? This frightens the average Congressman who has been taught to believe that differing viewpoints are his strength.

Q. What were your differences?

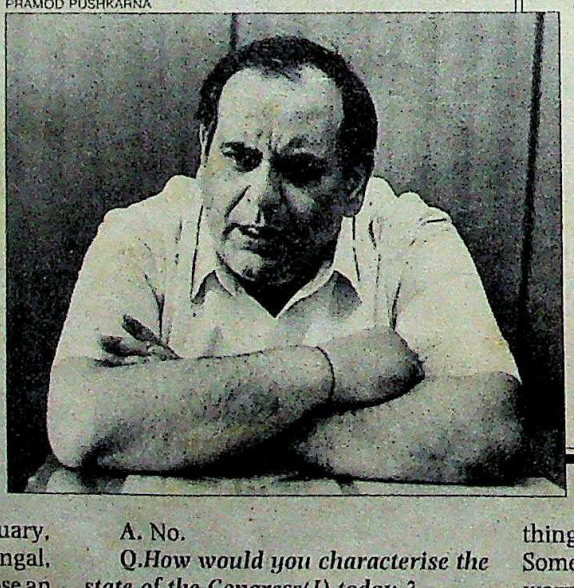
A. It is not relevant now as I have been out of the picture for over a year. Politically, since January, we have fought and lost in West Bengal, Kerala, Haryana. Every time you lose an election, there's no point in having to thump the desk harder and reaffirm loyalty to the leader. Unless you discuss things out, you will keep losing elections and the workers will not have confidence. How can you say in West Bengal, the people loved us but the local organisation let us down? Athough we lost the election it is not the end of the world. In Haryana, all of us knew it was a difficult situation but to get 5 seats out of 87 was out of our imagination.

Q. Why didn't you express your differences through party channels?

A. The trouble is that if you have tea together, the leadership thinks it has a revolt on its hands. If you want the Congress(I) to be strong—and you don't have a Nehru or an Indira Gandhi—you need people who can disagree with you. Mrs Gandhi used to tell us: nobody's perfect. But you must have your own team and your own system. When a system breaks down a single person can't keep holding the flag. The job of the leadership is to create an aura of confidence and delegate responsibility.

Q. So you have no confidence in the Congress(I) leadership?

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



A. No.

Q. How would you characterise the state of the Congress(I) today ?

A. A state of total flux. In spite of having over 400 MPs they seem to be in a total panic after the expulsions.

Q. If you were not expelled, would you fight them from within?

A. Yes. The problem today is the credibility of the leader and the Government. We lost the election in Punjab. That was a chance we took. Then, we lost Assam and Mizoram. But if you tell the average Congressman that the Congress(I) lost but the nation or democracy won, how is it going to make sense to him? He has been taught to believe the Congress(I) is the nation.

Q. But you were in the team then.

A. I take full responsibility. I don't want to pass the buck.

Q. What you're saying is there's a lack of leadership and credibility.

A. A series of things have upset people: the prime minister's visit to the Andamans where he took so many foreigners. This is the kind of thing that upsets the Indian psyche. Someone in his office should have warned him.

"If someone gets up one morning and decides he doesn't like your face, can he be empowered to expel you? Especially in a party that believes in democracy."

"I did not come into politics to melt away. All this about people having no motive except loyalty...is nonsense...If you can order people to show loyalty, it can be very degrading."

Q. Are his friends a problem?

A. No comment.

Q. But couldn't you have brought changes from within the party?

A. Of course. You sit and discuss things. Last October, when initial changes were made, there were promises of massive changes. But he (Rajiv) didn't

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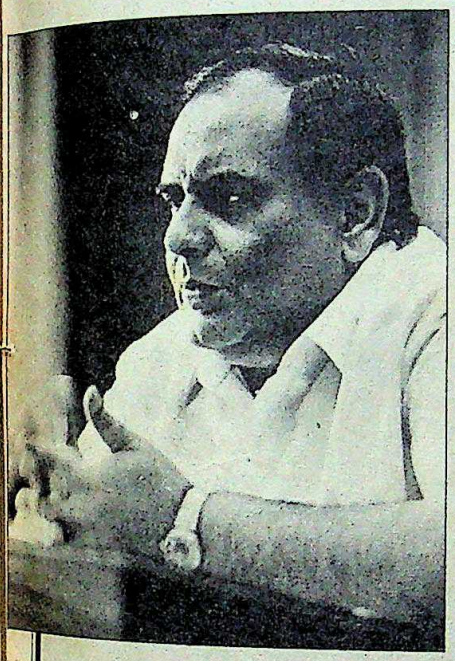
do so. Later, in January, he said that no changes were necessary. You can't afford these contradictions. You can't keep passing the buck.

Q. If you weren't expelled, would you be happy at things going this way?

A. It's not a question of only me. A 100 MPs feel the same way.

Q. Do you want to grab power?

A. I want people to realise the power



of stamina.

Q. What is your strategy now?

A. I cannot disclose it in advance.

Q. But people had expected that you would just melt away.

A. I did not come into politics to melt away. All this about people having no motive except loyalty, which they should keep showing, is nonsense. Commitment is personal. If you order people to show loyalty, it can be very degrading.

Q. But that's Congress(I) culture.

A. No.

Q. You have made election funding an issue. Why are you talking about this now and why not before?

A. It's an issue today. That's like asking why I didn't take up certain issues when I was in kindergarten.

Q. Is corruption a factor in your campaign?

A. Yes. There is a question mark in people's minds. They want to know who received the money and where. They want to be satisfied that the Government has nothing to hide. You have to dispel these doubts through a proper probe.

Q. But Rajiv says he's the victim of a destabilisation campaign.

A. That fizzled out in a week. If we are internally strong, why should we fear external destabilisation?

Q. Since election funding is an issue, what about the source of party-funding that was changed in 1984?

A. No comment.

Q. But you were part of the process. In fact, people say that if the prime minister is isolated, you were partly to blame as you blocked access to him.

A. People like me functioned like good shock absorbers. If, like me, you're over six feet tall and weigh more than 200 pounds, you make an attractive target. And, at no time was I associated with making appointments for the prime minister. I had an entire ministry to run.

Q. But you were also accused of trying to build up your own power base.

A. What's wrong with functioning in an independent manner? If I'm loyal, I don't have to declare my loyalty every day. There was no decision I made that Rajiv did not know about.

Q. Why are you so reluctant to criticise the prime minister openly?

A. If we disagree with the prime minister, we'll bring it out in public.

Q. Is Rajiv performing in the public interest?

A. We'll let the people decide.

Q. Will you show his weaknesses?

A. We'll help the people decide. Now that we're expelled, we'll have to see who the people of India want.

Q. You're not trying to topple the Government, you're not floating a new party, then, what are you doing?

A. We're going to have a mass movement. We're going to the people.

Q. As a good manager, you must have clearly defined objectives.

A. I don't have to enunciate them in advance.

Q. What are you like? The impression created is that you are rough-hewn, blustery, rude, authoritarian.

A. Good luck to those who think that.

Q. What do you think of Amitabh Bachchan's resignation?

A. As far as Ajitabh is concerned, unless concrete action is taken, nobody's going to believe in the inquiry. I think it is devastating for the party.

Q. What else can Rajiv do?

A. If there is any impression of his own complicity, he should do something to dispel it. If he is being sucked into this, he must take hard action to delink himself and dispel all doubts.

tion—solidarity with them. The move had backfired. And it backfired even more when Singh was expelled two days later following his letter to the prime minister asking for the prosecution of Ajitabh Bachchan on the basis of a document published in the *Indian Express* showing that he had purchased property in Switzerland. The timing of the expulsion was worse than that of an engine sputtering minus two spark plugs. It gave the immediate impression that Singh had been expelled because he had asked for an investigation of one of the prime minister's closest friends, based on the most devastating piece of evidence produced in the Amitabh-Ajitabh Bachchan controversy so far. Even worse, it appeared as if the Government had both the barrels of its shotgun pointed at its own head. Because, with its second blast, it blew another gaping hole into its own political head by announcing that steps would be taken to prosecute Ajitabh, thereby seeming to vindicate the stand taken by Singh. A day earlier, AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar, had ruled out Singh's expulsion from the party along with Arif and Nehru because, he said, Singh had not indulged in any anti-party activities. But 24 hours later, Moopanar had to eat his own words and announce Singh's expulsion as well. Said Moopanar: "Singh was expelled because the tone of his letter smelt of defiance and challenge to the leadership." A week later, the prime minister was to explain lamely that Singh was expelled because of an interview he gave two months ago to a Bombay weekly. This reflected even further confusion within the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

The grand design at the Prime Minister's Secretariat had been to try and separate the Bofors and Bachchan issues from the anti-party issue by timing the V.P. Singh expulsion in such a way that it would not be confused with his campaign against corruption. But because of bumbling ineptitude, the Prime Minister's Secretariat just could not get its scenario straight. According to sources close to the prime minister, he had a copy of the document published in the *Indian Express* on the morning of July 14 and had scribbled on it the words "action should be taken under the law". But the files took four days to travel from the Prime Minister's Secretariat to the finance secretary and back to the prime minister before the action was announced.

The frustration within the ruling party became evident when bands of slogan-shouting Youth Congress(I) goons descended on Arif's house in one of

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THE BACHCHANS

Crucial Expose

IF it was film star Amitabh Bachchan who resigned from the Lok Sabha last fortnight, it was his businessman brother Ajitabh who seemed to have landed himself in serious trouble. With the devastating disclosure in the *Indian Express* that he had bought a Rs 45-lakh flat in Montreux, 95 km from Geneva, in April last year (when he was still living in New Delhi) the spotlight was turned squarely on Ajitabh's affairs in Switzerland.

The Government hastily announced an inquiry, but the real disclosures came in the press. Quite apart from the expose on the Montreux flat, out came the name of Ajitabh's company in Switzerland—a name that he had jealously guarded, and that would result in further investigations—as also details of the Bachchan brothers' land deals on New Delhi's outskirts, deals that were allegedly registered at a fraction of the market price.

The Swiss authorities seemed to be doing their own inquiries. For while Ajitabh had first gone to Switzerland on a tourist visa last year, then acquired a business visa till August-end, and even got approval from the Geneva canton for the crucial work permit (annually renewable) that he needed in order to settle down in Switzerland, the federal authorities in Berne suspended the final processing of the work permit application pending a Swiss investigation into Ajitabh's affairs.

Federal Justice and Police spokesman Jorg Kistler told INDIA TODAY that the investigation would look into whether Ajitabh's company was a genuine or front operation meant to get him a work permit, the nature of the allegations against him in India and whether he was a man of dubious character. Said Kistler: "We will consider his financial situation and charges in India. We will see if he is a person of good standing and whether his company is a sham."

If the Swiss authorities decide that Ajitabh has been party to illegal or semi-legal activities in India (other than tax and foreign exchange violations), he will be refused permission to live in Switzerland. At the moment, Ajitabh is officially a resident of Belgium and is visiting Switzerland for conducting his business.

Meanwhile, Ajitabh continued to deny wrongdoing, declaring to reporters that he would explain everything in the inquiry that had been ordered by the Government of India. But, with the new disclosures, the Bachchan brothers' statements to the press over the past four to five months are now beginning to look like a patina of lies, or, at best, confusing half-truths.

Ajitabh flatly told a magazine in April that he owned no property in Switzerland. Yet, as the *Express* has now reported, a full year earlier, the Montreux flat had been registered in his name. The Regie Foncier Vaudois, which sold the flat, confirmed last fortnight that the flat was in Bachchan's name, that a 50 per cent down payment had been made, and the rest of the cost financed by a mortgage. The Regie did not say who had made the down payment. But other sources said the down payment had been made by Bachchan's business associates. And Bachchan's lawyer told a reporter: "Just because Bachchan owns a flat here, it does not mean that he has paid for it."

In their various interviews, the Bachchan brothers even tried to play down the size of the flat. Amitabh said it was 900 sq ft, Ajitabh said it was less than 1,000 sq ft. In fact, it is about 1,400 sq ft: not palatial (as exaggerated reports had it), but not underprivileged either.

Amitabh told a magazine in April that his brother "is employed by them" (his business collaborators in Switzerland). But, questioned last fortnight on how he could be working in Switzerland before he had got a work permit, Ajitabh said he was not "working" in the sense of being employed in Switzerland, that he was working on some projects with business associates, and that this accounted for his income.

Indian Express

Ajitabh and Amitabh; third-floor flat in Montreux: under inquiry

Yet again, in his interview to INDIA TODAY last April, Amitabh had said that Ajitabh's "employers...pay him a salary and take care of his kids' education". But where did the question of a salary arise if he was not employed? Also, Ajitabh said last fortnight that "I am paying for their (the children's) education out of my own income. I am a non-resident Indian businessman here."

All this inevitably raised the key question about the precise nature of Ajitabh's business dealings and employment. And here, evidence began to surface that Ajitabh's business associate was a company in which he himself had a major shareholding. One company (formed this June) is called Arcolab, and has a share capital of a million Swiss francs (Rs 84 lakh). An Arcolab official said Ajitabh was a minority share-

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holder, but Kistler said he had a 50 per cent ownership. The balance 50 per cent was held by another company, Arcopharma, whose Director Nandor Kovach was emphatic as he told INDIA TODAY: "I want to make it clear that Mr Bachchan has no connection at all with Arcopharma. I am the sole proprietor and shareholder."

Intriguingly enough, both company names have 'Arco' as a common element, and there was speculation that this could be an acronym for Ajitabh, Ramola (his wife) and Company.

Only Ajitabh's status as a major shareholder of Arcolab could explain the Bachchan brothers' quibbling over his being in employment, being in business, of working yet not working although he gets a salary, of it being an "employment-cum-business" relationship, and so on. Yet Arcolab was formed only this June, whereas the talk of an employment-cum-business relationship was well before this. Was this relationship, then, with Arcopharma? If so, there was the problem of Kovach's flat denial, that Ajitabh had nothing to do with the company.

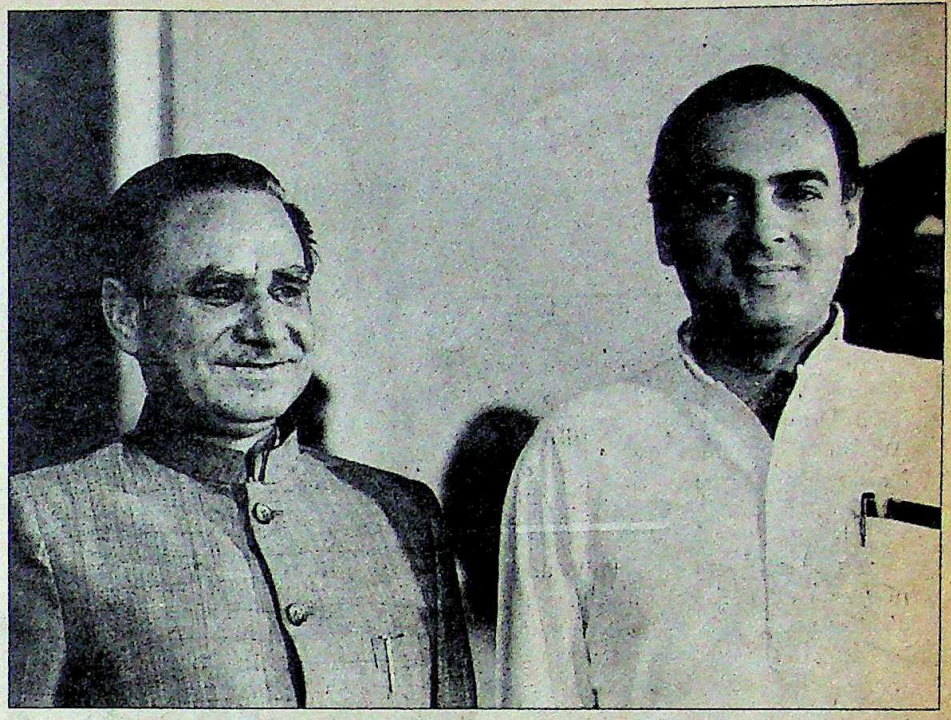
The crucial questions the entire affair boiled down to were the precise relationship that Ajitabh had with the Swiss companies, whether he had invested in Arcolab using money earned in Switzerland or taken from India, who really paid for the Montreux flat and how this money was arranged at a time when Ajitabh was still living in India, and whether there were any foreign exchange violations involved in the deal at any stage.

Ajitabh could claim that he has been a non-resident since September last year, but this does not automatically explain an accumulation of funds overseas which are used to acquire assets on becoming a non-resident. Indeed, while under the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act Ajitabh can claim non-resident status on the strength of his employment abroad, the fact that he is in Switzerland on overlapping tourist and business (neither of which allows him to take up employment) could be used to question his non-resident status itself.

The official inquiry will presumably ask all the relevant questions. And it was certain last fortnight that there would inevitably be more disclosures on the affairs of the Bachchan brothers.

—T.N. NINAN with BRIJ KHINDARIA in Geneva

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Fotedar with Rajiv: kicked upstairs

the most heavily-protected localities of Delhi and tried to rough him up at his gate as he tried to get out of his car in the presence of Uttar Pradesh MLAs and other supporters. The contrast was striking: Arif, expelled a day earlier, was celebrating the occasion by distributing laddoos to hundreds of supporters streaming into his residence while members of his erstwhile party were indulging in tactics reminiscent of the Brownshirts. Once again, the attempt, if it was intended to intimidate the dissidents, boomeranged. It was tailor-made for publicity and Singh and Nehru, who rushed to Arif's house after hearing the news, took full advantage of it. Singh condemned the attack as the "criminalisation of politics", while Nehru quipped: "Surely these brave boys must have some better way to display their loyalty to the prime minister." The headlines the event made the next day produced an outpouring of sympathy for Arif, even from among conservative Muslim leaders who had shunned him from the time he took a firm stand against the Muslim Women's Bill. The ruling party tried to paint the event as a stage-managed affair, planned by Nehru and Arif. But this stand lost credibility, after violent demonstrations by Congress(I) youth against Singh on two later occasions, and the appearance of some of the same demonstrators at sympathy rallies at Rajiv's residence.

The cabinet reshuffle—a fight-back measure—proved to be a damp squib: Rajiv was hamstrung by party factions and resentment against his close advisers.

The dissident leaders got another shot in the arm when the strong-arm tactics of the demonstrators were unequivocally condemned as bordering on fascism by some of the most respected leaders of Congress(I). In a joint statement, Kamalapati Tripathi, Sardar Swaran Singh, C. Subramaniam and Sadiq Ali, all of whom have held top party posts in the past, said: "We are setting a very dangerous precedent which is bound to strike at the very roots of democracy."

What Rajiv and his advisers have failed to realise is that the ordinary tactics of threats, cajolery, party discipline, parliamentary manoeuvrings will not work against the V.P. Singh movement, which is a subtle cat-and-mouse game being played not so much in the party as outside, among the masses. There is little doubt that it is aimed at dis-

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Chart by B.K. SHARMA

BUMBLING ON BOFORS

1986: January 16-19

Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme visits India.

March, 24

Contract worth $ 1.6 billion signed for purchase of howitzers from AB Bofors by the Government of India.

1987 April 16

Swedish Radio reports payment of large bribes to senior Indian politicians and key defence figures by Bofors through a Swiss bank account codenamed Lotus.

April 17

The Government of India, through a statement, "categorically denies the allegations", saying "the news item is false, baseless and mischievous. ..." Henceforward, the Government's consistent line is that there were no middlemen and so there could not have been any pay-offs.

April 20

Defence Minister K.C. Pant tells the Lok Sabha that Bofors had confirmed on March 10, 1986, "that they did not employ any representative/agent in India for the project. However, for administrative services... hotel bookings, transportation, ...telexes, etc., they use the services of a local firm." He quotes a Swedish official that "the company informed the Swedish Government... in autumn, 1985, that there would be no middlemen...they would deal directly with the Indian Defence Ministry. This was conveyed by Olof Palme in his personal conversation with Rajiv Gandhi in January, 1986."

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi tells the Lok Sabha: "We have to take somebody's word as truth and when a prime minister of a country assures us after having gone into great depth with the company that was involved that there are no middle agents and there will be no middle agents involved, then we have to accept somebody's word....You show us any evidence that there has been involvement of middlemen, of pay-offs or of bribes or of commissions, we will take action and we will see that nobody however high up is allowed to go free."

April 21

Union Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh tells the Rajya Sabha: "We have received a commitment from the company and from the Swedish government that nothing has been paid." He adds: "We as Government, if we find that something has been paid, will definitely pursue each of these questions: What? When? Where? How? To Whom? And Why?"

April 24

The Indian ambassador in Stockholm receives information from Bofors that "the payments referred to by the Swedish Radio were made to a Swiss company."

April 27

Rajiv tells a conference of army commanders that the contract was meticulously worked out and that Palme had assured him that there were no middlemen and that no money was paid into Swiss banks.

April 28

Rajiv tells the Lok Sabha: "The minute we get information, we will take action and we will show you that we have taken action. We will show the nation that we have taken action."

June 4

A censored version of the report of the Swedish National Audit Bureau is released, noting the Bofors claim that upon the Indian Government's insistence, it began to wind up its earlier contracts. These 'winding up negotiations' began in 1985 and an agreement on them was reached before the deal was concluded. Bofors states that the costs of 'winding up' amounted to 2 per cent to 3 per cent of the order sum, that is, 170 million to 250 million Swedish kroner (Rs 34 crore to Rs 50 crore), and that all this money was disbursed during 1986.

The report finally concludes "that an agreement exists between AB Bofors and ...(censored) concerning the settlement of commission subsequently to the FH 77 deal and that considerable amounts have been paid to, among others, AB Bofors' previous agent in India."

The report also notes (on the basis of the radio report) "three part-payments made in the middle of November 1986, of a total of 29.5 million kroner (Rs 5.9 crore) and a fourth payment of 2.5 million kroner (half a crore rupees) made in December".

June 15-30

Rajiv tells INDIA TODAY "We had said that middlemen were to be kept out and it has been confirmed that there were no middlemen at the point of signing."

July 20

Rajiv tells an informal gathering of newsmen that the Government has turned down a Bofors offer to send a delegation because "nothing would have been gained from it."

July 23

Win Chadha's lawyer files a suit in the Delhi High Court claiming that the contract between Chadha and Bofors "is effective from January 1, 1986 upto and including December 31, 1990".

July 25

The weekly *Blitz* after being briefed by the prime minister, offers another explanation for the Bofors payments: they were supposedly part of a larger contract to a regional agent outside India.

crediting the leadership as having condoned corruption at high levels and ultimately toppling it. But the idiom of action is subtle. And time, Singh and his challengers believe, is on their side. The game, as Arif described it in a couplet from Iqbal, is one of *palat kar jhapatna, jhapat kar palatna, lahu garam rakhne ka hai ek bahana* (overturn, withdraw, feign injury, attack, but keep the blood warm). Or as Ram Dhan put it: "All that you have to do now is to keep the parrots at bay in a garden of mangoes. Then the mangoes will fall by themselves."

MANY Congressmen draw parallels between the current situation and 1969 when the party split under Mrs Gandhi. But the situation was different during that period. Then, the beleaguered Mrs Gandhi was a sympathetic public figure fighting a galaxy of discredited and entrenched party bosses. Today, the reality is Bofors. The reality is Fairfax. The reality is the activities of the prime minister's friends, especially the Bachchan brothers. The reality is the Government cover-ups and the lies told in Parliament and to the people. The reality is that of a victimised raja, a Thakur out for revenge. And in a public atmosphere in which the common man believes that the powerful have broken the laws and stashed the country's scarce resources in foreign banks, the court of justice, ultimately, is the people and not the Congress(I).

It is to this forum that the wounded raja chose to take his fight. He was not concerned with squabbling within the party. People looking for precipitous and sudden action—the "do something" syndrome—such as procedures involving individual lobbying of partymen and seeking a no-confidence vote or floating a separate party will be disappointed. Singh's is a peculiarly Hindu approach calculated to appeal to the masses: the concept of desireless action, doing what must be done, but not expecting any official gain from it. His endeavour is to prove his point morally, and within that framework achieve a political result. His idea is not to use the system to become the prime minister. He believes he would have achieved nothing by this.

As a close associate put it: "His is a controlled people's referendum to change the system." Perhaps the most remarkable evidence of this is Singh's refusal to go along with President Zail Singh. At one time last month, a plan was being hatched ac-

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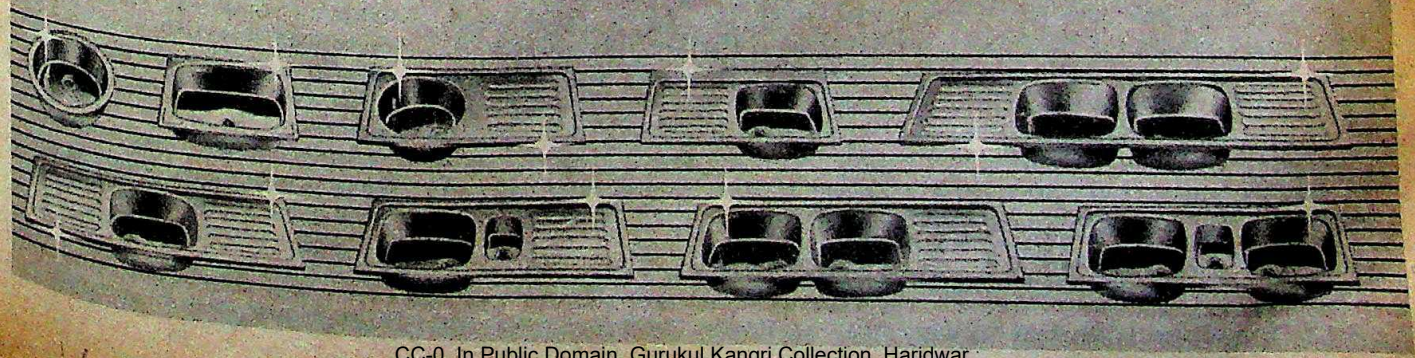

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cording to which the President was to dismiss the prime minister, allow his prosecution and swear V.P. Singh in as the new prime minister. Party members, according to the scenario, would have swung to Singh's side under the threat of a presidential dissolution of Parliament and mid-term polls. But Singh refused to go along with the plan because, his supporters say, it would have demonstrated nothing more than a political result and created the impression that Singh's fight was for pure power and not for reform and that he had used the corruption issue only to gain naked power.

The strategy of Singh and his supporters has always been a pre-emptive one. Because he is backed by strategists like Nehru, who understands Rajiv's mind like no other politician, and strongmen like Arif, he has been able to anticipate how Rajiv will react. His concern was never over what tactics the high command would use against him in the party, but with the public.

The challengers' aim is to put pressure on the party leadership through mass campaigns in Congress(I)-ruled states and by using the corruption issue to make fresh exposes.

Ruling party strategists have tried to paint him into an anti-national, power-hungry villain. The thrust has been to declare Singh a man who is engaged in a personality fight with Rajiv and the Bachchans; a man hankering for office; even a man who subverted the party's traditional socialist programmes in concert with imperialist forces. But already these have begun to sound like weak arguments. Singh has repeatedly reiterated that he is not seeking personal political office and will not accept any. He and his supporters have refused to be drawn into a discussion of personalities and personal issues. And in Hardwar, Singh postulated a left-of-Centre, populist platform, including the participation of labour on management boards, that has effectively served to pull the ideological rug out from under the Marxists, who have been supporting Rajiv in return for a more leftist-oriented programme by the Congress(I). And within this framework he continues to hit rapid-fire hammerblows at what are the ruling party's sensitive spots: Bofors, Fairfax, illegal foreign bank accounts.

And his credibility on these issues *(see box)* is higher than that of the Government. In contrast to Rajiv who has appeared to be a prevaricator, Singh, in the public eye, has stood on the side of the truth. As a ruling party MP admitted: "The trouble is that even if Singh stands in front of 10 lakh people and lies, they will be ready to believe him. First he was a bomb without a delivery system, but now the delivery system is in firing position." And a superstitious mythology has already developed around his challenge. The people of Gonda and Gorakhpur, who do not understand the intricacies of the Fairfax debate, believe that Fairfax is a wondrous machine imported from the US by the raja which instantly displays the photographs of venal and corrupt men. The word in Gorakhpur last month was that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh prevented V.P. Singh from holding a mass rally there as he feared the raja would use the occasion to display his machine and expose the state's corrupt leaders to public view.

The challengers' long-term strategy—to try and topple the leadership through continuing public pressure and mounting exposes—has already had effect in Uttar Pradesh where the chief minister stands dangerously on a political precipice. The destabilisation of the Uttar Pradesh Government, a state that the challengers have made the home-ground for their fight, is bound to have a devastating impact on the morale of the Congress(I), and will be another blow to partymen's confidence in the Central leadership. Already three ministers supporting Singh—Sunil Shastri, Surendra Singh, and Zafar Ali Naqvi—have left the Government. Even though Bir Bahadur says they were fired, they claim they resigned out of loyalty to V.P. Singh. As of now, there are 40, perhaps 50 MLAs, who are solidly behind Singh. Says Jaideep Brar, MLA from Bareilly: "Unfortunately, the crisis has become one of the Centre's credibility. If we can't face our own public, that now suspects the very leadership of our party at the state and Centre, how can we support this same party? We all stand ready to be expelled." Adds Aslam Khan, a former solid Rajiv supporter and an MLA from Dehra Dun: "If we are expelled, it will be like a badge of courage." Altogether, about 170 MLAs have signed a petition asking Rajiv Gandhi to sack Bir Bahadur. And last fortnight, Rajiv despatched troubleshooter Rajesh Pilot to Lucknow to conduct emergency meetings with the dissidents in order to try and salvage what could become a runaway situation.

Most Congress(I) chief ministers—as also the Centre—now find themselves between a rock and a hard place over how to deal with dissidents. If they throw them out they damage their own party and strengthen Singh's hands. If they keep them, they risk damaging the party from within. The holding of rallies in key MLA constituencies by Singh is not as innocent an exercise as it appears on the surface. No MLA, if he is not a Singh supporter, can possibly be pleased with a political rally being held by dissidents in his own constituency without his approval. If such a rally is held, it is done either with the help of the MLA's rivals within the party or the opposition. But the sitting MLA is placed

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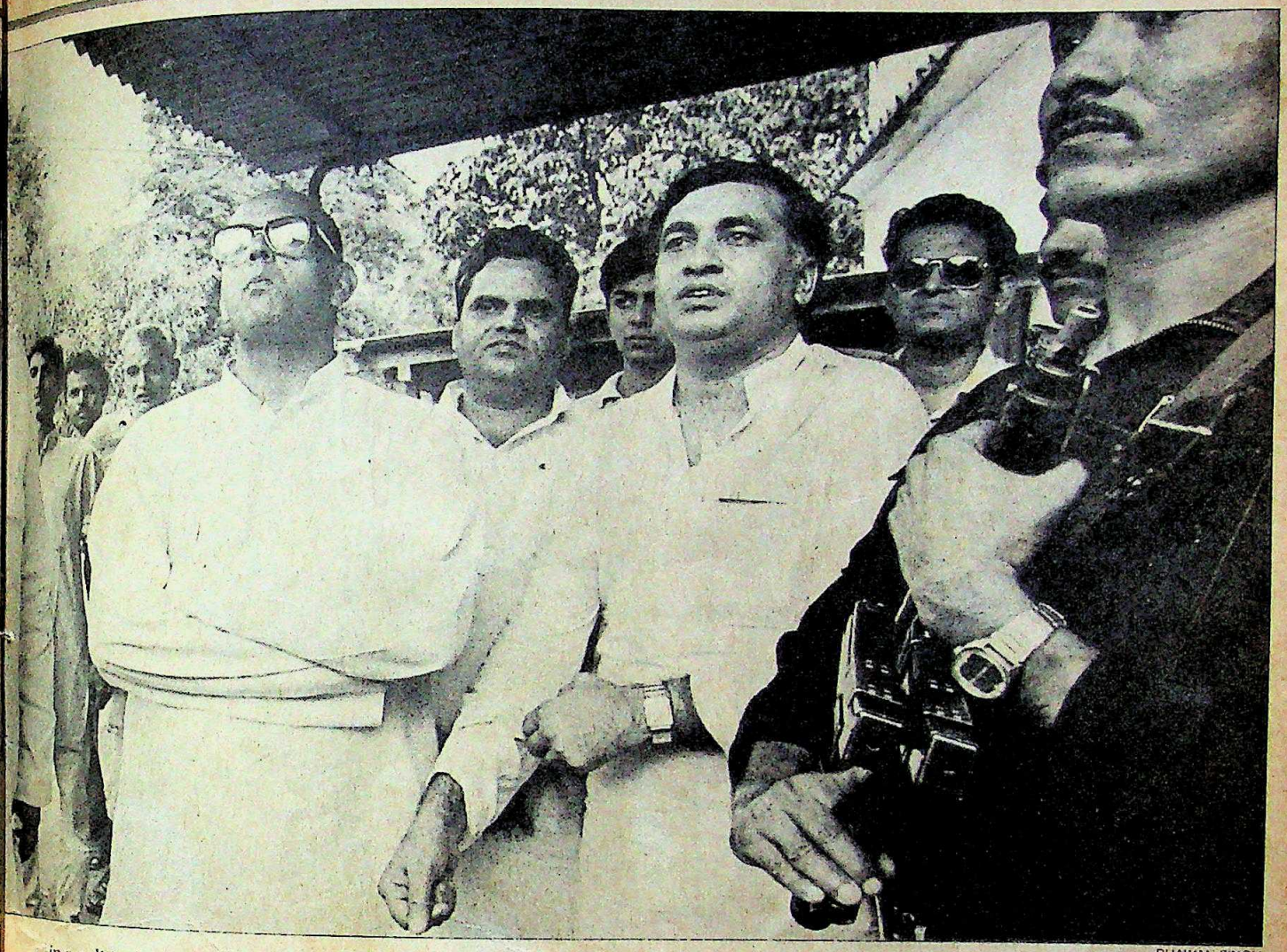

BHAWAN SINGH

Nehru, Singh and Khan: the dissident troika

in a political quandary. If he opposes the rally, he risks creating a law and order situation or stifling dissent aimed at revealing corruption in high places, both of which can backfire against him. If he assents to the rally, he appears to be conceding some form of political defeat. In either case, his position is weakened.

THE weakening of the Centre has left Congress(I) states, especially those with strong dissident lobbies, in a state of total confusion. In other states, the Singh factor is being used by local leaders to formulate their own political strategies. Just before the presidential elections, the Prime Minister's Secretariat actively wooed former chief ministers Vasantrao Patil of Maharashtra, Madhavsinh Solanki of Gujarat and Jagannath Mishra of Bihar in order to ensure that their followers toed the official line.

But now, all three are demanding their pound of flesh. Vasantdada, governor of Rajasthan, is insisting that Maharashtra Chief Minister S.B. Chavan be ousted within a month, and when that happens the state would face political turbulence that would provide a windfall for the dissidents. That the tremors of the challenge were also being felt in Bihar was evident from the fact that barely 100 legislators, out of a total strength of 245, turned up for an emergency meeting of the Congress(I) Legislature Party following the expulsion of Nehru, Arif and Singh. But here too, it is difficult to distinguish the anti-chief minister sentiment from the pro-Singh sentiment. Bihar dissident leader Mishra and his hardcore supporters of more than two-dozen MLAs have adopted a wait-and-see attitude. They have neither supported nor opposed the expulsion and kept both sides guessing. Mishra's lukewarm attitude towards Singh and his challengers stems not only from the hope of political plums promised by the Centre but also from a bruised ego. He has not forgotten how rudely Nehru behaved when he was despatched to Patna in August 1983 as an observer and became a party to Mishra's ouster.

In Orissa, barely 20 Congress(I) MLAs, out of a total of 115, issued statements welcoming the expulsions. Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik has maintained an eerie silence. The crisis within the Congress(I) appears to have given the controversial chief minister a new lease of life. He is known to be a former protege of Nehru and the Centre cannot at this stage afford to dump him. Here too, the Centre will pay a heavy price: if Patnaik is removed, he is likely to make a beeline for the Singh camp. If they keep him, they risk sending the anti-Patnaik forces in the direction of Singh. Madhya Pradesh faces the same dilemma. The expulsion of Shukla was seen even in high command circles as a mistake because it removed the only stopper within Rajiv's Congress(I) to the strength of Arjun Singh, whom some see as ambitious for power. Besides, Arjun Singh's growing dominance at the Centre has caused deep resentment within the camp of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora, Arjun Singh's arch political foe. And there are already rumblings that

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Vora may join hands with Shukla who, along with his brother Shyama Charan, enjoys tremendous support in the Chhatisgarh area. Shukla's power base was demonstrated by the tumultuous welcome he received when he went to Raipur after his expulsion.

In order to contain the confusion, dissidence and political opportunism in critical states following the expulsion of Singh and the fall-out from the Muzaffarnagar rally, Rajiv's advisers have devised a new "fight-back" programme. Aside from the Doordarshan-plugged rallies at the prime minister's house, the programme includes signature campaigns among MPs, MLAs and even among former legislators pledging loyalty to the leader and followed by *akhand pujas*. But even here—partly because of Doordarshan—the rallies seem to have the opposite effect on public opinion: they appear stage-managed while those of Singh, disrupted by Congress(I) ruffians, appear to be genuine.

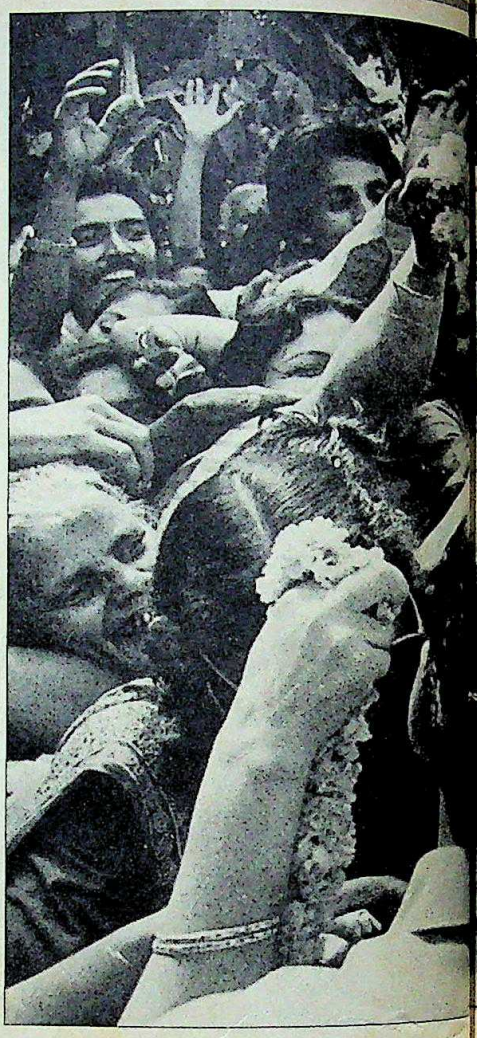
The incongruity of Rajiv's state is seen in the fact that despite the support of 400 MPs, he is forced to demonstrate his strength by stage-managed loyalty rallies at his residence.

Rajiv also has a new style of functioning now. He listens to groups of advisers and then retreats to a room where, in solitude, he dictates what he has heard into a tape recorder, plays it back to himself and then comes up with a decision. He has been advised to take the attitude that he and the party—after the presidential election that threatened to turn into a showdown—have been given a new lease of life for two years and that with no political showdown in sight until the next election he must act with confidence, ruthlessness and act "prime ministerial". He must, he has been told, use the media and stress the positive. Among the first "positive" aspects of this campaign is the breakthrough in Sri Lanka which appears timed to give his sagging image a boost.

Other parts of the fight-back plan call for taking Singh's platform out from under his feet. Hence, the new emphasis on progressive economic policies, hints at nationalising the jute and textile industries, announcing action, ill-timed as it was, against Bachchan, asking the Enforcement Directorate to publicise raids against economic offenders, and stressing that the drive against corruption was spearheaded all the time by him and Singh had been a mere instrument of this policy while in the Cabinet.

The Cabinet reshuffle was designed to demonstrate that the prime minister is totally in command. The word was out that the reshuffle would induct new "achievers" into the Cabinet. But the reshuffle proved to be a damp squib. In order to please partymen, he had told scores of them that they would be taken into the Cabinet. Now, he risks alienating them and pushing them into the opposite camp. Rajiv's critics maintain that he was hamstrung while making the Cabinet changes by his inability to satisfy the conflicting demands of factional leaders. But sources in the Prime Minister's Secretariat say that Rajiv will take his own time and that he will pick from a list of 40 probables for a cabinet expansion, which will follow the monsoon session of Parliament. Other planned measures include reshuffles in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, the AICC(I), the District Congress(I) Committees, and the holding of municipal elections. The leadership, he has been told, is incapable of dealing with the problems of the states. His top advisers: Arjun Singh, Buta Singh, P. Shiv Shankar, K.C. Pant, P.V. Narasimha Rao, have not even been elected from their own states. New advisers must have grassroots support. And there is deep resentment in the party over the power wielded by Shiv Shankar, M.L. Fotedar before his removal to a Cabinet post, Moopanar, and Sita Ram Kesri, who have formed a wall of inaccessibility around Rajiv. He is under severe pressure to remove them. Rajiv has also agreed to tone down his rhetoric, as that of partymen against the dissidents, to avoid the public criticism that he is involved in a motivated campaign against them.

But Rajiv's fight-back measures will have to be tested by the public, which will be increasingly reluctant to buy them from a leadership that has continued to lose credibility. Congress(I) loyalists talk of party unity as being the *deus ex machina* that will save them from disaster. But party unity is an important factor when



fighting the Opposition. In this case, the fight is within the party. Even though Singh and his challengers have held talks with Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal, their strategy is not to form a new party or to form a united front with the Opposition. This would merely serve to unify the Congress(I) in a real sense and defeat the purpose of Singh and his supporters. Congressmen who have had any sort of dealings with the Opposition, say in sadness and frustration that none of the disparate groups in the Opposition can sail together on any issue and present a strong challenge to the Congress(I). Even former Karnataka chief minister Gundu Rao, who has been hobnobbing with opposition politicians to try and find his place in the sun, says that most ex-Congressmen would prefer to come into the Congress(I) fold than join an opposition nucleus. Says Rao: "So consumed are the opposition stalwarts by their own ambition to become prime minister that none will support

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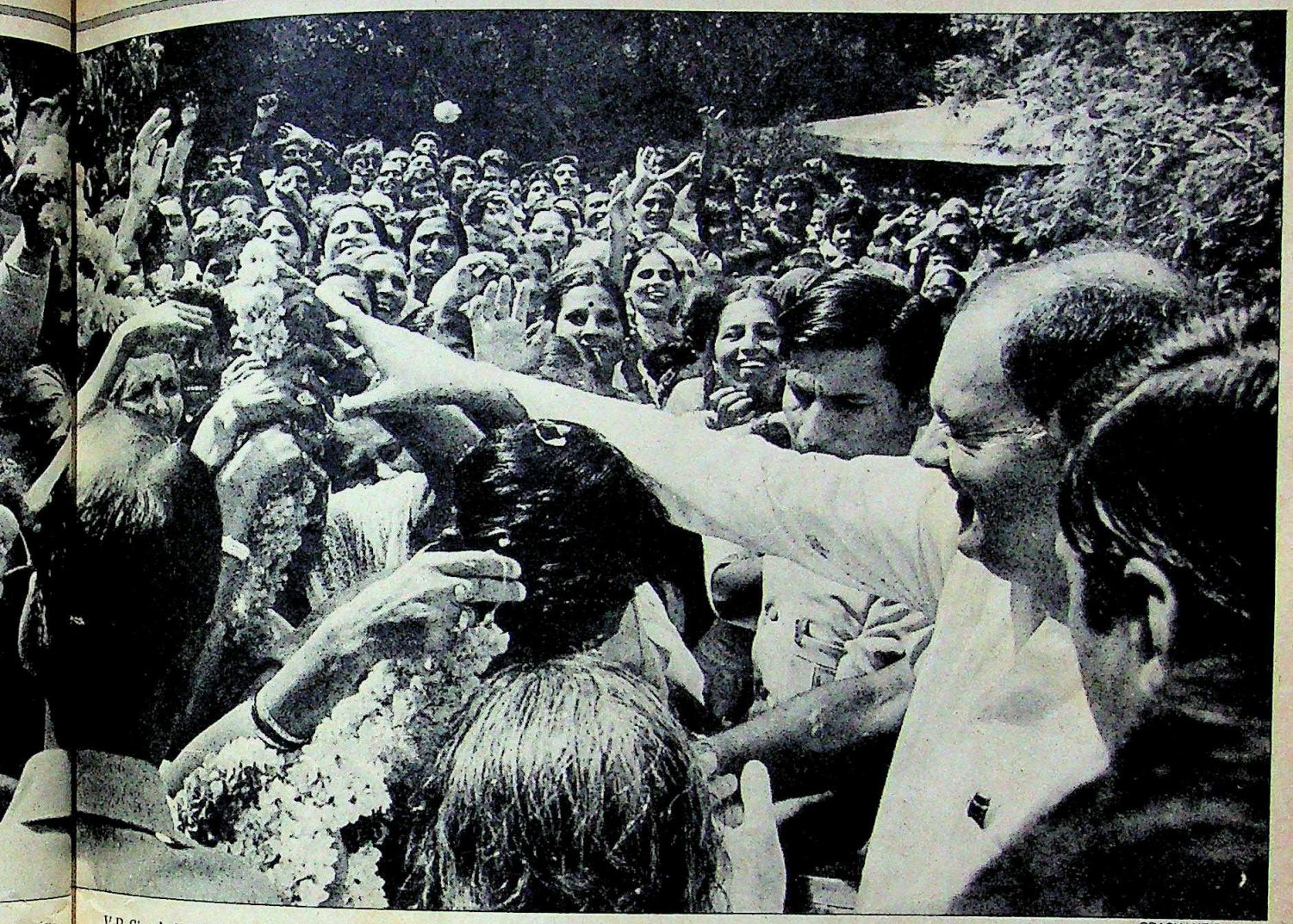

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Rajiv greeting well-wishers: orchestrated support

V.P. Singh." That may be far-fetched in terms of political adjustments but it is an accurate analysis of the strategy adopted by Singh and his followers, who insist on calling themselves the real Congressmen.

ULTIMATELY, their aim is to continue to put relentless pressure on the party's leadership through mass campaigns that will test their strength outside Uttar Pradesh, by causing mass confusion in Congress(I)-ruled states, and by using the corruption issue—which has unnerved the public—to make fresh exposes to taint the leadership. Singh is not expecting any immediate mass desertions. Congressmen are cautious by nature. They hang on to their seats until the last moment. For them, the party is like a political cocoon, the fount and vehicle of all patronage. And there is little doubt that partymen will not stage any sudden revolt. But there is always the possibility of the emergence of the "smoking gun" implicating Rajiv. In this eventuality partymen may force Rajiv to resign and elect a new leader. Even this scenario will probably play into the hands of the challengers who may be invited to rejoin the party.

But the challenge is for real. The idea is to continue to mount pressure through mass campaigns and scandalous revelations which will produce such intense insecurity within the party that Congressmen will be forced to ditch the incumbent leadership and look to someone else to save the party and lead the Government. And the challengers hope to inherit the party intact. The success of this strategy depends almost entirely on whether the challengers can keep up the momentum and whether they can show, as they have been hinting, that the scandals in high places involve the prime minister and his family directly. They are not in a hurry. They have yet to test their strength in the south—a rally has already been scheduled for Hyderabad—from where they expect to issue another clarion call against the "corrupt Dilli durbar". Their success in the south, they hope, will further rattle the party's leadership. Meanwhile, they will continue to milk the Bofors and Bachchan issues, which have so far shown no signs of flagging in the public's mind. Gradually, they will begin to focus on still other scandals on which teams of their supporters, within and outside the Government, are gathering new evidence. Just when the ultimate denouement will be played out is still anybody's guess. What is clear is that the challengers have demonstrated that even an illiterate electorate is capable of a rare democratic sophistication in that it has demanded accountability from leaders inclined to treat public office as a personal preserve. And they have shaken the ruling party and its leaders. The most compelling evidence of this is the incongruous situation in which the prime minister finds himself: even though he still enjoys the support of some 400 MPs in Parliament he is forced to demonstrate his strength via stage-managed loyalty rallies at his residence.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and PRABHU CHAWLA
with bureau reports

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THE PRESIDENCY

Lull After the Storm

NOTHING could have provided more relief to the beleaguered prime minister than the smooth change of tenancy in Rashtrapati Bhawan. The packed Central Hall of Parliament reverberated with thunderous applause during the swearing-in ceremony for the country's eighth President. As the congenial and soft-spoken freedom fighter from Rajamadam village in Tamil Nadu exchanged seats at the high podium with outgoing President Zail Singh, more than 400 Congress(I) MPs, half-a-dozen chief ministers, and cabinet ministers led by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hoped that the transition would herald a turbulence-free political reprieve.

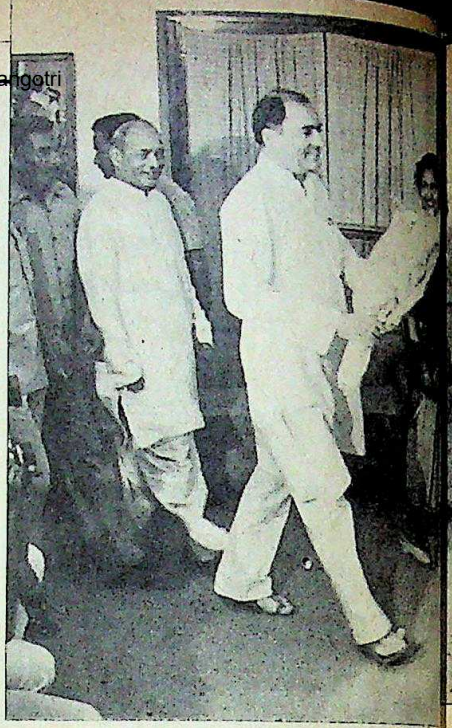
For the Congress(I), the event was more than a simple change of presidents. It marked the end of a period of confrontation between the President and the prime minister. Said AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar: "All is well that ends well. It has been a very smooth and cordial change. We are sure that the motivated debate has finally closed."

And Venkataraman's first public speech—approved earlier by the Union Cabinet—was reassuring. He said: "I will neither fail to exercise the duties and functions attached to this high office, nor stray beyond the powers enshrined in the Constitution by the founding fathers." No sooner had he completed his sentence than Congress(I) MPs and the prime minister clapped enthusiastically.

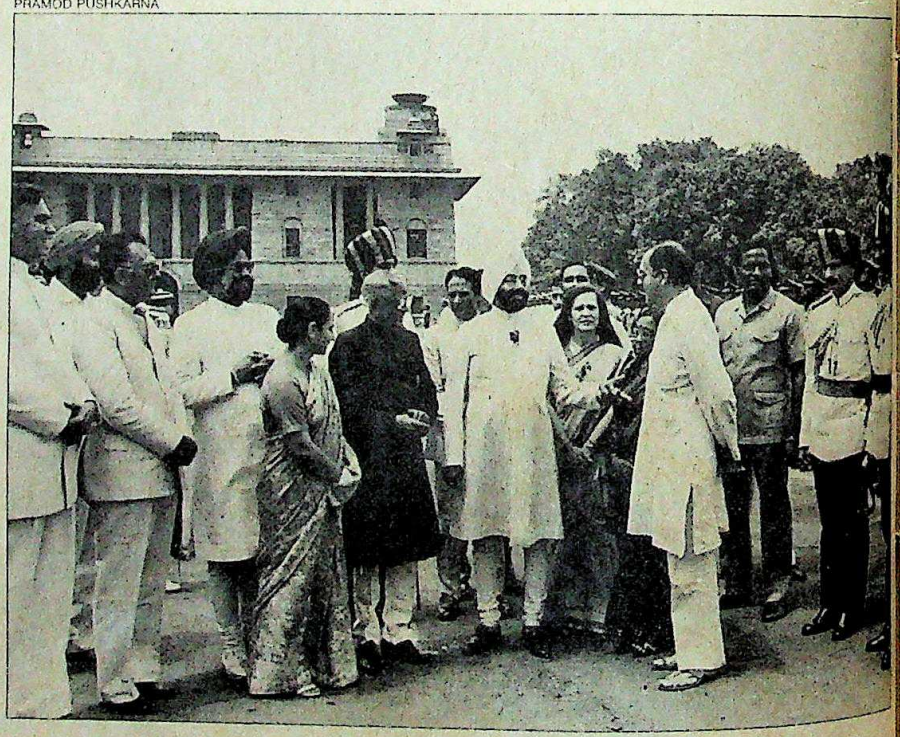
Rajiv was determined to prove that Venkataraman's victory was his personal achievement and had taught a lesson to his adversaries within and outside the party. He had personally taken over the election campaign for the President and appointed over 20 state committees headed by chief ministers and senior MPs to ensure that Venkataraman polled more votes than the combined strength of the party. It was one way of establishing his control over the party. And when the results were finally declared, Venkataraman did secure 7,40,148—slightly more than the 7,04,506 votes which the Congress(I) and its allies in the states and the Parliament had. Once Venkataraman was declared elected, the focus shifted to the swearing-in function.

At Rajiv's directive, the ceremony was held on a grand scale. Rajiv chose trusted Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram—who happens to be the new President's protege too—for turning the function into a glittering affair.

Central Hall was chosen deliberately to achieve maximum media publicity. In contrast with Zail Singh's swearing-in, where only 200 guests were invited, Central Hall was packed with over 800 guests, including governors and ambassadors. Chidambaram paced the aisles attending to little details. And, sharp at noon, Rajiv and Sonia walked in with over half-a-dozen security guards. A few minutes later, Janaki Venkataraman arrived with Gurdeep Kaur, Zail Singh's daughter, and sat next to the prime minister. Zail



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Singh arrived in ceremonial procession with Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson Pratibha Rao, Chief Justice R.S. Pathak and President-elect Venkataraman.

Since all the formalities were over a minute before the swearing was to take place, at the appointed time of 12.15, Pathak had to wait before conducting the business. Earlier, Home Secretary C.G. Somaya read out a notification from the chief election commissioner declaring Ramaswamy Venkataraman elected as President and sought Zail Singh's permission to start official business.

As Venkataraman finished his oath, taken in English, 21 guns roared outside, marking the takeover by the new President. Inside, Singh beamed as he hugged his successor. The outgoing President looked decidedly more relaxed and confident than five years ago at his own swearing-in ceremony when he completed his speech with difficulty.

But during the last five years, he had converted the quiet Rashtrapati Bhawan into a place of action. He threw open the gates of Rashtrapati Bhawan to the public. And he agreed to meet anybody who wanted to call on him. He would meet

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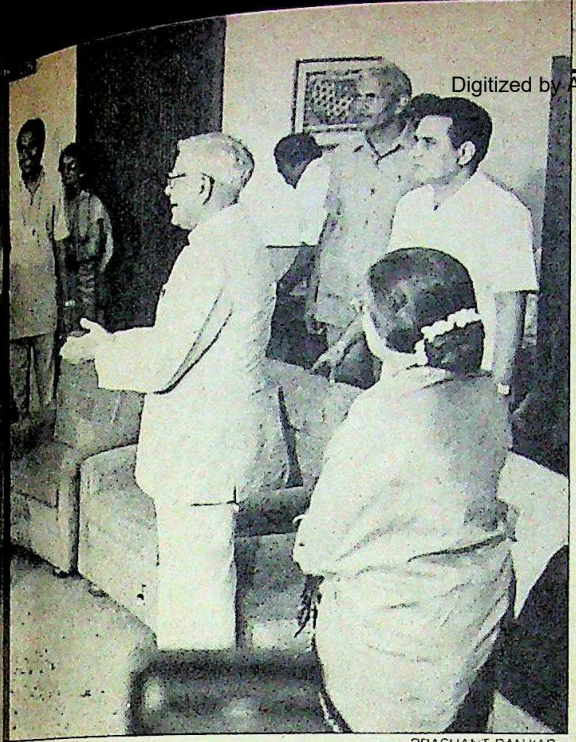
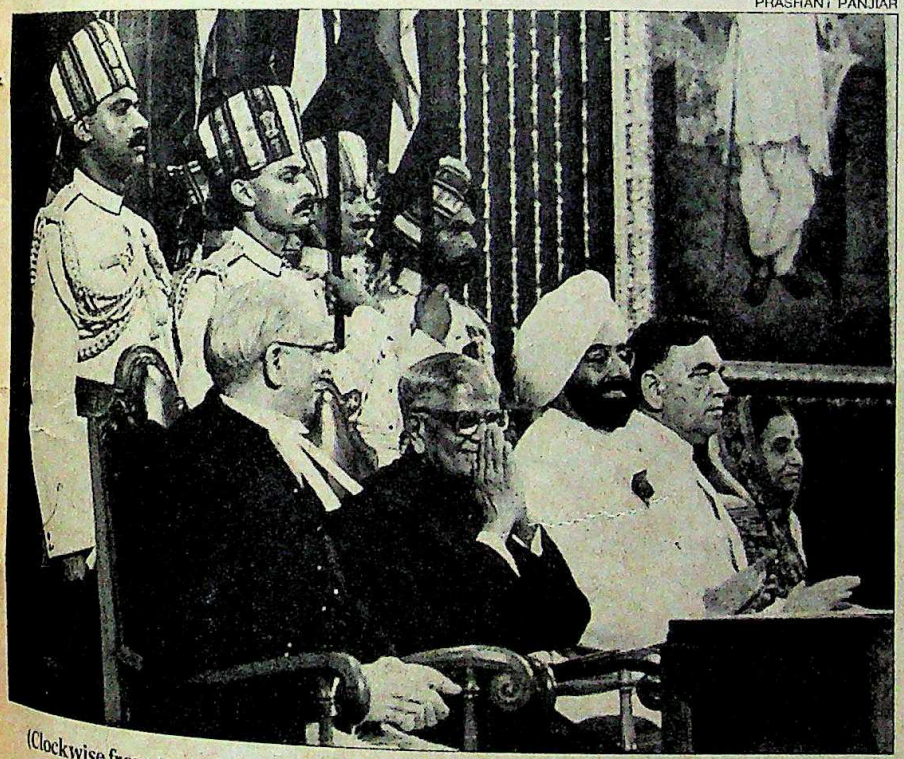


PRASHANT PANJIAR



PRASHANT PANJIAR

(Clockwise from top) Rajiv congratulates Venkataraman; the swearing-in ceremony; and a farewell to Singh

over 100 people daily and would accept any social invitation. And during the period when the prime minister stopped calling on him he established direct contacts with the chief ministers, governors and party MPs. And in the feud that developed between Singh and Rajiv, this easy accessibility was quickly condemned as politicking by the prime minister.

It was also during this period that the President began to reassert his powers and began to compel the Government to accede to his requests. Even though he was not entirely successful in this quest, he left office with grace and with the claim that it was during his tenure that the debate about the powers of the President was reopened meaningfully. Said Singh after his retirement: "I never aspired for any power which was not there in the Constitution for the President. But I am happy that people will have a fresh and objective look at the Constitution."

During those five years, Singh had transformed himself from a yes-man to a statesman of some degree. He ensured that no prime minister can take the President for granted. It was only through his political experience that he could maintain a balance between what he wanted to do and what he actually did. At times, he was about to dismiss the Government, but finally better sense prevailed. He decided not to be a party to any arbitrary measures divorced from the political process.

And then, when he was about to retire he even made peace with Rajiv who was his number one headache during the last few months. Within a span of four weeks, he met the prime minister half-a-dozen times. The two broke bread together on several occasions, at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Even on his last day in office, he called the prime minister and went across to 5, Race Course Road for breakfast. And when he was moving out of the stately Rashtrapati Bhawan, he told Sonia and Rajiv: "After Indiraji's death, I always treated Rajiv as my son, but someone created misunderstanding between us." Rajiv responded with: "I was never given the other side of you. Let us forget the past." Later in the day, when Rajiv and Sonia arrived at Rashtrapati Bhawan to bid farewell, Singh again hugged both Sonia and Rajiv and took leave of them and drove out of the place where he spent the most controversial five years of his career.

The man who has moved into Rashtrapati Bhawan is not known to create controversy. While the presidency made Zail Singh what he is today, Venkataraman assumes office with a record of national service in many distinguished roles starting after Independence.

The new President already has a handful of chores and unfinished business ahead of him. His predecessor has left behind the controversial Mail Censorship Bill, a note for discussion on the powers of the President under Article 78 of the Constitution. Singh had written to the prime minister that he was leaving the debate on the Article 78 for his successor. Venkataraman has to tackle these issues to completion. But he had already struck a conciliatory note on these issues in his first speech. Indirectly referring to the tense relationship between the prime minister and the President, Venkataraman said: "Too many institutions and relationships have suffered an erosion of confidence. It will be my endeavour to play my due role in clearing mistrust."

Congress(I) leaders believe that Rajiv will be able to strike a better rapport with Venkataraman because he trusts him and feels that his advice would not be biased. In fact Rajiv, while ignoring Singh when he was President, was simultaneously consulting Venkataraman on major political and national problems. On the other hand, both the Opposition and a section of the Congress party feel that Venkataraman will prove to be tougher than his predecessor about constitutional proprieties. Said a pro-Venkataraman MP from Tamil Nadu: "The new President will prove a major deterrent for any constitutional violations than Gianiji, who always looked for political implications." His stand on the issues left behind by Singh will be his litmus test.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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K.K. TEWARY

Ironic Twist

"Mr Zail Singh, on his own, and perhaps through other dubious connections, was engaged in trying to bring about total destabilisation of the political system...and leading ultimately to a situation favouring the splitting of India."
—Union minister of state for public enterprises, K.K. Tewary, at a press conference on July 21

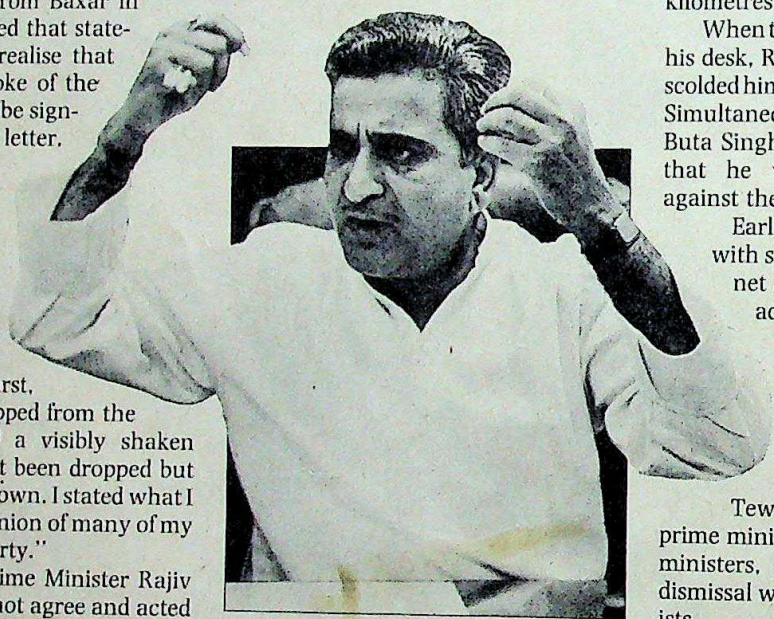
WHEN the outspoken Lok Sabha member from Baxar in Bihar signed that statement, he did not realise that with the same stroke of the pen, he would also be signing his resignation letter. The political wheel had come full circle for Tewary. After an earlier diatribe against President Zail Singh, he had been made a minister. But after his latest outburst, he was quickly dropped from the ministry. But, said a visibly shaken Tewary: "I have not been dropped but have resigned of my own. I stated what I thought was the opinion of many of my colleagues in the party."

His supremo, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, clearly did not agree and acted swiftly: within 48 hours of his addressing the press conference, Tewary had lost his office, ending a 20-month tenure. Said an aide of Zail Singh: "Had the prime minister acted with the same decisiveness and clarity earlier, he would not have found himself in the current mess."

Tewary bore some responsibility for the running feud between the President and the prime minister. It had all begun in April 1985 when Tewary had charged in Parliament that Rashtrapati Bhawan was being used by Sikh extremists as a hideout. Since Rajiv did not discourage Tewary from carrying on his diatribe, the minister continued attacking Zail Singh both inside and outside the House. Indeed, it had begun to seem that Tewary, one of Rajiv's most vocal loyalists, had taken it upon himself to carry on a single-handed vitriolic campaign against the President. And more recently, he was in the forefront of the attack on expelled former Union ministers V.P. Singh and Arun Nehru.

Though the President could have expressed his anger at the insults more forcefully, he confined himself to writing letters to Rajiv requesting him to make his recalcitrant minister mend his ways. But Rajiv refused to reproach Tewary for his outbursts. Said Satya Pal Mallick, a dissident Congress(I) member of the Lok Sabha: "Tewary should not have been taken into the Cabinet at all. In fact, by encouraging people like Tewary, democratic institutions like the presidency were not only being destroyed but were also being blackmailed."

But this time round, the President chose to finally settle the issue. When



HARI OM GULATI

Tewary had taken it upon himself to carry on a single-handed vitriolic campaign against the President, which ironically, has now led to his ouster.

newspapers carrying the details of Tewary's press briefing appeared the next morning, Zail Singh was in Vrindavan, near Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. As he helicoptered back, he shot off an angry letter to Rajiv and sought suitable action against Tewary. He concluded his one-page missive by saying that if no action was taken, he would be forced to believe that the views expressed by Tewary were those of the prime minister.

The tone of the letter took Rajiv by surprise because, just the day earlier, the two had had a very cordial meeting. In fact, it was during the course of this meeting that Rajiv had told Zail Singh that he would forget all the bickerings of the past. These, he said, had arisen because of biased information that he had been fed against the President. As a gesture of reciprocation, the President disclosed that he had already rejected the application seeking permission to prosecute the prime minister. But even as the two were hugging each other to conclude the peace settlement, Tewary was launching his most vicious attack yet against the President just a few kilometres away, at his residence.

When the President's letter landed at his desk, Rajiv summoned Tewary and scolded him for his 'irresponsible' action. Simultaneously, he sent Home Minister Buta Singh to convey to the President that he was contemplating action against the minister.

Earlier, when Rajiv confabulated with senior party leaders and cabinet ministers, most of them had advised him to dismiss Tewary immediately for going too far. But just as Rajiv was about to sack the offending minister, pressure started mounting on him to review his decision. Tewary's supporters, including a prime ministerial aide and two cabinet ministers, adopted the line that the dismissal would demoralise Rajiv loyalists.

Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Rajesh Pilot was sent to the President twice to find out whether he would settle for a lesser punishment. But Zail Singh was adamant. He warned Pilot that if no action was taken, he would neither attend any of the official farewell functions nor would he broadcast his farewell speech to the nation—a prospect that an embattled Rajiv Gandhi clearly did not relish.

By the time Pilot reported back to him, Rajiv had already made up his mind. Within hours he drove down to Rashtrapati Bhawan and told Zail Singh that Tewary's resignation had already been received. A few hours later came an announcement from Rashtrapati Bhawan that the President had accepted Tewary's resignation from the Council of Ministers. With that communique, Singh, in effect, declared to the world that he had won his final round against his detractors in the Congress(I).

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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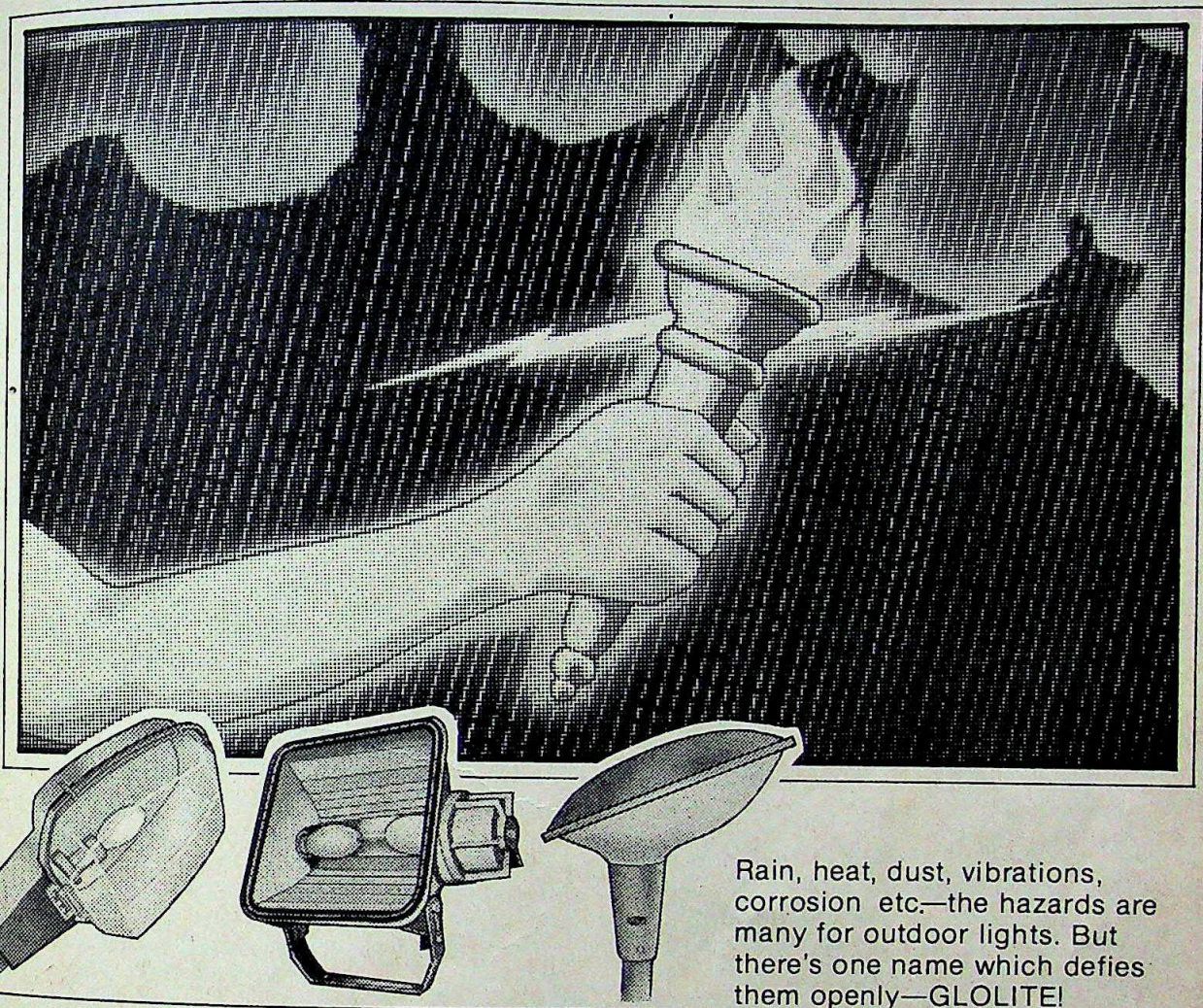
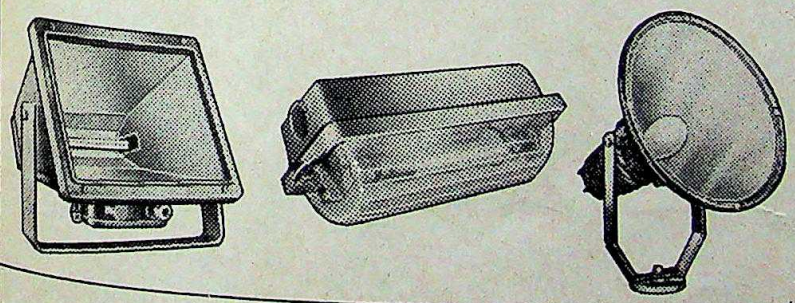
Accepting Challenges In The Open!





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MEERUT

Anguish Without End

"The longer violence has been used, the more difficult the users find it to perform compensatory acts of non-violence. A tradition of violence is formed..."
—Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means*

THREE-and-a-half months after it first came to Meerut, violence has come to stay as a tradition here. Officially, more than 135 people have been killed but the communal hatred shows no signs of letting up.

Following the lynching of 11 Muslim bus passengers by mobs on the Meerut-Bijnor road on the night of July 22, armymen returned to patrol the curfew-bound town. The other thing that returned was the stench of decaying human flesh in the local medical college morgue.

"They stopped the bus and started asking us our names: four of us were Muslims. They called us out and immediately started beating us with lathis and iron rods," a shocked Maqsood Ahmed, 25, recounted. The mobs had struck at four buses in the same manner that day.

District Magistrate T. George Joseph admits that the situation has worsened manifold since he last saw the town in turmoil in December 1982. "It's like a room filled with cooking gas," he says. While the administration, overhauled with the transfer of senior officials, settles down, the high-power committee set up to probe the May flare-up is in its last phase of investigation. After examining 120 witnesses, the former chief secretary of Uttar Pradesh, Gyan Prakash, who heads the committee, feels that Meerut can be saved from recurring agony if the social, political and economic factors that create tensions are analysed and dealt with.

But that's easier said than done. The divide between Hindus, who make up 47 per cent of the population, and Muslims who form 43 per cent of it, has never been so complete. There is hardly a day of total peace and rumours, which flow on the heels of violence, lead to greater mayhem.

The bus massacre was a case in point, says Senior Superintendent of Police, G.L. Sharma. The fiction that one of them was missing—possibly kidnapped by Muslims—spread among the Kanwarias, ardent Shiva devotees scattered around the area. With sentiments running high during the Shivaratri celebrations, it culminated in the tragedy. Kanwarias were predictably an important part of the mobs.

It is impossible for the police to foresee the next flashpoint. For instance, within two hours of a bomb blast that killed three on July 15 in Bazaza Bazaar, trouble was reported from half a dozen points across the city as mobs—later cane-charged by the police—assembled spontaneously.

The spilling of violence into rural areas—as illustrated by the bus massacre—is also a disturbing phenomenon. As it is, the easy availability of country-made firearms and knives in a town already notorious for its gangsterism has rendered the police task near impossible. "The mobs do not need leaders now. Any youth between the age of 15 years and 30 years can take charge," says a police official. More alarming, Joseph feels that "people eagerly believe rumours".

Because Hindus and Muslims are sprinkled evenly across the town, unpredictability is heightened. Though the migration of people from localities where they are in a minority—which began in May—continues, the sale of immovable property on these lines has not as yet begun. The estranged communities continue to share the crowded bylanes.

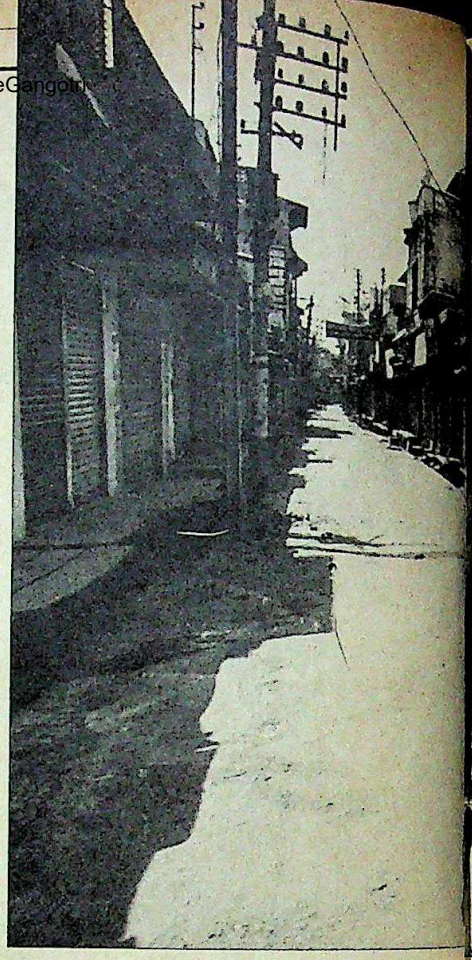
BEFORE the Jagannath Rath Yatra early last month—when Radhey Shyam Kaushik was district magistrate—youngsters, disgruntled by the official ban on their procession, roamed the streets in mobs. However, the situation eased when the ban—described as "anti-Hindu"—was lifted. The Hindus are also enraged by the "exaggerated" descriptions of the Maliana killings in the press. They cite the official watered down version to support this contention.

The Muslim mood isn't any less ugly. Stories about atrocities by the police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) still form part of popular fable. In Muslim eyes, the BJP, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindu bodies have come to be identified with the discredited police force. "I was shocked to hear a six-year-old boy tell his friends how he plans to snatch guns from the PAC," says 58-year-old Hafiz Mohammed Zafar, a respected elder.

The administration also has to contend with outsiders, like the Delhi-based Virendra Sharma 'Nagi', national convenor of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Shiv Shakti Dal. Nagi, who makes a business of selling trishuls, a day after the bus tragedy, led a procession of about 100 trishul-brandishing youths to Joseph's office, demanding the release of the Dal's local chief, who is detained under the National Security Act. Again, earlier, on the eve of the Jagannath Rath Yatra, the local organisers were getting their instructions from Lucknow and Ayodhya.

The ban on the yatra spurred popular Hindu sentiments and the procession, when finally allowed, saw a record turnout. "The administration helped the polarisation process. Normally only about 500 people participate," says Vinay Kumar, a shopkeeper of Sarrafa Bazaar.

On the other hand, the ban on the entry of Muslim leaders, which covered Babri Masjid Action Committee Convenor Syed Shahabuddin and Delhi's Shahi Imam, Abdullah Bukhari, has lent the Muslims a permanent grouse. Shahabuddin was detained at Muradnagar police check post in February-end while the Imam was confronted by an irate Hindu mob and an unobliging police at the same place on July 4. The mileage they got from that drama—widely reported by the press—was even greater than what they could have gained by actually touring the affected areas.



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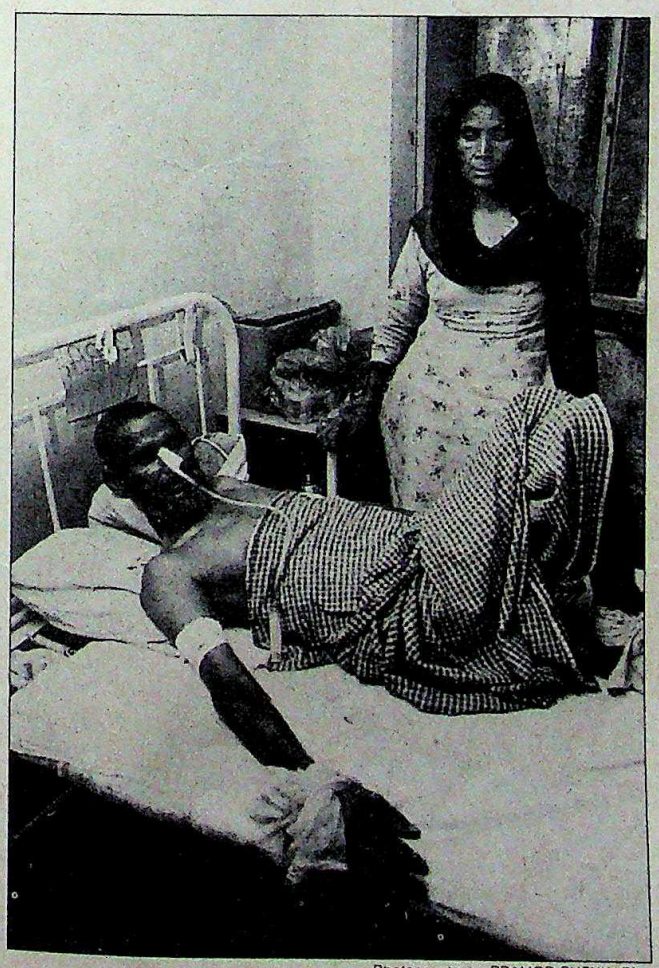
Police patrol trouble area; (right) riot victim: undying hatred



Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The widespread doubts—among both communities—in the administration's ability to take a firm stand coupled with antagonism towards the police, is a dangerous development in a town where the men in khaki have come to represent all authority. "The most visible symbol of the administration is now the beat constable," says Sarvodaya leader Sunder Lal Jain. In the rural areas, however, the gram panchayats, together with the revenue staff, serve as an efficient conduit for feedback.

The failure to hold municipal elections for over a decade means that there are no recognisable grassroot-level leaders and people have nobody to turn to. This has resulted in a communication gap between people on one hand and officialdom, MLAs and MPs on the other. The feedback to authorities is therefore poor and most eruptions of violence are greeted with surprise. To bridge this chasm, Joseph has now reactivated the near-defunct Civil Defence set-up but it cannot replace a political structure.

However, politics is not unaffected. Notes Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who recently resigned from the Union Cabinet alleging his party's failure to fight communalism: "So great is the divide that Meerut Congressmen of different communities meet me separately." Indeed, when local MP and Union Minister for Urban Development Mohsina Kidwai visited Meerut in May, two party MLAs demanded that she leave and later, partymen asked Rajiv Gandhi to ban her entry as it "aggravated" the problem. Young Congressmen also stand accused of rumour-mongering and egging on mobs.

The BJP is now trying hard to carve a local niche for itself. Though Kidwai and all the three MLAs from the town belong to the Congress(I), the BJP is the only party which has bothered to put up its case before the inquiry committee. While condemning the May disturbances, the 10-page representation carefully magnifies Muslim acts of mayhem. In the Assembly, BJP state unit President Kalyan Singh has subtly insinuated that the minority community has waged a war in Meerut. The counter-claim by Muslim MLAs is that they are being pushed into a corner and their cry for protection is being labelled as a demand for another Pakistan.

The administration has attempted to bring the young Hindus and Muslims together by promoting sports among them. It is also screening—uninspiring—Films Division documentaries with an anti-communalism theme but admits Joseph: "We have a limited role in what is essentially a social problem."

The feedback on this appalling situation is reaching the Centre through people like Mufti, who has met the prime minister thrice on the issue since May. But the Centre, barely 70 km away, seems to have left the city to its own fate—a fact that has affected the psyche in Meerut.

"Everyone will soon tire of the curfew, the violence and the joblessness," says Laxmikant Jain, a local goldsmith. Adds Gyan Prakash optimistically: "The people of Meerut will come together as they have in the past." But every fresh eruption takes the exhausted town farther away from that happy ending.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI in Meerut

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WIN CHADHA

Missing Link

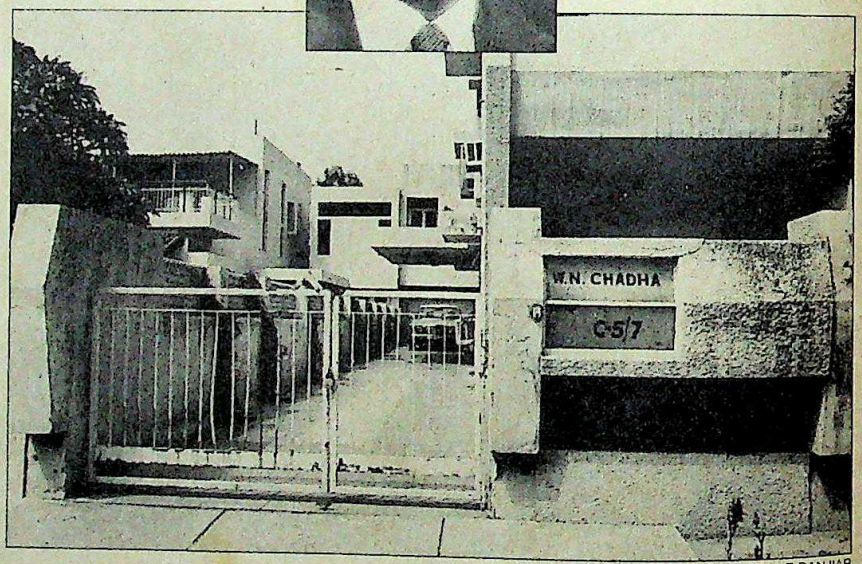
BESPECTACLED, slightly pot-bellied, grey-haired and ailing from "diabetes mellitus and poorly controlled hypertension", Win Chadha, 61, a former Fulbright fellow, hardly fits the picture of a swindler on the run. Chadha, say his doctors at the Hudson Medical Associates Polyclinic in Bronxville, New York, is a seriously sick man. But nobody quite believes that. Ever since his flight from India in the middle of the Bofors scandal three months ago, a massive manhunt has been launched by Indian enforcement officials. Yet, last fortnight, he walked into the Indian consulate in New York, produced his passport with a power of attorney he wanted notarised and walked out, making a mockery of the Government's efforts.

An inquiry has been ordered and the officer who stamped Chadha's power of attorney has been sent back to India though the embassy in Washington claims that it is purely a coincidence. "He was going to India anyway. There is nothing to it," said Ambassador P.K. Kaul, who also claimed that when Chadha walked into the consulate he was not considered a fugitive. Consular officials stress that until then they had not even been told by Delhi to look out for Chadha. It was only later that the embassy received summons for Chadha and his son Hersh from the deputy director (enforcement) in the Finance Ministry.

The orders, says Kaul, were served at the address Chadha had left behind: 143, Little Hill Drive in Stamford, a tiny town in Connecticut, adjoining the New York borough, Bronx. But residents at the address refused to accept the summons, denying that anyone by that name lived there. The consulate had to serve the summons through newspaper advertisements. Later, when a cable from New Delhi said that the Chadhas' passports had been revoked, the embassy informed the US Administration that the Chadhas held invalid documents.

But the hunt is turning into something of a farce. Indian officials in the US say they can hardly press for his deportation unless they find him. But Chadha has been making no effort to hide. He has made daily visits to doctors in Bronxville, New York. Dr Anthony J. Camisa, when contacted, said he has been treating Chadha for "several weeks". His diagnosis: "He is a metabolic disaster. His blood sugar is thrice normal, his triglycerides and cholesterol are very high and his blood pressure ranges between 220 and 230. If his blood pressure goes any higher, he is going to have a stroke."

But the blood pressure was also rising in New Delhi, where the Government's muddled efforts were causing red faces. On July 1, the day the Swedish Audit Bureau sent its report that $39 million (Rs 50 crore) had been paid as winding up costs on the Bofors deal, the Enforcement Directorate raided Chadha's New Delhi residence and the office of Anatronics General Corporation, the flagship of his eight firms dealing in arms, real estate, investment and "liaison". His lockers in the Union Bank of India, Bank of India and Indian Bank were broken into and sealed and his bank accounts in Grindlays Bank and the Bank of Baroda frozen.



Chadha (inset) and his Delhi house: mystery exit

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Win Chadha's audacious visit to the Indian Embassy in the US last fortnight to get his power of attorney endorsed made a total mockery of the Government's so-called efforts to track him down.

Last fortnight, when the Indian consulate cabled New Delhi about the notarised power of attorney in the name of his Administrative Officer S. Nandi and Accounts Manager Paul Joseph M., the directorate made a clumsy attempt to retrieve the document from his Delhi lawyer, P.P. Malhotra. But it had to back off when Malhotra's colleagues angrily protested. "We fear that they will sell off his property and he will never come back," said an official.

"Nonsense!" snaps back one of Chadha's lawyers. "We have not even registered the papers with the sub-registrar." The power of attorney papers, filed in the US, must be registered in Indian offices for legal acceptance here. Officials maintain Chadha has only one farmhouse in his name, though he had two companies—Atmaram Estates and Padmavati Estates—dealing in real estate. A Delhi house under construction is in his wife's name. The Government can confiscate family property by registering a criminal case against him (if he fails to respond to court orders, his property and bank accounts in his or his companies' names can be confiscated).

But more important, his presence is needed to unravel the Bofors scandal. Chadha's six-page agreement with Bofors throws new light on his status as the company's agent in India. The agreement, valid from January 1, 1986 to December 31, 1990 states that Anatro-

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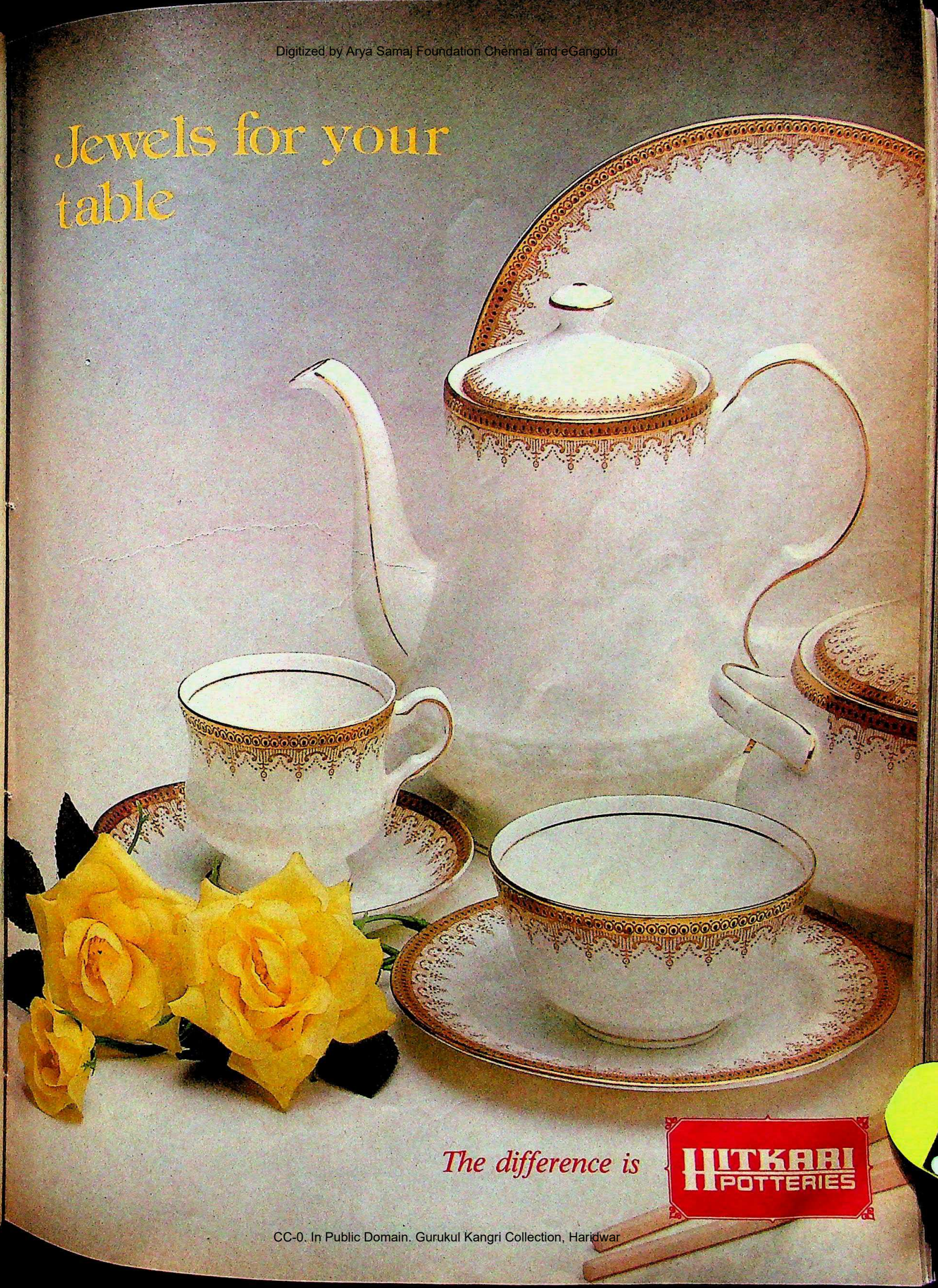

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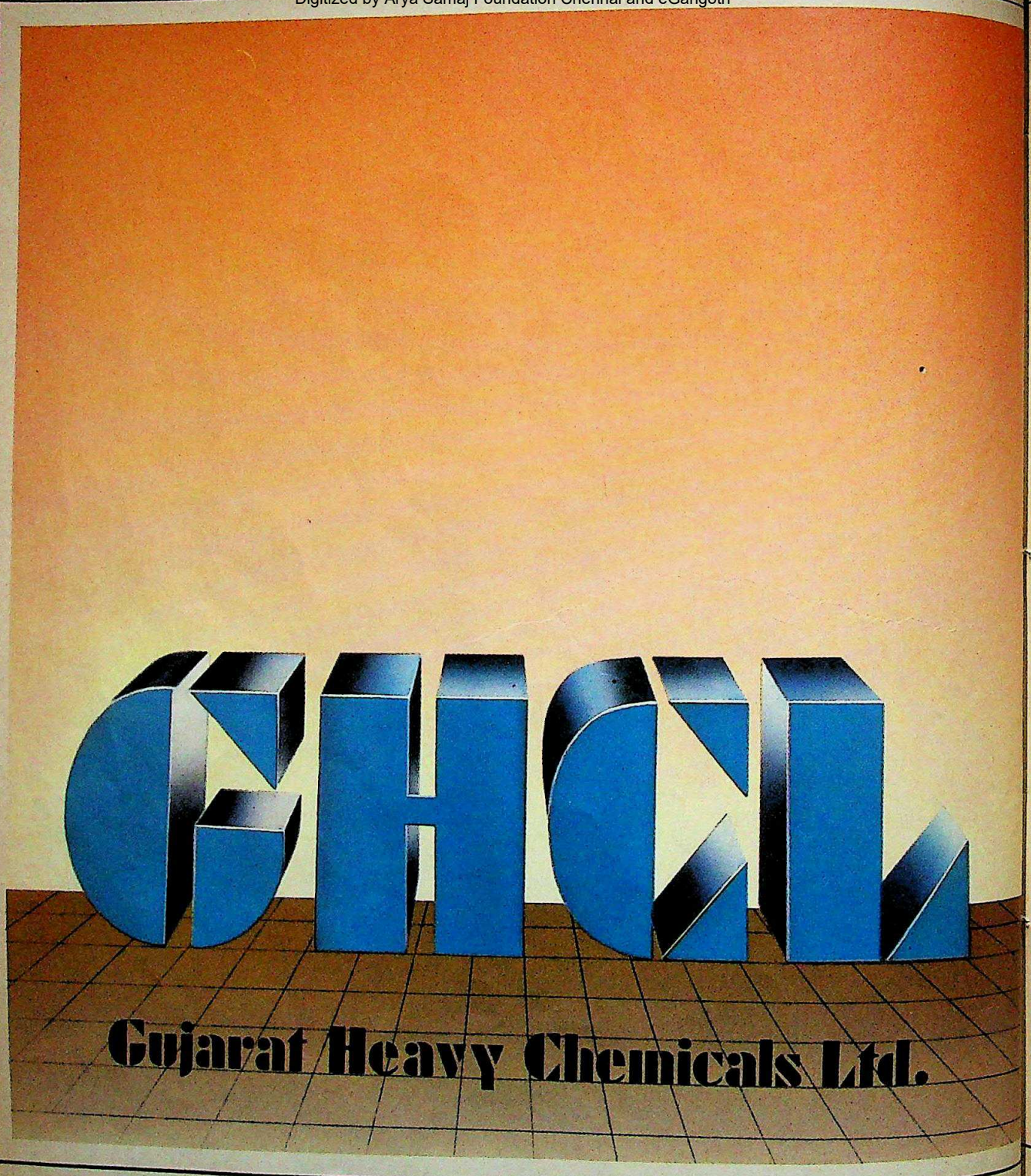

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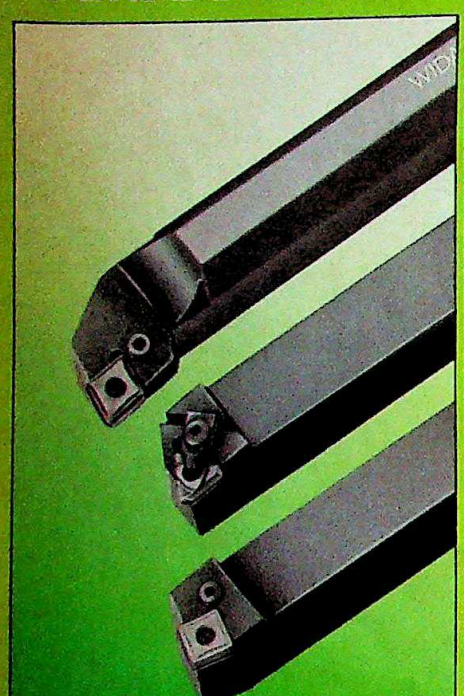

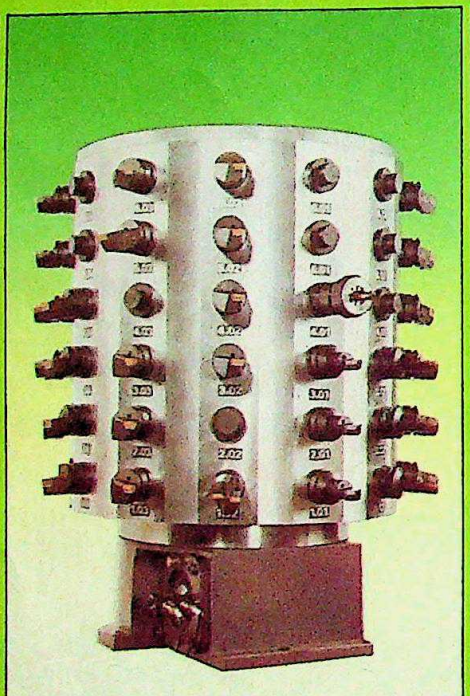

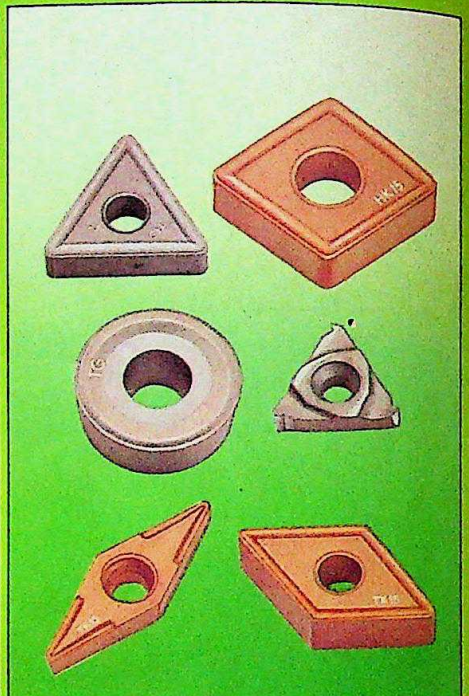

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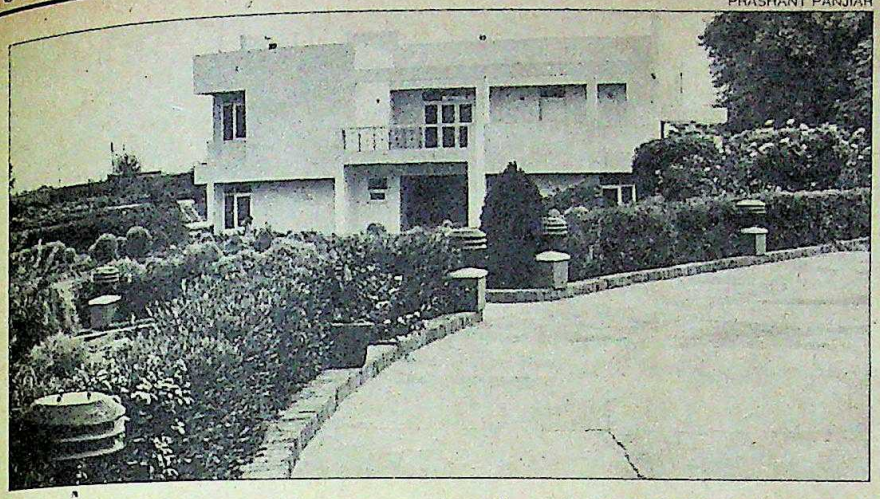
PRASHANT PANJIAR



Chadha's farmhouse: solid assets

nics were "administrative consultants" and had to obtain Bofors' "written permission" to get into any sales activity. But Chadha's duties also included "assisting in obtaining licences for potential Bofors operations in India". The remuneration: 100,000 Swedish kroner (Rs 1,90,000) per month. Also, costs of extensive travelling and trials of ordnance were to be borne by Bofors.

The procedure to get Chadha back is clear-cut. Prosecute him, brand him a proclaimed offender (so that the US Government and its Federal Department can act), get him on Interpol's wanted list and hasten his extradition. Airports will know him as a wanted criminal, local authorities will be told of his fugitive status and federal agents will be able to interrogate anyone who knows his whereabouts. But even if caught, he can go to a US court. Only if he loses there—proceedings could drag on interminably—can he be extradited. His extradition under FERA charges is also uncertain because neither Interpol nor directorate officials can recall a precedent.

But this lengthy procedure can be skirted by getting Chadha deported, a frequently-used practice by Interpol. Since his passport stands revoked and he now carries invalid documents, the Government can ask the US authorities to track him down and send him back. But Interpol will move only after a criminal case under FERA is filed against Chadha.

Directorate sources confirm that they have "enough material" to indict Chadha for violating FERA. But officials are waiting for a green signal from the top—after the Fairfax controversy and the transfer of the finance portfolio to Rajiv Gandhi, nothing moves in the directorate without a nod from the prime minister's house. "We are approaching him through legal channels," says Anil Kumar, enforcement director. "The case is still under investigation," he says, adding that charges will be framed only after investigations are over. That may or may not be further evidence of hastening slowly on an all-important case.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI and SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

HEC

Truce at Last

THE only nice thing that could be said after more than 70 days of agony was that it finally ended. On July 25, the lock-out of India's largest engineering unit, the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) near Ranchi, was lifted, bringing to a close a labour-management face-off that cost the severely ailing corporation an estimated Rs 80 crore. The final understanding was a climb down for the 20,000 workers who will go without pay for the strike that preceded the lockout. Besides, the wage revision agreement of May 14, which had led the unions to strike work, still stands.

The fracas began in May when a tripartite wage revision agreement was signed between the HEC management, the Bihar Government's Labour Department and the Hatia Project Workers Union (HPWU), which is affiliated to the Congress(I)'s Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). Although the wage hike of 14 per cent was greater than the 10 per cent recommended by the Bureau of Public Enterprises, the workers were incensed. They have been demanding pay parity with other Central Government undertakings. They were also agitated that the agreement had been signed by HPWU's chief, Rana Sangram Singh, whose union enjoys only minuscule support. It is only one of the 23 registered and 40 unregistered unions that have proliferated. But Sangram Singh enjoys the backing of Bihar Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, a trade unionist who also heads the state INTUC unit.

On May 16, workers went on a tools down strike, and the HPWU itself split over what was termed a sellout. Capitalising on the anger, Janata Party General Secretary and local MLA Subodhkant Sahay floated the HEC Mazdoor Sangharsh Morcha which had popular support although it excluded INTUC. Its main demand: scrapping of the

Workers blocking the road before HEC: mounting losses

KISLAYA

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agreement. Meanwhile, in Patna, opposition members, led by Karpoori Thakur, offered a three-day dharna in the Assembly in support of the workers. When they were forcibly ejected and then suspended for five days, they rushed to Ranchi to belch fire against the Government. The call for an indefinite strike came on June 22.

Union leaders were convinced that they were victims of a power struggle between three Bihar leaders: Dubey, former chief minister Jagannath Mishra and K.K. Tewary, Union minister of state for public enterprises until his resignation last fortnight. None of the three get along politically. If Tewary wanted the crisis to build up to embarrass Dubey, the chief minister wanted his group to sign an agreement and stall Mishra who has been trying to crack his grip on the unions. Indeed, after the crisis arose, Dubey blamed the Centre while Tewary minced no words in criticising the chief minister.

Politics aside, the HEC tragedy has been unfolding for years now. At the end of the financial year 1985-86, it had accumulated losses of about Rs 500 crore and it had a negative net worth of Rs 311 crore. But Chairman Prem Sagar Gupta claims that things were actually improving. He says that losses declined from Rs 34 crore in 1984-85 to Rs 11.8 crore in 1986-87. "The company would have gone into profit this year had the strike not further crippled it," Gupta asserts. The Centre's vacillation with regard to HEC is best illustrated by the turnover of 18 chairmen in the last 25 years. Chairmen coming from other undertakings have tended to bring along a bunch of officials for key posts, thus breeding resentment. For instance, Gupta came from Bharat Heavy Electricals with five high-ranking executives who came on unheard of terms. The opposition of two directors—A.K. Mishra and P.C. Neogi, both old HEC hands—to the lock-out decision is being read as a part of the resentment against outside executives.

HEC's problem of over-staffing led to a ban on recruitment four years ago: since 1982-83, the staff strength has fallen by 700. Workers fear that Gupta will try to take advantage of the political confusion to get rid of "trouble makers", a list of whom they say he has prepared.

The workers' acceptance of the wage revision is certainly a victory of Dubey. But in volatile Bihar there is no saying when politics will next hit the crippled giant. —FARZAND AHMED in Ranchi

BIHAR

Ad Play

JUST how arbitrary is the dispensation of Bihar Government advertising in the local press became public knowledge recently, much to the embarrassment of the state's rulers. The matter came to light when CPI legislator Shatrughan Prasad Sinha asked in the Legislative Council for the precise break-up of government advertisements, the lifeline for the entire local press.

The Hindi *Aryavrata* and the English *Indian Nation*, which belong to the same publishing house and support Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, received Rs 55.47 lakh worth of state advertising out of a total of Rs 1.75 crore in 1986-87—or 31.69 per cent of the total. Similarly, *Aaj*, another pro-Dubey paper received allocations of Rs 26.53 lakh (15.16 per cent). While it is true that *Aryavrata* and *Indian Nation* were leading dailies until the national dailies, *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *Nav Bharat Times* and *Hindustan* made their appearance in Bihar, the official manner of functioning was best reflected in the discrimination against the popular Hindi *Patliputra Times*. Owned by former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, Dubey's arch-rival, it received advertising support of just Rs 1.58 lakh last year, considerably less than even little-known papers. Worst still, till June this year, the paper had received advertisements worth only Rs 700, the lowest of all 39 English, Hindi and Urdu dailies published from Patna.

The figures speak for Dubey's attitude towards the press for much of his 27-month-long tenure. In the early days of his chief ministership he courted journalists—dinner invitations to newsmen were not uncommon—and backed *Patliputra Times*, because he then got along with Mishra. It was a relationship that would soon sour. At that time, he also got in a non-IAS officer, S.M. Shafiuddin, as director of the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD). He was meant to reorganise the department but the whimsical handling of advertising only succeeded in alienating the press. As the press turned critical, Dubey himself turned contemptuous and refused to so much as hold a press conference during his tenure.

That Dubey was feeling isolated over time became evident two months ago when the chief minister appointed Minister of State for Mines and Geology Om Prakash Lall, 35, in charge of the IPRD, to reorganise it and check irregularities. He also appointed a young journalist, Satyaprakash Asim, in his mid-thirties, known for his incisive writing, as his press advisor—Dubey's third. To clip the director's wings, Lall has now appointed a three-member committee—which, however, includes Shafiuddin—to regulate advertisement allocations.

Dubey with Shafiuddin (centre): arbitrary advertising

Says Lall: "There is no evidence whatsoever that the chief minister ever ordered the department to stop advertisements to any paper." But it would seem that officials in the department took advantage of Dubey's alienation from the press to discriminate against some papers and heap financial advantage on others, including some which were published only for the record and never really appeared on the market. Owners of small papers are keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that there will be some change in the Government's attitude towards the press in the months to come. —FARZAND AHMED

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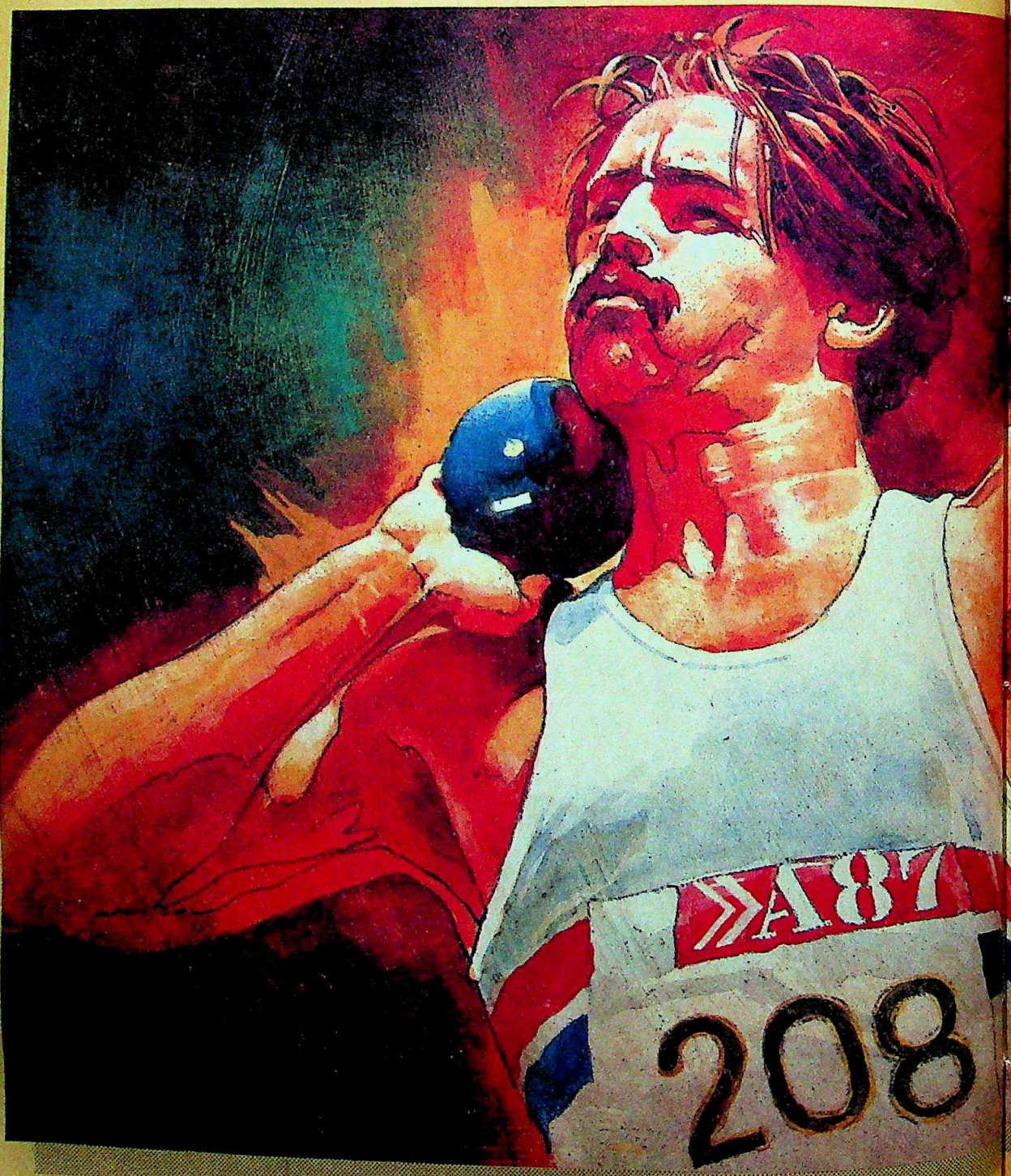

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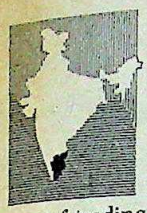
TAMIL NADU

Water Woes



A new item has appeared in household budgets in Madras—water. As dry taps began to haunt the city's 3.2 million residents last fortnight, the business of trading in water assumed the status of a major industry. Says Rajeswari Narasimhan, wife of a public sector executive: "Water has now become a household provision on which one incurs a regular expenditure."

In Madras, the days of turning on the tap for an assured supply of water are temporarily over. Beginning last month, the Madras Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board—popularly called Metrowater—has been supplying only 45 million gallons on alternate days to a city that needs at least 80 million gallons every day. Even this trickle is unreliable. The Red Hills reservoir, which supplies water to the city, is now totally dry. The current supply is purely groundwater, a fast-depleting source.

Not surprisingly, middle class families who can afford it, have begun purchasing tanker-loads of water from private suppliers. A family of four needs, on an average, a tanker-load per fortnight. Those who can't afford it, await their turn in long queues before Metrowater's tankers and pay 10 paise for a bucket against a water ration card. Metrowater claims its tankers distribute four million gallons daily.

A tanker, tapping underground water from private wells on the East Coast road from Tiruvanmiyur in south Madras to the tourist resort of Mahabalipuram, costs anywhere from Rs 150 to Rs 400, depending on the part of the city it is needed. Says Dr S.H.A. Krishna, a retired medical practitioner, now settled in Anna Nagar in west Madras, one of the worst-affected areas: "After making do with a few buckets every day for a long time, we have now started buying water. The only constraint is that every tanker costs Rs 400 in our part of the city." Adds Dr D. Narayana Reddy, who runs a clinic in Theyagaraya Nagar in central Madras: "My monthly water expense for home and clinic will be in the region of Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200."

If households turned to buying water last fortnight, they were following in the footsteps of industry which had gone in for it already last month. Each of the four five-star hotels in Madras, for instance, has been buying, on an average, 10 tankers of water every day for the past month from private tanker operators.

The scale of the business is impressive and transport contractors have predictably turned their attention to it. The operators and transport contractors pay Rs 10 per tanker-load to private well owners on the long coastline stretching towards Mahabalipuram. Says the proprietor of Gomathi Water Suppliers, S. Subramaniam, who has been in the water business for two-and-a-half years: "Water itself doesn't cost much. It is the transportation and other costs which add up." He points out that the quarterly motor vehicles tax for each lorry, for example, has gone up this month from Rs 1,325 to Rs 1,625. Considering that an estimated 2,500 lorries make an average of five trips out of town daily to get water, it would mean that the daily scale of business is in the area of Rs 25 lakh.

Though the transportation of water itself does not require any special permission, tanker operators complain of harassment by the police. Digging a borewell requires a licence but this control is not strictly implemented in the existing desperate situation.

So desperate indeed is the position that several private sector companies have begun reimbursing their executives for the cost of one water tanker every 10 days. Industrial establishments too have started buying water for their workers' colonies. And the price of water is rising steadily, having already doubled over the last month.

But how long even this manner of supply can keep the city going is a good question. Underground coastal water in and around the city can be tapped only up to a depth of 40 ft to 50 ft, at which level there is an impermeable clay barrier separating fresh water from the sea water underneath. In 1983, the last time that the city passed through a similar crisis, water was available in these wells at a depth of 25 ft. This year, in many of the wells, the critical depth of 50 ft is already being reached. If the current scale of commercial exploitation continues, it is only a matter of time before the wells start turning out sea water.

In 1982, Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan played the violin in the Red Hills reservoir to invoke the raingods. The next year, Thomas Verghese from Kerala tried magic, at Metrowater's invitation, to induce rainfall. This year, it is Mammon who is speaking.

Even Metrowater is strangely silent, despite having an ebullient chairman—AIADMK leader Jeppiar (who, mysteriously, keeps his initials secret). Jeppiar, in fact, makes himself as studiously unavailable to the press as to Madras citizens who want to know what the state Government plans to do about the water problem. It is unlikely, that the reason is that his throat is as parched as the rest of the city's residents.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

Queueing for water: costly commodity

SHYAM TEKWANI

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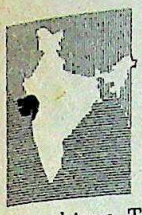
GUJARAT

Dry Debate



TO drink or not to drink? In Gandhian Gujarat, the dilemma is yet to be resolved as the Government attempts to balance political ideology with its political compulsions. The latest debate on the issue has been raging for more than a month and shows no signs of subsiding. And now, the prohibitionists are rallying together to protect what they see is a principle that simply cannot be sacrificed at any cost.

The current controversy has its origins in the stand taken by the sexagenarian Congress(I) MP and trade unionist Chiman Mehta in early June, following communal riots in the district town of Broach. He had then urged Union Home Minister Buta Singh to press the state Government to scrap the dry law. A teetotaller himself, Mehta got the state chapter of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), of which he is also the president, to pass a resolution in late June urging the Government to relax prohibition. Alleging the existence of political patronage to bootleggers and corrupt policemen, Mehta said: "The law exists only on paper and is the single biggest source of corruption in the police force. And it is also a major cause behind the recurring communal riots in Gujarat." Prohibition, in fact, initially came into force more than three decades ago when the present-day state of Gujarat was still a part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency.

Mehta: fighting the ban

The powerful pro-prohibition lobby, which is backed by the Gandhians, reacted quickly, and challenged Mehta with charges of being anti-labour and publicity-hungry. The 85,000-member Textile Labour Association (TLA), that was founded by Mahatma Gandhi, also passed a resolution in early July condemning Mehta's demand and reiterated its faith in total prohibition, which is enshrined in its constitution. Said TLA President Navinchandra Barot, 62: "If the living conditions of the mill workers have improved over the years and domestic tensions have eased, it is because they no longer spend a major part of their salaries on liquor." Added Chunibhai Vaidya, 72, a Sarvodaya leader who has continuously fought liquor consumption and heads the Lok Samiti, a voluntary organisation: "Mehta has done great disservice to the working class. Corruption has very little to do with only the dry law. It exists in every department." Vaidya later issued a public statement urging the INTUC to oust Mehta.

Mehta's demand has provided a rallying point for the prohibitionists. Vaidya and other like-minded leaders have already begun exploring the possibility of forming a joint front to do battle on the issue. Former chief minister Babubhai Patel also argued that the fact that the per capita sales tax netted in Gujarat was thrice as much as that netted in Uttar Pradesh, established the point that there exists a higher purchasing power in the state due to prohibition.

Barot: pro-prohibition

After three decades of prohibition, Gujarat is once again in a turmoil over the question of lifting the ban on liquor.

Mehta's standpoint was apparently based on the actual implementation of the prohibition policy. The nexus between bootleggers, policemen and politicians is widely acknowledged in the state as is the reality of the rivalry between bootleggers of the different communities that has also led to recurring riots in various Gujarat towns in the past.

In Ahmedabad, hooch barons are known to have funded politicians. The best known case is that of Abdul Latif Shaikh, the alleged bootlegger-turned-politician, who was not only elected municipal councillor but, in the course of his campaign, reeled out the names of the politicians he had previously financed. Predictably, in most Gujarat towns, liquor is freely available—often, at various points, only a stone's throw away from police stations. In rural areas, locally distilled brews that are made out of *mahua* and toddy are often staple drinks of the villagers.

The most recent example of lax implementation was available in Broach—the constituency of Congress(I) state chief and MP Ahmed Patel. In this incident in May, what started out merely as a drunken brawl ended in a violent communal riot that snatched half-a-dozen lives. Even after a week of rioting and after preventive steps were supposedly taken by the local police, when the Special Prohibition Squad subsequently conducted raids in Broach, it made a haul of liquor worth several lakh rupees. Inquiries revealed—not surprisingly—that, before the riots, at least three bootleggers had paid the Broach police large sums of money on a daily basis to stall the raids.

As Jashwant Chauhan, a former legislator and an old-time critic of prohibition points out: "Total prohibition is a big farce as those prosecuted are generally small-time carriers of liquor and not the big sharks. This is the result of the bootlegger-police tie-up. Moreover, the judiciary gets bogged down in these cases." In 1985, though 1.2 lakh cases were registered under the Bombay Prohibition Act, as many as 55,000 are pending trial and another 14,000 are still being investigated. True, convictions were made in as many as 24,486 cases, but because most of those indicted were merely carriers, the trade has not suffered to any significant extent.

It is also a common occurrence for bootleggers to be arrested, only to subsequently emerge on bail and simply carry on business. Although habitual offenders can be detained for up to a year under the Prevention of Anti social Activities Act (PASAA), even this does not prove to be a deterrent.

The Congress(I) had promised to make the policy 'practical' in its 1980 assembly elections manifesto, apparently to win votes following demands to exempt toddy and beer from the purview of the dry law. After the election, the

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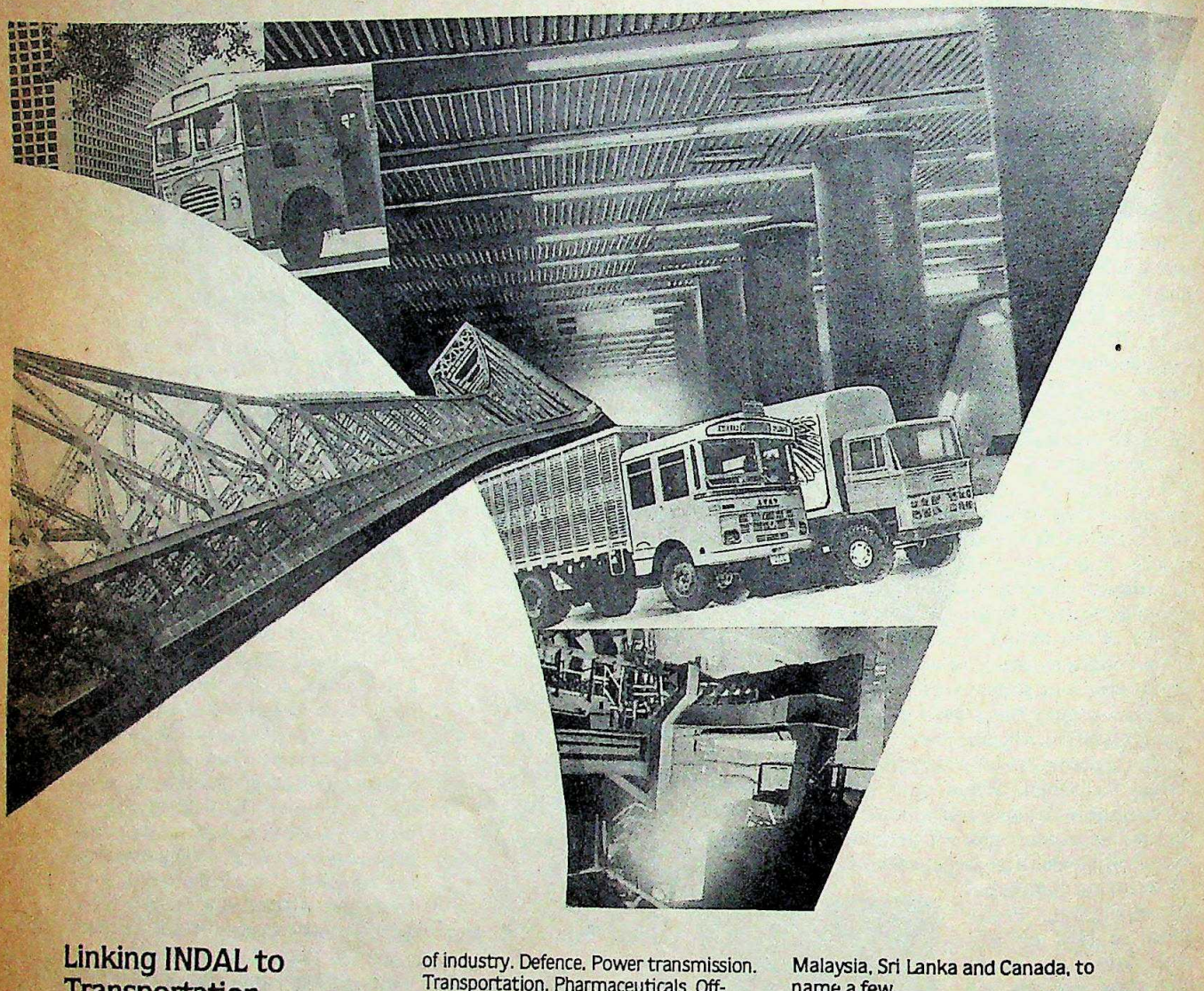

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Madhavsinh Solanki Government had appointed a commission under former Gujarat High Court chief justice N.M. Miyabhoy, to study the prohibition policy. His report, tabled in 1984, was virtually an indictment of the state police machinery, which, it said, ensured that the demand for liquor was first created and then met. It had suggested strong measures for stricter enforcement. This, coupled with protests from the prohibitionists, had then prevented the ruling party from amending the law.

Apart from causing an estimated loss of Rs 80 crore in annual revenue to the state Government, the policy has also adversely affected tourist inflow. Admitted Ashok Kumar Sanyal, general manager of a leading Ahmedabad hotel: "The dry law prevents a good number of tourists from visiting Gujarat. Though the Government does give some concessions to tourists, the procedure is very cumbersome."

Much has depended on the Government's sincerity in implementing the law. Under the Janata Party government, for instance, the prohibition minister, Harisinh Chavda, had exhibited his party's will to enforce it by personally leading raids against bootleggers. However, the dedication of Amarsinh Vaghela, who now heads the portfolio, is suspect because he had supported relaxation, of prohibition, until he was made prohibition minister, when he made a quick turnabout. Lack of government sincerity also shows in its meagre grant of Rs 15 lakh annually to voluntary agencies which have had a crucial role to play in the campaign against liquor. Says Babubhai Patel: "When the Government is spending over Rs 100 crore annually on the mid-day meal scheme for schoolchildren, it could definitely spend a little more for a cause which is linked to social upliftment of the people."

The Government is firm, however, about not relaxing the law. Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary conveniently ignores his own party's stand in 1980 when he asks: "How can one think of scrapping prohibition in Gandhi's Gujarat?" His proposals for stricter enforcement are, nevertheless, vague—among them is one to create a separate force, delinked from the police, and made up of surplus staff from various government departments. His attitude seems to indicate that the prohibition enforcement will limp along in the same half-hearted manner in which it has for the last so many years.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

The Foreign Hand

ONCE upon a time, there was a Foreign Hand. The Foreign Hand was ruining India. So his advisers came to Rajiv Gandhi and said: "Prime minister, the Foreign Hand is destabilising India. You must act in time against it!"

Rajiv asked Sonia: "Have you settled affairs with your sisters and aunts and uncles in Italy?"

"Yes," said Sonia.

Rajiv asked Gopi: "Have you finalised arrangements for our children to study in Moscow?"

"Yes," said Gopi.

Rajiv asked Amitabh: "Have you conveyed what needs to be conveyed to your brother in Switzerland?"

"Yes," said Amitabh.

Rajiv asked Romi: "Have you advised the PR firm we hired in America on how to improve my image?"

"Yes," said Romi.

"Good," said Rajiv. "That's settled then. Now I can deal with the Foreign Hand that is trying to break up our country. The first thing we must do is to unite the nation. For that, we must demoralise our opponents and get rid of the disruptionists within our party."

"How do we demoralise our opponents?" the advisers asked.

"By making the right statements," said Rajiv. "Just watch me."

The prime minister went out and shouted: "I'll make those who work with the Foreign Hand remember their grandmothers!"

He went to a meeting in Parliament and snarled: "I can't answer every barking dog I see!"

"Wonderful," said the advisers. "Your opponents are demoralised. Now, get rid of the disruptionists in the party."

"Watch me," said Rajiv. And he started to give orders.

"Expel Arif Khan," the prime minister commanded.

"Why, prime minister?" they asked.

"Because he is disrupting law and order in Meerut," Rajiv said. "Expel V.C. Shukla."

"What for, prime minister?" they asked.

"Because he is disrupting the President in Rashtrapati Bhawan," Rajiv said. "Expel Arun Nehru."

"What has he done, prime minister?"

"He is disrupting the Nehrus," Rajiv explained. "Expel V.P. Singh."

"What's his fault, prime minister?" they asked.

"He is disrupting big business," Rajiv said.

"Well, that's it. The disruptionists are out of the party."

All the advisers applauded. "That was wonderful, prime minister," they said. "That must have taught the Foreign Hand a lesson."

"That's right," said Rajiv. "It should have also united the whole country by now. Go and find out."

The advisers went out. They returned with long faces. "Prime minister, you were right, the whole country is getting united."

"Good," said Rajiv. "But why do you look so sad?"

"Because prime minister," they wailed. "The country is getting united against you...."

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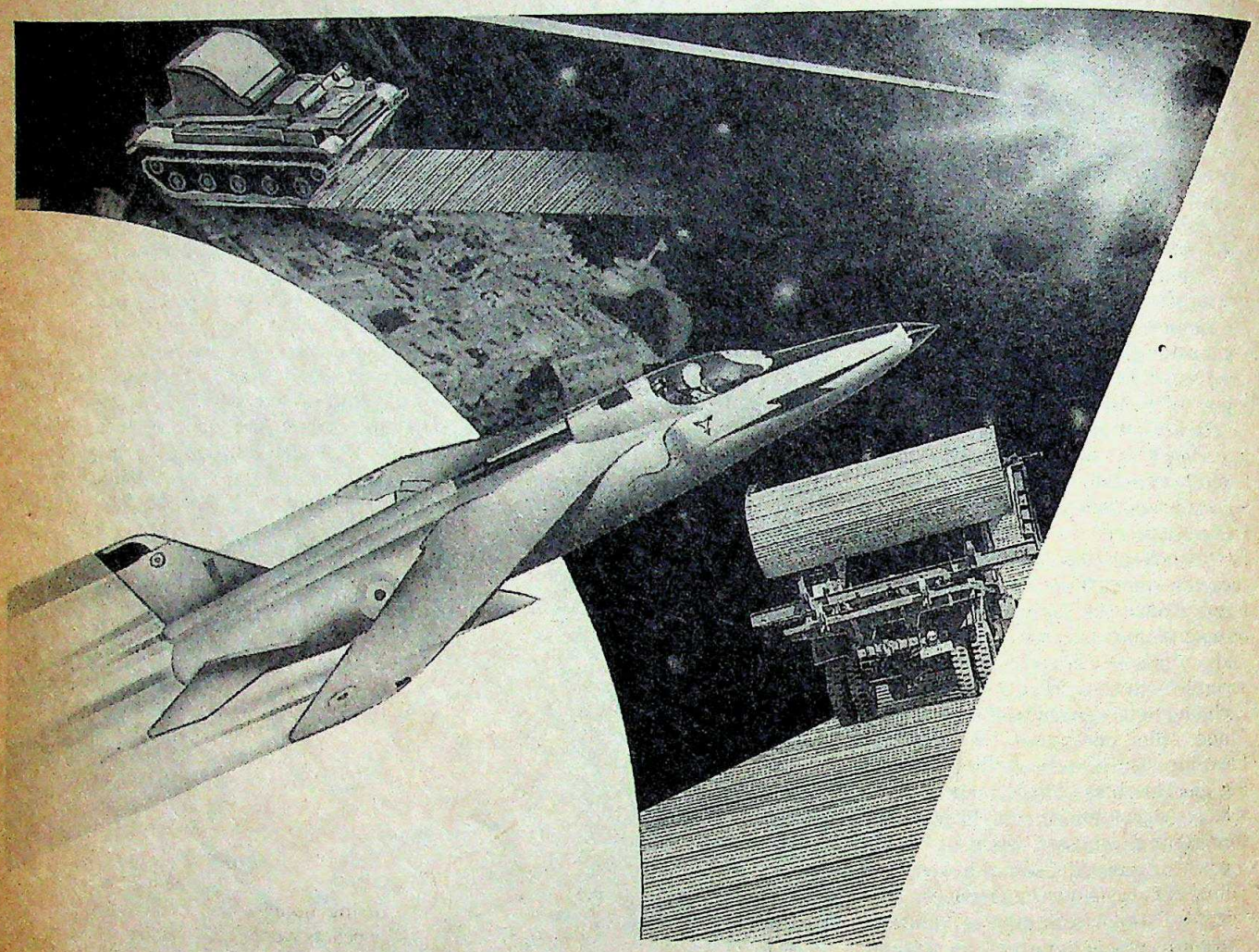
FOR SOME FIGHTERS WE GIVE OUR BODIES



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MADHYA PRADESH

Sons of Trouble

In Beohari town in Madhya Pradesh, Santosh Kumar Shukla, 30, is always surrounded by "people who can defend him", to quote his father Ramkishore Shukla, the state's finance and law minister. But the charges of intimidation against the minister's sons are proving increasingly embarrassing. Alleges BJP leader Lawkesh Singh: "They are holding the town to ransom."

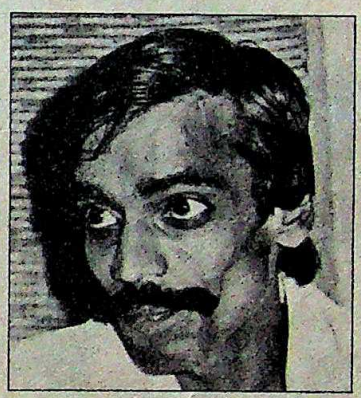
Shukla admits that his sons' cronies face some criminal charges but justifies Santosh's association with them by saying: "He keeps them because he has to survive there." But the case is not as simple as he makes it out to be. Two of his five sons, Santosh and Surendra, face three separate police cases each, while two others, Vinod and Bindeshwari, have one case each pending against them. These relate chiefly to house trespass and obstructing public servants in discharging their duties. A case against Santosh, for allegedly attacking a government truck-driver, even figured in the state Assembly last year. But it had to be closed as the complainant did not come forward to give evidence.

Now, Shukla's sons have been named in an attack on a circus in front of Beohari police station by a group of hooligans. Three circus employees, including a woman trapeze artiste, were injured following an altercation that took place over the purchase of tickets. The attackers, who went on a rampage, also fired gunshots at the circus employees. Three people were arrested and in statements recorded by a magistrate, home guards jawans at the circus and other eyewitnesses named Santosh and his brother Vinod in connection with the attack. The statements were recorded apparently as the district administration had doubts about the manner in which the first information report was taken.

Though Vinod's application for anticipatory bail has been turned down by the sessions judge at Shahdol, the police have not yet arrested the brothers, substantiating the charge that the administration is afraid to act in the case. The issue even found an echo in the state Assembly where opposition leader Kailash Joshi charged: "The Government is deliberately suppressing facts in the case and shielding the influential accused."

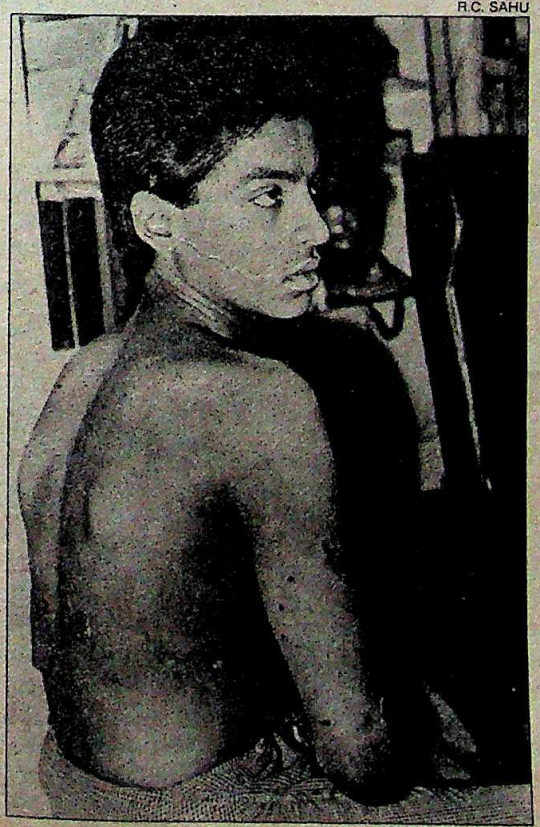
Santosh, however, vehemently denies the allegations. He says his brother, Vinod, went to the circus but came out after the trouble began. "I reached the spot only to restrain the crowd which was in a violent mood as they were assaulted by circus employees," he says. He accuses his father's political rivals of trying to implicate him and his brothers.

Notwithstanding these protestations of innocence, the terrorised circus management decided to shift from Beohari to Pali, 120 km away. Says proprietor Prakash, 32: "They are big people. A minister's sons are involved. We are afraid." He says the Beohari sub-inspector of police was literally "begging" the minister's sons not to foment trouble. Adds Sharif Khan, 30, who looks after the circus lions: "I can tame a lion, but cannot face those goondas again." Most circus artistes say they have never experienced anything of this kind during their constant travels.



Injured Uday Kumar (bottom); Shukla (left) and Santosh: spreading terror

R.C. SAHU



The treatment of the injured circus employees at the Rewa Medical College Hospital lends credence to charges of a political cover-up. Says Uday Kumar, 18, one of the three employees with gunshot wounds who was rushed there: "They initially admitted us but later simply threw us out without giving any reasons." Comments Dr Vijay Saraf, who runs a private nursing home in Shahdol, where the pellets were finally removed: "I don't know how such a big hospital could discharge them without removing the pellets. It is strange."

The BJP organised a public meeting at Beohari to condemn the incident and presented a memorandum to Chief Minister Motilal Vora when he visited Shahdol after the incident, demanding his resignation and action against the culprits. The Government has ordered a CID inquiry and the Beohari sub-inspector has been attached to the lines as Shahdol's Superintendent of Police Nandan Dube said "his role in the incident was found to be dubious".

But public dissatisfaction over the Government's reluctant intervention continues to reign. Though Shukla insists that the whole thing is a political game aimed at hurting him, he will find it increasingly hard to persuade his voters to see his point of view.

—N.K. SINGH in Shahdol

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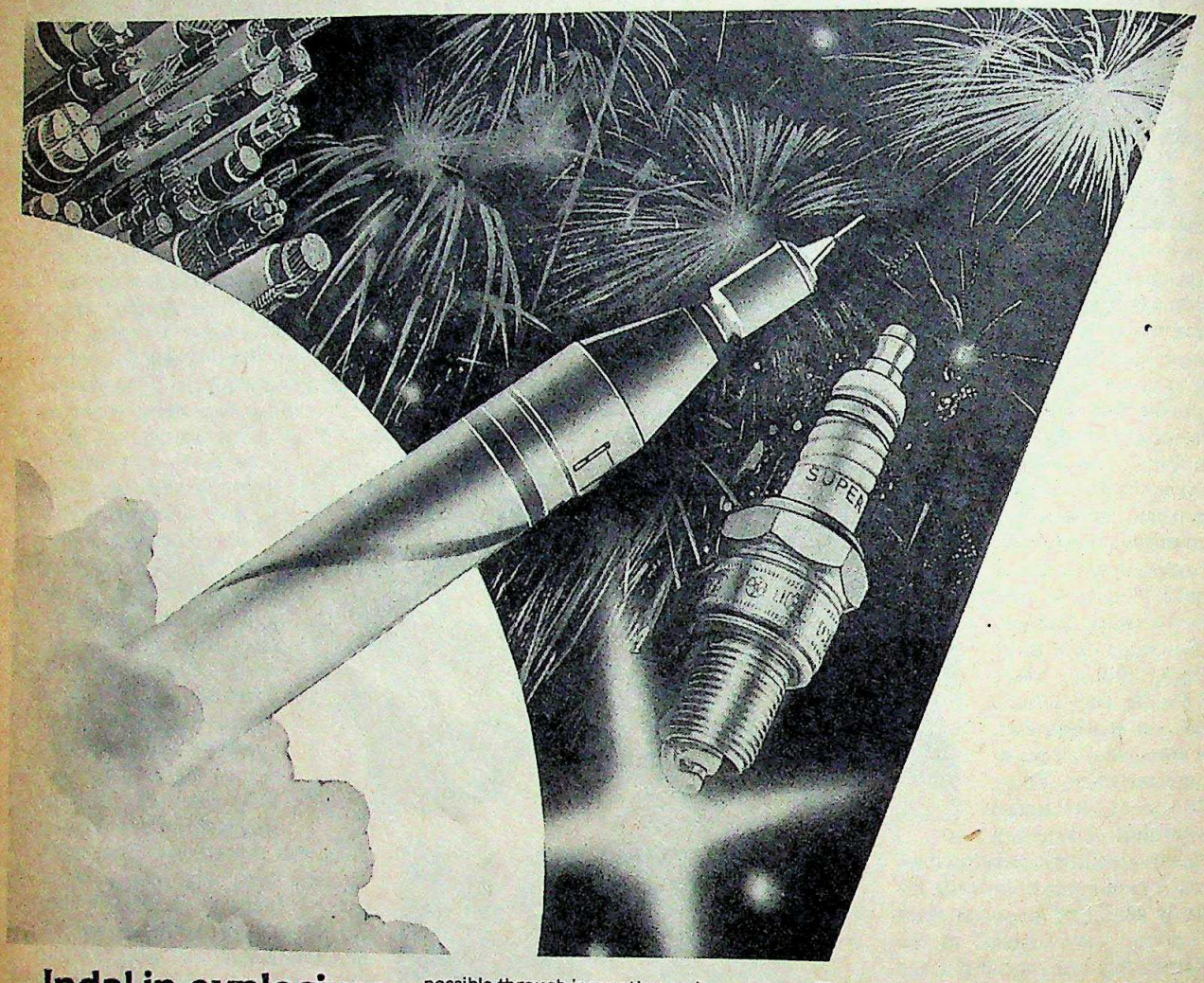

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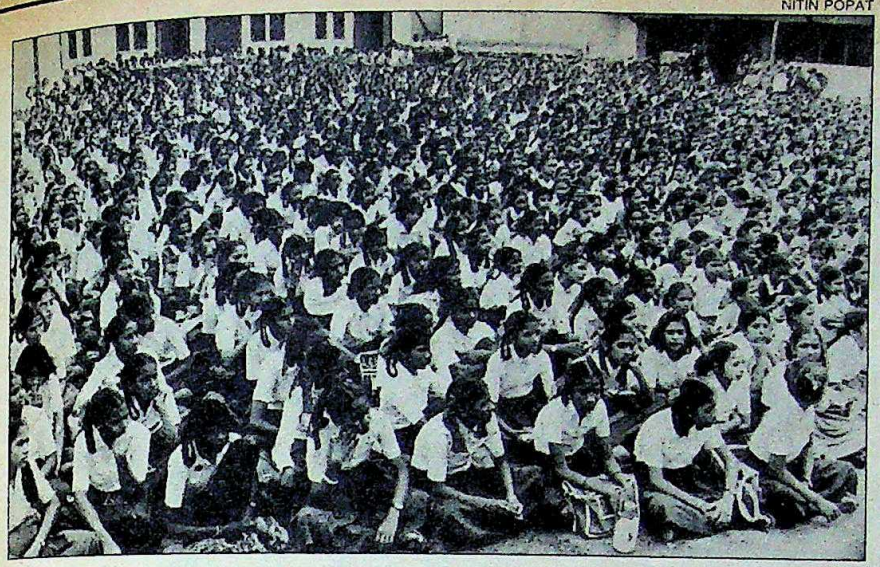
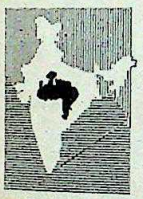
NITIN POPAT



MADHYA PRADESH

Acid Attacks



VANDANA Sharma is only 14 but "I wish I had died," she wailed in a Jabalpur hospital last fortnight after severe acid burns had disfigured her face. Along with four schoolgirls and two passers-by, she was the latest victim of an 'acid cult' in this Madhya Pradesh town.

Over the last five years, at least 150 such serious cases have been recorded. In the July 16 case, the culprit, Premlal Dheemar, 30, a rickshaw-puller, told the police that he had wanted to punish Vandana—he used to take her to school—for complaining to her parents about his misbehaviour, leading to his sacking. Three of the girls—including Vandana—were later rushed to Bombay for treatment at government expense.

After booking Dheemar under the charge of attempt to murder—Section 307 IPC—and detaining him under the National Security Act (NSA), the police also arrested the owner and an employee of the shop which had sold him the acid. Several shops were raided and a huge quantity of undeclared stock recovered.

As news of the tragedy spread, a large crowd gathered at the hospital. "It was a moving sight," said 17-year-old victim Rita Sharma. All schools and colleges remained closed on July 17 following a student boycott. Schoolgirls also staged a protest rally and handed a memorandum to District Magistrate Bhagirath Prasad. There was anger at the administration's failure to act in spite of several attacks, including one in August last year—it caused an uproar—in which two-year-old Lucky Sharma's face was grotesquely disfigured in a case sparked by political rivalry.

MUKESH JAIN

Victim Vandana; and (top) protesting schoolgirls: tragic trend

Although announcements of changes in law and regulation of the acid trade had been made, little was implemented. After the Lucky tragedy, only people with specially issued identity cards should have had access to the liquid. But the cases since and the recovery of large quantities of acid from criminals prove that this didn't happen. "It pains me that nothing has changed," says Lucky's father, Dr Kailash Sharma.

Superintendent of Police O.P. Rathor says that acid attacks in Jabalpur date back to 1957. Criminals favour the method for the fear psychosis it creates but Rathor notes that ordinary people have taken to this method, in family feuds.

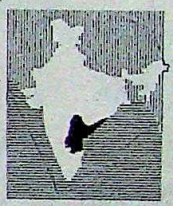
Until recently, culprits were booked for causing grievous hurt by dangerous means and not for attempt to murder. But under public pressure, the police is now using Section 307—in addition to the NSA—under which bail is hard to secure. Less than half-a-dozen culprits have been convicted in five years.

The district administration has now proposed the enactment of a special law in which the onus of proof will be on the accused, and which will carry the death sentence. The police have also moved the Government to introduce a licensing system to control the trade. As it is, considerable time has been wasted, as dozens of victims tragically testify.

—N.K. SINGH in Jabalpur

ANDHRA PRADESH

Double Fracas



A piquant situation has developed in Andhra Pradesh. Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, despite his proclamations of virtuosity in public life, has taken into his cabinet two MLAs with long police records. Interestingly, Home Minister Dr K. Siva Prasad Rao and Labour Minister P. Siva Reddy have had their names entered in police books after becoming Telugu Desam legislators.

The Opposition went into the attack soon after the dramatic cabinet reshuffle of July 11 (INDIA TODAY, July 31). An adjournment motion was tabled in the Assembly questioning the appointments but when the speaker turned it down, the opposition legislators staged a walk-out. But the Telugu Desam supremo was unmoved. Said he: "No man is presumed guilty till he is proved as such. It would be unfair to deny anyone this benefit just because he is a minister."

Among the charges against Siva Prasad—a general surgeon with a 100-bed nursing home in his constituency, Narasarapet—are attacks on an IPS officer, R.P. Meena, and the principal of a Narasarapet college. Both the cases were, however, recently withdrawn by the Government in "public interest".

Besides, the home minister stands accused in five other cases, three of which relate to violence during the 1984 Lok Sabha polls in which bombs were hurled in clashes between Telugu Desam and Congress(I) workers. However, says Siva Prasad: "I have never seen a bomb. Most cases have been foisted on me by Congress(I) men who pressured the local police to register them."

The charges against Siva Reddy are

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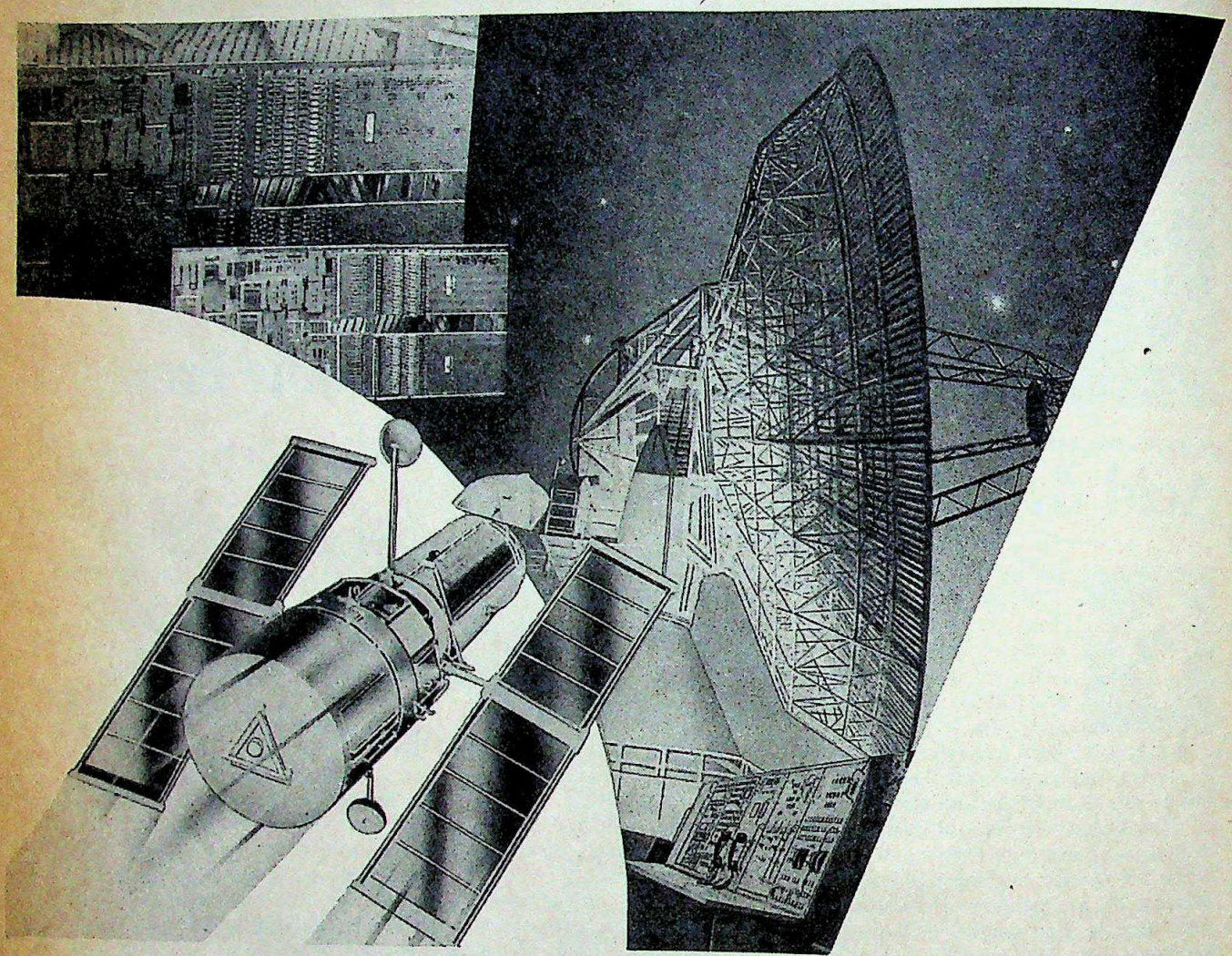

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Siva Reddy (left) and Siva Prasad: unedifying records

no less serious. Elected from Jammalamadugu—known for violence—he faces several accusations of taking the law into his own hands after his election in 1983. Just two months after his election, he and his men stormed into the Jammalamadugu police station and forcibly had some of his supporters—detained for gambling—set free. A few constables were also beaten up.

Later, on July 31, 1984, Siva Reddy allegedly opened fire on a crowd during a bandh called to support a local demand for more water and jobs. He was charged with attempt to murder and though the case was dropped—again in "public interest"—a private complaint against him is still in court. Another private complaint by a cement factory official accuses Siva Reddy of threatening him with a rifle on September 5, 1985. What is more, during the Hyderabad Corporation elections in February 1986, Siva Reddy was nabbed by the police after he and some accomplices in a jeep allegedly hurled bombs at a polling booth. According to the records of the Chandranarayangutta police station, the man who was later to become minister also opened fire to scare away voters.

The litany of complaints against the labour minister do not end here. On April 12 this year, an illicit liquor den in Dorivemula village, allegedly run by Siva Reddy himself, was raided by excise officials. Illicit liquor, bottles and fake labels, besides two jeeps used for transporting the stuff, were seized. Again, on June 26 this year, the Cuddapah district police had to chase away Siva Reddy and some of his men when they went to the house of the zilla parishad president, Balram Reddy, allegedly to threaten him. Defending his actions Siva Reddy says: "My involvement in any raid or any incident is only for self-protection."

But for Telugu Desam, faced with declining popularity in urban pockets, the controversial past of the two ministers may well prove to be a millstone around its neck.—AMARNATH K. MENON

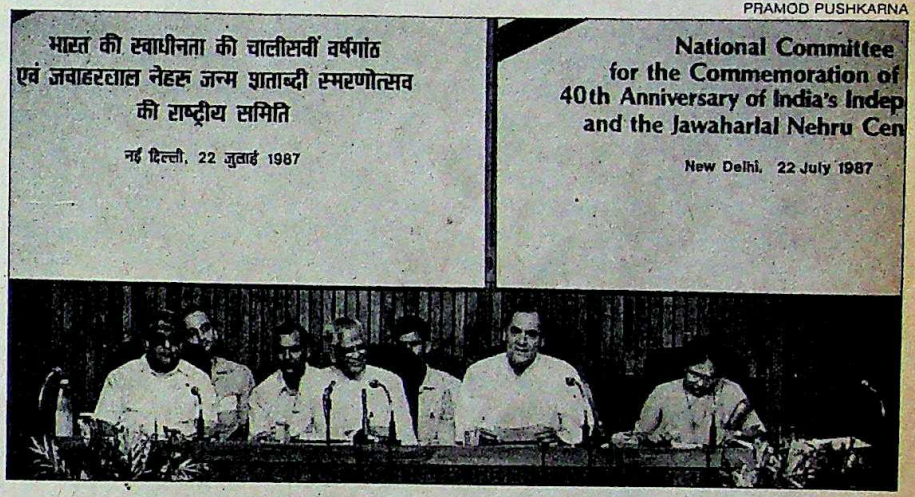
CELEBRATIONS

On a Low Key

THE partying is over. It is not *quite* the time to celebrate and bring out the crackers. The 40 years of Independence and the 100 years of Jawaharlal Nehru were going to be kicked off with pyrotechnics in Delhi; the sparks (Rs 20 lakh) igniting several *utsavs*. But fireworks of another kind have dampened the spirit.

For its first meeting on December 23 last year it was the National Committee for the Celebration of 40 Years of Independence and the Jawaharlal Nehru centenary. Last fortnight, when it met again, commemoration had replaced celebration. Even Chairman R. Venkataraman changed his words. And his tone. It was graver: "It is a moment of sombre introspection of what we have achieved and the tasks which lie ahead."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Dixit (extreme right) with Rajiv and Venkataraman: a sober tone

The report also carries a hint of chastisement: "We must focus on key issues of nation-building and caution against making a *tamasha*."

Certainly, there are flights of fancy in the suggestions: sending up a Freedom 40 satellite, a human chain of people holding hands across the nation, a "superstar road show on freedom" video to be marketed internationally. But says Shiela Dixit, Union minister of state for parliamentary affairs and chairperson of the implementation committee: "We want to sow pride in the nation. People today run it down. We want people to say: 'India is my land'." So, freedom fighters will get a memorial like the one to the unknown soldier—to be built in Delhi after an international competition to choose the architect.

The budget has not been finalised; although the secretariat set up for it has been sanctioned Rs4 crore, the rest of the money is coming from the Centre and states. Thoughts of austerity have not leashed the imagination. On the anvil are a Freedom 40 cricket match—India and Pakistan against the world (after all they had the same enemy then), HMV cassettes with old patriotic songs from films interspersed with the speeches of Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, cassettes of four versions of the national anthem. There will also be a ballet presented by Europe Youth Orchestra—Zubin Mehta's tribute to Nehru.

Memorabilia is aplenty: T-shirts with "I run for India", badges, flags, banners, buttons. Television will show 52 episodes of *Discovery of India* by Shyam Benegal, write-in shows about stories of freedom fighters from remote corners, talk shows, documentaries. There will be Freedom 40 awards for young achievers—an organisation for young achievers is planned, called DRIVE, for dedication, responsibility, initiative, vision and enthusiasm.

It begins on August 9 at Gowalia Tank in Bombay, remembering the Quit India Movement, with Aruna Asaf Ali hoisting the flag—as she did 45 years ago. Then the prime minister will collect the soil from the tank, the signal for people to collect soil from sites connected with the freedom movement.

Later, the soil collected from all over will be mixed at Rajghat. The President and the prime minister will plant saplings on it. Half the "nationally integrated" soil will be taken back to the rest of the country: groves of 40 trees each are to be planted on it. From soil to soil, in other words. —MADHU JAIN

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MAHARASHTRA

A Clash of Interests

IN spite of the Congress(I)'s overwhelming majority in the state Assembly, Maharashtra is going through a period of severe instability. Within just 17 months of taking over the chief ministership of the state, S.B. Chavan is already a beleaguered man, hounded by his own partymen. Chief Correspondent M. RAHMAN analyses the reasons that have led to the alignment of intra-party forces against Chavan. His report:

IT sounded like an irritated elder putting a truant schoolboy in his place. "We have spoken to him and he will not do it again," said Rajiv Gandhi when questioned about Rajasthan Governor Vasantrao Patil's extraordinary attempts to bring down Maharashtra Chief Minister S.B. Chavan's Government. Rajiv's comment came after weeks of intense lobbying for Chavan's removal from a post he had reluctantly accepted 17 months ago after Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar was forced to resign following a medical examination scandal.

Chavan's problems began even as the state Assembly met for the monsoon session in Bombay. Vasantdada, looking fit in spite of chronic diabetes, openly spoke of the need to remove him if the party was to survive in Maharashtra. Chavan typically said nothing but, after a visit to Delhi, quietly announced that Rajiv had okayed the long-awaited cabinet expansion.

Vasantdada soon followed Chavan to Delhi and, unable to meet Rajiv for two days, threatened to resign from his post if he was not granted an audience. Soon Vasantdada was back in Bombay, asserting that not only would Chavan not be allowed to expand his cabinet but that there would be a new chief minister by August 1. Seething with anger, Chavan complained to Rajiv and, in a rare display of candour, publicly attacked Vasantdada for "angling for the state's chief ministership" for the third time.

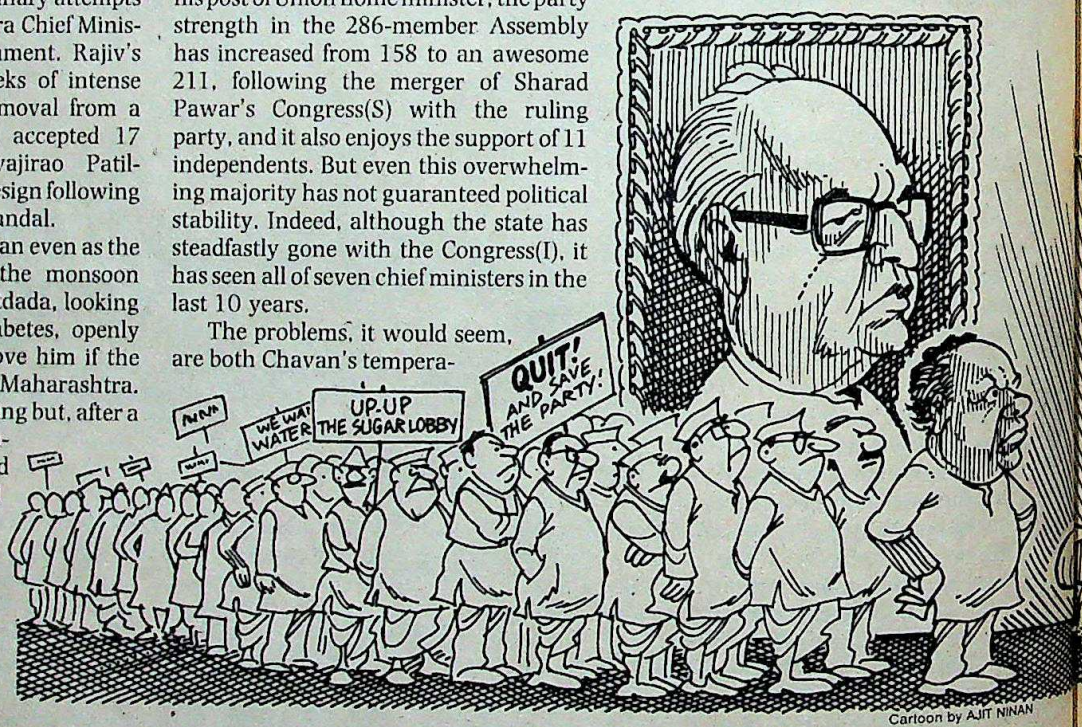
As rumours swept the corridors of the Vidhan Sabha, the chief minister's supporters organised dinners and confidently claimed that the Government would survive. Ultimately, before the Assembly session ended on July 24—Chavan faced the ignominy of his party members pressing for a privilege motion against him—two party factions came out with signed memorandums leaving the leadership issue to Rajiv. "When it comes to the crunch, 90 per cent of the MLAs will still do Rajiv's bidding," said an MLA ruefully.

Since Chavan's return after giving up his post of Union home minister, the party strength in the 286-member Assembly has increased from 158 to an awesome 211, following the merger of Sharad Pawar's Congress(S) with the ruling party, and it also enjoys the support of 11 independents. But even this overwhelming majority has not guaranteed political stability. Indeed, although the state has steadfastly gone with the Congress(I), it has seen all of seven chief ministers in the last 10 years.

The problems, it would seem, are both Chavan's temperament as also the overweaning ambitions of his party rivals. Chavan returned to Maharashtra with the reputation of being an excellent administrator but a poor politician. It is a failing he implicitly acknowledged recently: "Before coming to Maharashtra, I never claimed that I had majority support (in the Assembly). Actually, I was forced against my wish to come here."

Aware that he owes his position to the party bosses and not state legislators, Chavan has studiously kept his distance from most MLAs. He is also unwilling to play the usual game of distributing favours and winning legislators over. Though Pawar and Vasantdada each command the loyalty of at least one-third of the legislators, Chavan has failed to develop his own following.

Outside the Cabinet, his most prominent supporter is Balasaheb Vikhe-Patil, MP, who controls the state's oldest co-operative sugar factory in Ahmednagar. Though himself a Maratha, Chavan hails from the backward Marathawada region and lacks a following in western Maharashtra's prosperous sugar cooperative belt, the centre of political power in the state and home turf for Pawar and Vasantdada.



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Chavan has been trying to curb the Maratha sugar lobby's enormous clout, repeatedly asserting the Government's intention to supply water from new irrigation schemes to sugarcane areas for only eight months of the year. He also wants to curtail the sugar cooperative leaders' powers to collect funds from cane growers. This lies at the root of his conflict with Vasantdada and Pawar, the sugar lobby's

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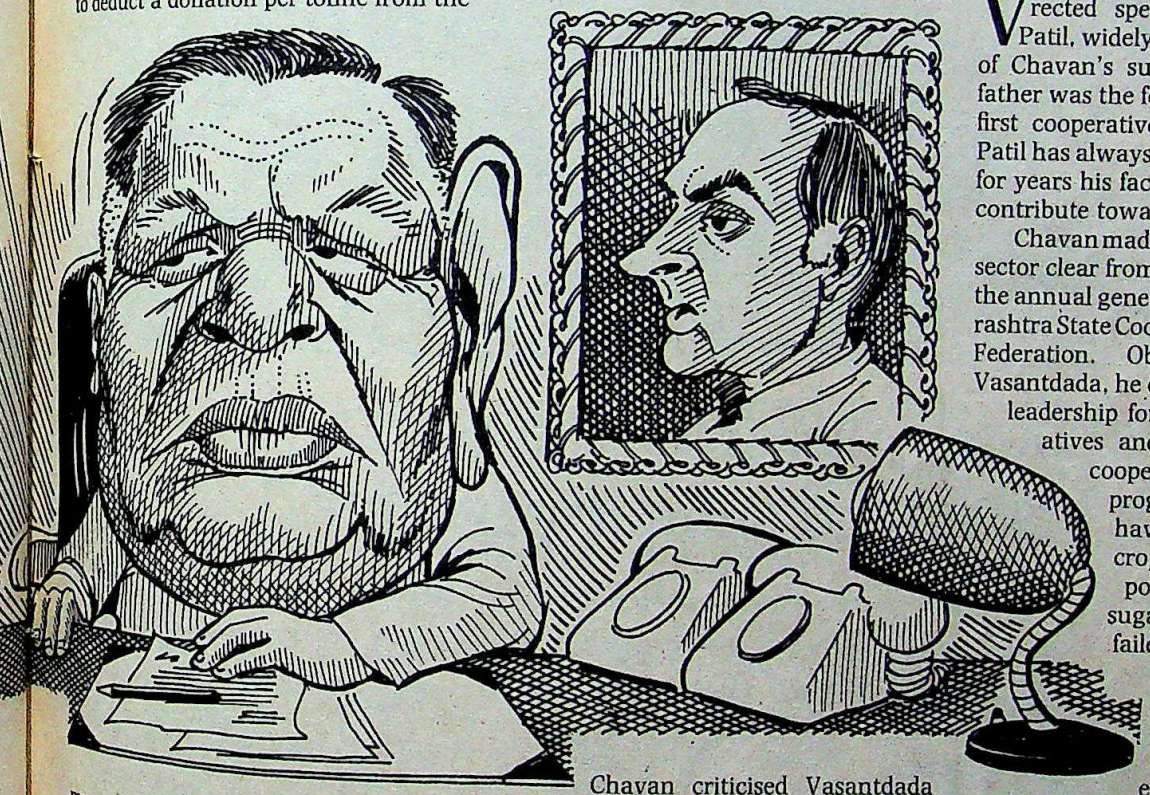
most prominent leaders, both of whom have been chief ministers.

Of the 101 sugar factories in Maharashtra—the country's second largest sugar producer—92 are in the cooperative sector, and many of these are controlled by important Congressmen. This year's sugar production is an estimated 24 lakh tonnes and almost a quarter of the annual agricultural income of Rs 5,682 crore comes from this sector.

Though Chavan says that the drought-stricken districts have reacted very positively to his new irrigation policy, its effect will really show only years later when the new schemes are completed. But other decisions have instantly affected the sugar barons. For instance, a simple but effective way to raise funds was to deduct a donation per tonne from the money paid to farmers for their sugarcane. This would go into countless trusts—ostensibly set up for area development—controlled privately by the barons. But now the Government has ruled as illegal any such donations to trusts not directly controlled by a cooperative factory's board of directors. Moreover, a formula has been introduced on the quantum of donations, which has to be approved by a general body meeting of the cooperatives. With a stroke of the pen, Chavan has checked a traditional source of financial power.

Three years of drought and new government regulations have made the prospect of expansion immeasurably gloomy. The Central Government has referred back to the state 52 proposals for new sugar factories as none of these qualify under licensing guidelines introduced last December. For ambitious politicians, the takeover of a private factory is now the only way out. Six private units are due to be brought into the cooperative sector and it was this that recently led to the first serious public wrangle between Chavan and the leaders of sugar cooperatives in the Congress(I).

On one of his periodic visits to Maharashtra, the Rajasthan governor summoned Director of Sugar Shrinivas Patil and along with Pawar is said to have discussed how sugar factories could be converted into cooperatives. An angry Chavan criticised Vasantdada and Pawar, and to drive home his point, transferred Shrinivas Patil from the plum post to a remote district.



Chavan also turned his attention to the 12-year-old Deccan Sugar Institute (DSI), a research and training organisation of which Vasantdada is president for life. The DSI, a yet to be completed Rs 25-crore project, was set up on a large tract of government-donated land on Pune's outskirts by a sugar cooperatives' trust. The institute researches all aspects of sugarcane growing and use, and also conducts technical courses on factory functioning. The DSI's annual Rs 1.5-crore budget is met through a deduction from the price of levy sugar. But with Chavan's attack, there was criticism of the DSI's functioning and indications of a government inquiry.

In Pune to attend the institute's annual general meeting, an infuriated Vasantdada said that the chief minister would have to go if the future of the cooperatives and the party was to be safeguarded. It was clear that Vasantdada's own ambitions had coincided with the embattled sugar lobby's interests. As *The Maharashtra Times* commented critically, Vasantdada was insisting that "everybody should accept his equation that cooperatives mean Congress, cooperatives mean Dada, therefore Dada means Congress".

VASANTDADA'S venom was directed specifically against Vikhe-Patil, widely considered the architect of Chavan's sugar policy. Though his father was the founder of Maharashtra's first cooperative sugar factory, Vikhe-Patil has always been the odd man out—for years his factory has even refused to contribute towards the DSI's running.

Chavan made his attitude towards the sector clear from no less a platform than the annual general meeting of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Sugar Factories Federation. Obviously referring to Vasantdada, he criticised a section of the leadership for exploiting the cooperatives and insisted that for the cooperative movement's progress, the focus would have to shift to non-cash crops grown by the state's poorer farmers. "The sugar cooperatives have failed to reach the common man," he emphasised. "The Government's policy is clearly aimed against the leadership of the cooperatives," said Vishwanath Patil, outgoing federation president and Vasantdada's nephew. "Drought has meant that 17 sugar factories have no cane to crush and only 86 cooperative factories are functioning now."

Complained Janata Party leader P.K. Anna Patil who controls a sugar factory: "Please tell the chief minister not to see Dada whenever he sees a sugar cooperative." Chairman of the Maharashtra Distillers Association Anna Patil said that the latest crisis was caused by a government hike in the duty on molasses and alcohol, which had priced it out of the national market. "Our factories are choked with unsold molasses and alcohol

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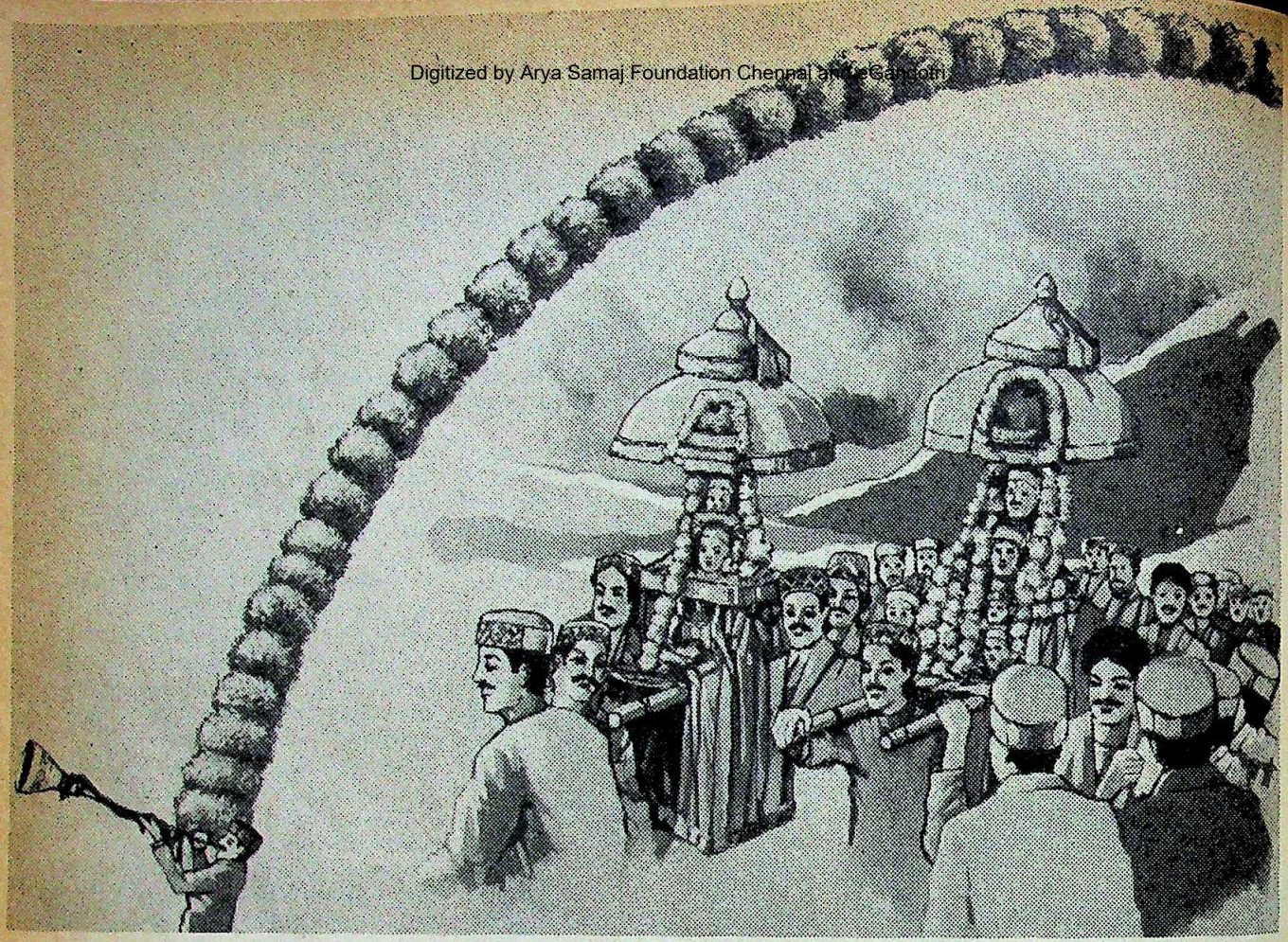
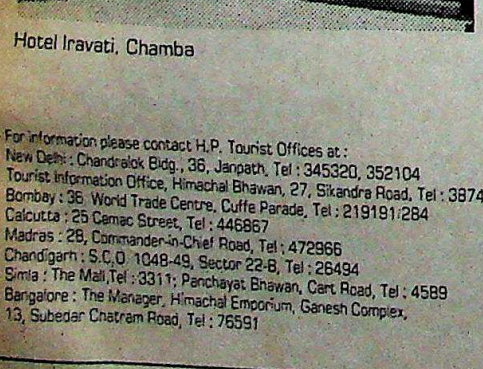


"And pomp, and feast and revelry,
With masks, and antique pageantry"
– JOHN MILTON



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now, and if they don't reduce the duty no sugarcane will be crushed this October," he said.

Can Chavan survive the confrontation? His hope lies in the fact that even with a weakened Central leadership, not many legislators are likely to choose open defiance. And AICC(I) General Secretary Nawal Kishore Sharma, observer for the state, said: "I do not think there is going to be any change in Maharashtra for the present."

But the question remains: can the Congress(I) win the zilla parishad elections due in January next year and the Assembly poll in 1990 with Chavan at the helm? Chavan is confident but others are not. Describing Chavan's as a "caretaker" Government, Rajya Sabha member Suresh Kalmadi said: "Nothing less than a change in leadership will save the party."

Stressing his achievements, Chavan's supporters point out that the Government has taken a number of popular measures. The most significant has been the agreement over the controversial cotton support price issue with the Shetkari Sangathana's Sharad Joshi, which has quickly defused the agitation and checked the Sangathana's growing influence in the cotton-producing districts.

Chavan also points out that his government has settled the highest number of compensation claims relating to land acquisition from private owners. "In 1986-87, Rs 105 crore was sanctioned for this as against just Rs 30 crore in the previous year," said Minister of State for Revenue Rohidas Patil. "And in the first four months of this year, we have already sanctioned Rs 72 crore." "It is false to say I have put the party's future in jeopardy," added Chavan.

His supporters also see in the growing influence of the Shiv Sena encouragement by powerful Congress(I) dissidents. A few months ago the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray even organised a mammoth meeting at Sangli, Vasantdada's hometown. The meeting was said to have been organised with support from Vasantdada's group. Said Sangli's Janata Party MLA Sambhaji Pawar: "Dada has turned to the Shiv Sena because his family has lost the support of the youth." The MLA has also conducted a relentless campaign against allegedly shady land dealings by Vasantdada's relatives, complaining to the Lok Ayukta, filing petitions in court, and raising questions in the Assembly.

Chavan himself has remained relatively free of scandals, though the most serious controversy involving his aides and family members blew up earlier this year. Hundreds of students of newly-opened B.Ed. colleges—run by politicians or their relatives—found themselves stranded before the examinations as the institutions had wrongly held out hopes of university recognition. But Chavan moved quickly, sacking a personal assistant who was directly involved. Though charges have been levelled against Chavan's son Ashok, an MP, for exploiting his father's position there has been no evidence yet of serious malpractices. Ashok generally keeps a low profile and does not directly interfere in the state's administration as many chief ministers' sons are wont to.

But Vasantdada's son Prakash Patil, also an MP, has been more active in the latest political imbroglio. It was Prakash's interview to a Marathi newspaper which first publicly raised the demand for a change in the chief ministership. After returning from Moscow—where he had gone on Rajiv's invitation—Prakash remained by his father's side, conferring with leaders at his Bombay bungalow. Defending his father's role, he said: "Actually it was the chief minister who dragged Dadaji into a controversy by attacking his involvement in the sugar cooperative federation's work and transferring the director of sugar."

However, neither Prakash nor Ashok are even remote contenders for the chief ministership. The man who is seen as the foremost candidate has, however, remained in the background all through the crisis, either away on a foreign trip or on frequent visits to New Delhi to confer with Rajiv and other leaders. When Sharad Pawar was brought back into the Congress(I) he was seen as the obvious successor to Chavan, since he has a reputation not just as a good administrator but also as a politician with the right touch.

Sharad Pawar, seen as a front-runner in the race for the chief ministership, remained in the background all through the recent political wranglings in the state.

Young and hardworking, he could provide the leadership to the party for the elections that will follow. Soon after coming over to the Congress(I), he quickly joined forces with MPCC(I) President Prabha Rau and then went on an extensive tour of the state's drought-stricken areas to reinforce his support at the district level. Now, Rau is also lined up against Chavan who, characteristically, has failed to rally her to his side although she was, until recently, bitterly opposed by Vasantdada.

But as Vasantdada left the hurly-burly of political gamesmanship in Bombay and returned to the more august confines of Jaipur's Raj Bhavan, even before the assembly session had ended, it was apparent that any change in the chief ministership would come about only on Rajiv Gandhi's say so. For the moment, faced as he was with the prospect of ever-increasing amounts of dissidence erupting in several other Congress(I) ruled states, Rajiv seemed unwilling to remove Chavan and give dissidents elsewhere any ideas. How long it would take to change his mind was a question, however, for which even political soothsayers had no convincing answer.

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SRI LANKA

Accord Discord

A fortnight can be a long time in the history of a nation. Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo? An India-sponsored peace pact with the Tamil militants? A regional autonomy plan approved by the Sri Lankan Government and in the absence of hardline Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa? Two weeks ago, only the most incorrigible optimist would have had the temerity to dream such dreams.

Yet, the fact that all this happened and with such blinding speed has left most Lanka-watchers still rubbing their eyes in doubt and disbelief. And not without reason. Despite Rajiv's hastily-arranged air-dash to Colombo last week to sign the historic accord with Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene, the prospect of peace in the troubled island after three decades of ethnic strife between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, intermittent riots and four years of bloody fighting that has claimed nearly 14,000 civilian lives, still rests on a hair trigger. Says Sri Lankan Minister for National Security, Lalith Athulathmudali: "Peace finally seems to be knocking at the door."

But whether that door to peace will finally open is still a loaded question. For one, the accord is between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments and not with the Tamil militant groups fighting for a separate Tamil state. Further, the main and militarily most powerful Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) almost rendered the accord meaningless by initially rejecting it on the grounds that they—as the people whose fate was being decided in Delhi and Colombo—were not consulted at all on the terms of the agreement and their objections to certain clauses in the accord. It was only when LTTE leader Velupillai Pirabhakaran, after cooling his heels for five days in a Delhi hotel room, was finally granted a midnight meeting with Rajiv six hours before the prime minister emplaned for Colombo, did the LTTE grudgingly agree to go along, but with certain crucial conditions.

In fact, the LTTE press release after the Rajiv meeting is a guarded statement that merely states: "We met the prime minister of India on 28th July evening and appraised him of various problems and issues concerning the proposed Indo-Sri Lanka agreement....We are satisfied that the prime minister understands our fears and is fully sympathetic to Tamil aspirations. Our discussions with the Indian Government will continue after the prime minister's return from Colombo."

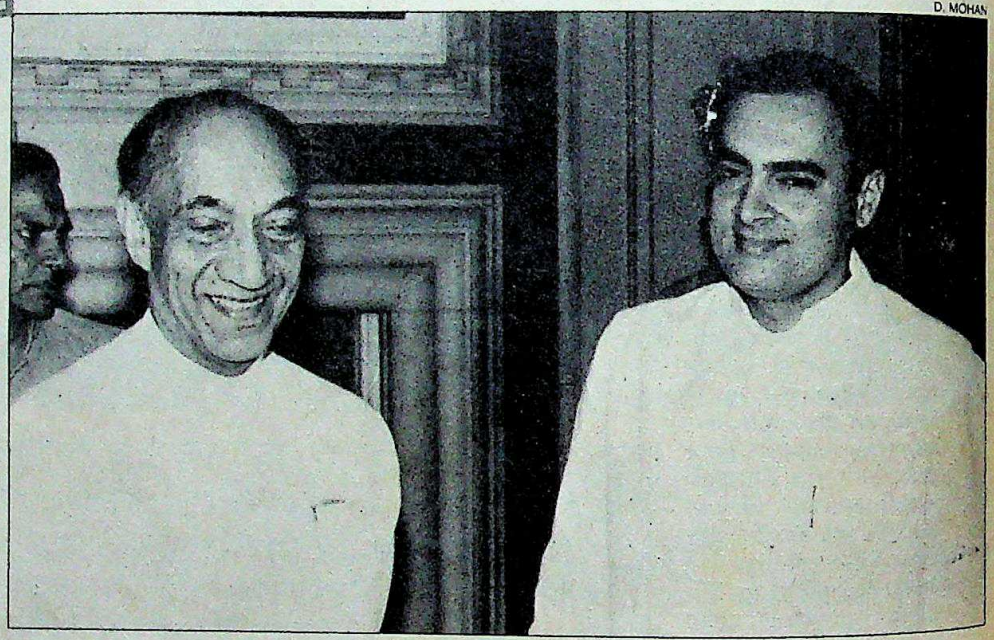
Even the leaders of the four moderate Tamil guerrilla groups, who were flown in to New Delhi to discuss the fine print of the accord, have only accepted the terms as an "interim agreement" though, in any event, they have far less to lose than the LTTE and are also more susceptible to pressure from the Indian Government.

Before Rajiv's trip, a violent protest against the accord was led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, leader of the Opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), and the Buddhist clergy, and widespread riots erupted in Colombo illustrating the fragility of peace. Later, as Rajiv inspected a Sri Lankan guard of honour before leaving Colombo, a sailor hit Rajiv on the shoulder with his rifle butt. Though, Jayewardene contended that the rifle had hit Rajiv as the soldier fell following a sunstroke, Rajiv was lucky to escape relatively unhurt. If the rifle butt had landed on his head, Rajiv would have suffered a serious skull injury.

New Delhi and Colombo had clearly been hasty, presuming that the LTTE could be pressured to agree. In fact, two days before Rajiv's visit was officially announced, Sri Lanka's powerful National Security Minister Athulathmudali, the key man in the

The hitch now lies in whether or not Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, facing violent and angry protests at home, will agree to the LTTE conditions for the accord as conveyed by Rajiv Gandhi.

D. MOHAN



Jayewardene and Rajiv: bilateral agreement

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negotiation process, stated in an interview that the settlement was the result of "New Delhi's desperation, or domestic political constraints there (in India)". He claimed that the latest package was, in fact, proposed by Rajiv and accepted, after amendments, by Jayewardene.

Admittedly, New Delhi has the most to gain by the accord. It would, for one be trumpeted as a major diplomatic triumph for Rajiv in the midst of domestic discontent. It would satisfy the moderate section of the Tamil militants and ensure a key advantage for India in that Colombo will agree to stop accepting military aid and training from Pakistan and Israel and even shut down the Israeli special interest section in Colombo. It will also ensure that the huge number of Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu are sent back to Sri Lanka. Says a Foreign Office official: "This is the best possible accord keeping in mind India's concern for the Tamils and her geo-political interests."

But in the end, it was New Delhi's characteristically overbearing attitude towards the LTTE that almost buried the accord before it was given birth. As Pirabhakaran told INDIA TODAY after meeting Rajiv: "We had found this accord totally unacceptable because we had not been consulted. We have reconsidered our objections to the accord because we finally met Rajiv Gandhi, albeit at the eleventh hour, and he has taken serious note of our objections." *(see interview)*.

The hitch now lies in whether or not Jayewardene, facing angry protests at home, will agree to the LTTE conditions as conveyed by Rajiv. The LTTE leaders will stay on in Delhi and continue their discussions after Rajiv's return, then fly back to Jaffna for consultations with the group's military commanders. So regardless of the accord being signed by Colombo and New Delhi, the LTTE is still a crucial element in any final peace proposal.

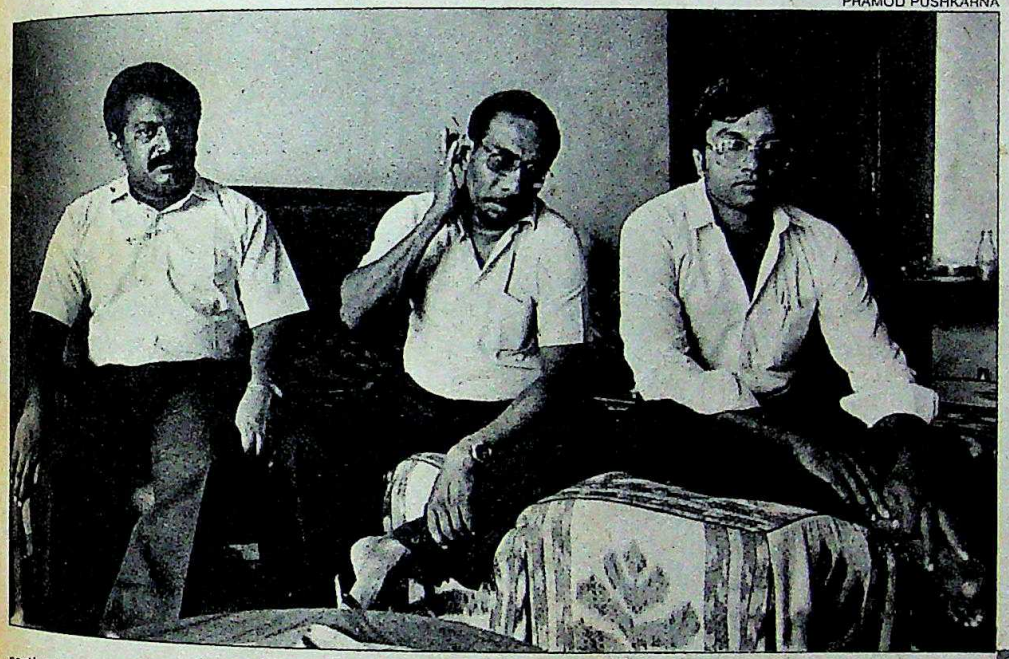
EVEN the other Tamil groups have given in, so as not to embarrass India and not so much because of the terms of the accord itself. Said Ketheeswaran, official spokesman of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF): "We are under no illusion that by merely signing the agreement there is going to be a solution." V. Balakumar, spokesman of Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS), stated: "We were informed that India would be going ahead with the agreement which, in any case, is between them and Sri Lanka. Nobody asked us for our approval. Whether we support or reject the agreement doesn't matter. India is going ahead with it. How can we prevent it?" The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation Eeelam National Liberation Front and EPRLF have, however, placed on record their "apprehension" regarding certain "deficiencies".

What provides the most hope is that the proposals are easily the most far-reaching and comprehensive in terms of the Tamil demands that the Jayewardene Government has offered so far. It is essentially a 14-point memorandum of understanding between the governments of India and Sri Lanka with Colombo speaking on behalf of the Sinhalese and New Delhi speaking on behalf of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. India, according to the terms of the accord, is a signatory not only as the attorney for Sri Lankan Tamils but also as the underwriter of the accord and guarantor to both sides. India, by assuring Colombo that the militants will be sent back to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu and by agreeing to joint patrolling of the Palk Straits, has conceded major concessions to Jayewardene.

But obviously Jayewardene also had compelling domestic reasons for going along. The man who had categorically stated that on no account would there ever be a merger of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka; a government which had consistently taken the stand that the people of the east, where Tamils formed only one-third of the population, did not want to merge with the Tamil-majority north, has now offered to constitute a single provincial council comprising both the north and the east. Even the much-talked about December 19, 1986 proposals only envisaged certain administrative linkages between the northern and the eastern provincial councils, and did not provide for an unconditional merger of the two provinces.

Under the new administrative dispensation planned in Sri Lanka, there will be eight provincial councils instead of the earlier nine. Elections would be held before the end of the year to all the provincial

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



(From left) Pirabhakaran, Balasingam and Yogi: reservations

It was New Delhi's characteristically overbearing attitude towards the LTTE that almost buried the accord before it was given birth. Even then the consent given by Pirabhakaran was conditional.

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PIRABHAKARAN

"We reviewed our stand"

DRESSED in grey trousers and a light-blue bush shirt, he looked more like a successful businessman rather than the man who has for four years fought a bloody battle with Sri Lankan security forces as commander-in-chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Having initially rejected the accord, Pirabhakaran finally agreed to reserve his objections till Rajiv returns from Colombo. He spoke at length to Principal Correspondent ANITA PRATAP *before and after the meeting with Rajiv Gandhi. Excerpts:*

Q. What was your initial objection to the accord? Will you be endorsing this agreement?

A. This agreement was totally unacceptable to us. It is called an Indo-Sri Lankan friendship agreement, but it deals with the Tamil ethnic question. And it was drafted without consulting the Tamil representatives. So, we had rejected it.

Q. Has your attitude to the agreement changed after meeting Rajiv?

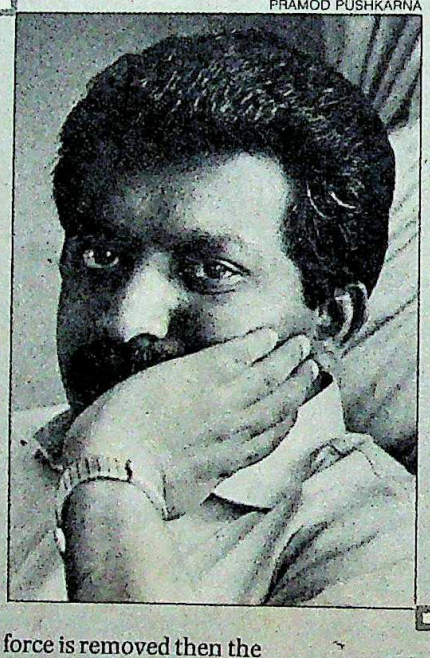
A. Last night, we had a one and half hour long discussion with the prime minister and we have reconsidered our objections to the accord because Mr Gandhi took serious note of our reservations.

Q. What were the specific reservations that you raised and what was Mr Gandhi's response?

A. We raised the point about the referendum. But Mr Gandhi pointed out that there were several clauses with regard to the referendum as for instance that it can be delayed at the discretion of the President and that the displaced Tamil refugees will have to be rehabilitated first. So all this will take time and he told us not to take it too seriously as India would handle it. As to our main objection about disarming, Mr Gandhi understood our problems and practical difficulties—it took us 12 years to build this organisation and it just can't be dismantled in 72 hours. He appreciated the fact that the procedural elements and time factor posed serious problems. Basically we have laid down two suggestions for our disarming—one that the Sri Lankan army withdraws their camps in the north and east and second that a working arrangement is made on ground that would ensure the safety and security of the Tamils. Unless the working arrangement is established the question of disarming doesn't arise. We pointed out to Rajiv Gandhi that we are the protective force for the Tamils and if this protective force is removed then the Tamils are vulnerable to an indisciplined army. Mr Gandhi said he'd raise our suggestions with Mr Jayewardene. I've also said that I must go back to Jaffna for consultations with my area commanders and assure them and the Tamil people about the accord paving the way for a political solution.

We changed our stand after Rajiv Gandhi took serious note of our objections to the proposed referendum and grounds for our disarming.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



We will not lay down arms till an arrangement for the Tamils' safety is worked out and the army camps in the north and east dismantled.

Q. So if an Indian peace-keeping force is sent in, the LTTE ceases to be a military organisation. It would be the end of the Tamil armed struggle.

A. The disarming cannot take place immediately. There are so many things that need to be done first. We will take decisions about our future strategy later.

Q. So your position is not fundamentally different from the other groups.

A. We can't be compared. The other groups have no problems about disarming because the LTTE has disarmed them. I think the difference is that India has realised that without the LTTE the accord won't work—that's why they took the decision to consult us albeit at the eleventh hour. See, earlier Indian officials came, read out an agreement asking us to sign it. That was unacceptable. The door to consultations had been closed - but Mr Gandhi opened it and took a serious note of our reservations. That has brought about the fundamental change in our attitude to the accord in the last 24 hours. Our ultimate objective is to ensure security and freedom of our people.

Q. It was being said in Indian official circles that the LTTE had unofficially agreed to the accord but that, as you have taken a stand on Eelam, you were registering a token protest.

A. I am a man of principles. I also have the trust and faith of my people. If anyone had said that we had unofficially agreed to this accord, it's a lie.

Q. Don't you think this accord signals the end of the Tamil resistance.

A. The objective of the accord is to put an end to Tamil resistance. We can't say at this point when the objective will be achieved. We will have to wait and see.

Q. What will be LTTE's role now?

A. It's for the people to decide.

Q. What exactly are the issues that you find objectionable in the accord?

A. It is being said that three of the

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four cardinal principles which we enunciated at Thimpu have been met. It is not so. Take the question of homeland. Certain sentences have been introduced in the agreement which have far-reaching implications. For example, the northern and eastern provinces have been defined as the area of "historical habitation of Tamil speaking people... who have at all times hitherto lived in this territory with the other ethnic groups". In one stroke, the agreement justifies the illegal Sinhala colonisation in the east for the last four decades. How can we agree to this?

Secondly, we are not recognised as a nation of people. Tamils are described as one of the ethnic groups. It ignores the fact that we constitute a separate nationality.

Thirdly, the merger of the northern and eastern provinces is temporary, conditional and interim. The President has the power to decide on the referendum. Four of the five members of the committee monitoring the referendum will be appointed by the President and the fifth is from the eastern province. There are no Tamils at all. And the outcome of the referendum is based on a simple and not two-thirds majority. Due to the aggressive colonisation, Sinhalese and Muslims together form 60 per cent of the population.

But the most crucial point on which we are rejecting this agreement is the point about giving up our arms. This tantamounts to surrender and not return of arms under a mutual agreement. There are 200 army camps in the north and east—What happens to our people if we surrender our arms? Once we are disarmed, the Tamil armed resistance will be brought to an end. It is only because of our armed struggle that the Tamils have been saved from total annihilation. We are the only deterrent force—if this deterrent force is removed, our people become defenceless.

Q. If you had all these objections, why did you agree to come to Delhi?

A. If we had been shown this agreement in Jaffna, we wouldn't have come to India at all. It is only when we came here that we found that India and Sri Lanka had already come to an agreement, which I am now supposed to endorse. It was a calculated plan to persuade me to come so as to give the impression that I am a party to it.

Q. But didn't Puri brief you on this agreement when he met you in Jaffna?

A. He told us that Jayewardene had come up with a 'wonderful package' and that he had agreed to merge the north with east, that Tamil would be an official language and that they had agreed to the question of homeland—he didn't use that word. He said that land settlement and law and order would be with the provincial council. Puri also said "the December 19 proposals should be thrown into the dustbin". He made it amply clear that he was talking about an altogether new set of proposals. And I was asked to come to Delhi to meet Rajiv to pave way for a solution. It was shortly before we boarded the helicopter that Puri referred to some agreement that I must sign. I stopped and told him that if I have to sign an agreement to give up Eelam then don't take me to India. Puri assured us then 'we won't pressure you. It is up to you to decide what you want'.

Q. But India has made it clear that it will not support Eelam.

A. See, until a satisfactory agreement has been worked out, we will have Eelam as a fundamental principle. We have now been told that once we endorse this agreement there won't be any more talks regarding the actual powers devolved to the administrative unit. Puri said that the powers to be devolved have already been discussed by TULF, Natwar Singh and Chidambaram in June 1986. In fact, against that provincial council bill I had written a letter to MGR expressing my objection to it. Now, if in this agreement further problems crop up it will be discussed by India and Sri Lanka and not the Tamils.

Q. Why do you think Jayewardene conceded the major Tamil demands?

A. India's pressure on Sri Lanka was mounting, as evidenced by the air-dropping mission. At the same time, with this agreement that seeks to disarm us, Sri Lanka could achieve two goals—consolidate the newly captured areas in Vadamarachi and put an end to the Tamil armed resistance. This agreement is favourable to Sri Lanka, not us.

Q. Can you survive without India's or MGR's support.

A. The question doesn't arise. As per this accord, the Sri Lankan Army has to remain within the barracks. If they come out, India has to intervene—they have to fight the Sri Lankan Army, not us.

Q. What do you think will happen now?

A. I don't think the accord will bring lasting peace.

councils. As part of the deal, Tamil would also be made an official language of Sri Lanka. As of now, Sinhala is the only official language of the country although Sinhala, Tamil and English are all national languages.

The Sri Lankan Government has also agreed to grant a general amnesty to all Tamil militants. The Government would also release the estimated 5,300 Tamils in custody. The army in the north and the east would return to the barracks. The militants would be given a general amnesty and would have the right to vote, even if they are outside the province, if their names figure in the electoral rolls.

Obviously, the fact that India had now become an active mediator, instead of remaining a passive postman relaying

SHYAM TEKWANI

Dixit: the key to success

shuttle messages between Colombo and the Tamil groups, was one of the key reasons for Colombo's new spirit of accommodation—especially after the Indian air-drop and the military stalemate following Operation Liberation in the Jaffna area. Jayewardene is also hoping to sell this accord to the masses with the sop that, if peace returns, the economy will stabilise, benefiting all. There is also growing pressure from Colombo's western aid donors to put an end to the dramatic escalation in Sri Lanka's defence expenditure.

In fact, once the details of the new package agreement were worked out between New Delhi, via its High Commissioner in Sri Lanka J.N. Dixit, and Colombo, both sides moved with uncharacteristic haste. Dixit's First Secretary

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(Political), Hardeep Puri, flew into Jaffna for a meeting with Pirabhakaran; and Jayewardene issued summons for an emergency cabinet meeting—held, significantly, when the hardliner and rabidly anti-Indian Prime Minister Premadasa was away in Japan. Equally significantly, Dixit was allowed to address the meeting, an unprecedented event in Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

Back in Delhi though, the Indian Government's clumsy handling of the LTTE threw a major spanner in the works. Throughout the sessions with Dixit—and later with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran and his Food Minister S. Ramachandran, who were flown in from Madras to try and use

Athulathmudali: crucial role

their influence on Pirabhakaran, the guerrilla leader literally stuck to his guns. Dixit, at one point, reportedly told the LTTE: "This is the fourth time you are deceiving Rajiv Gandhi." He also told the LTTE leaders that "this is all we can extract from Jaffna", to which Pirabhakaran replied: "If this is all that you can extract from Jayewardene then please allow us to go back to Jaffna."

> If the anti-accord protests spearheaded by Bandaranaike spread, Jayewardene would have problems implementing the accord.

> The boycott of Rajiv's arrival ceremony by Premadasa and Athulathmudali showed that the path to peace in Sri Lanka is still a dangerous minefield.

HAVING failed to pressure Pirabhakaran, New Delhi attempted to isolate the LTTE by sending for representatives of the TULF and other militant organisations, knowing they would be in no position to resist Indian persuasion. In fact, it suits them to be a party to the agreement. They do not have to disarm for they have already been disarmed by the LTTE.

Indian officials claim that once the accord is signed, it will bring Jayewardene under New Delhi's influence since both sides need each other now to implement the agreements. "It has now become India's responsibility to keep Jayewardene in power and ensure that he sticks to his side of the agreement," says an Indian official. Indian diplomats also say that with the accord, they have wooed Jayewardene away from the West and Pakistan and brought him back into India's "orbit of influence".

Other Tamil-watchers analyse that Jayewardene was prepared for the changing complexion of Sri Lankan politics with the possible coming together of Premadasa and Bandaranaike's SLFP. "Jayewardene must have agreed to this accord because his position was becoming weak and shaky and the only way he could remain in power was to seek India's help," says one analyst.

But that is easier said than done. The opposition to the accord in Sri Lanka is snowballing with each passing day. If the possible realignment of political forces in the island leads to Jayewardene being toppled, whoever takes over will obviously be from the anti-Indian camp or, in any case, will have to adopt a posture to appease the majority Sinhalese and the powerful and increasingly militant Buddhist clergy. Whatever the future, a change of government in Colombo will obviously endanger the future of the accord.

New Delhi, having taken the plunge, now has to convince the LTTE to come around to endorsing the accord or, failing that, isolate them and thus render them redundant. Indian officials talk of sending a "peace-keeping force" to disarm the LTTE if they remain obstinate. Under the agreement that has been signed, an Indian peace-keeping force is likely to be sent to Sri Lanka but that will only further exacerbate Sinhalese sentiments.

The onus now rests with Rajiv. He has to convince Jayewardene to agree to at least some of the concessions that the LTTE is demanding and then convince Pirabhakaran and his colleagues to endorse the accord. Rajiv's arrival in Colombo was hardly an auspicious one. The capital was under a dusk-to-dawn curfew that will extend till he leaves. The debris of the previous day's riots still littered the streets. More significantly, Athulathmudali, who has been a key man in the peace negotiations, stayed away from the welcome reception, obviously in support of Premadasa, who boycotted the ceremony. If Athulathmudali throws in his lot with the anti-accord lobby, the path to peace in Sri Lanka could still be a dangerous minefield.

—DILIP BOBB and ANITA PRATAP with S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Madras and MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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PAKISTAN

A Stumbling Block

PAKISTAN'S covert, worldwide programme to beg, steal or smuggle nuclear technology has had a nasty habit of exploding into controversy just when the negotiations on the US arms aid package are in a critical phase. Last fortnight, as American papers reported, for a whole week, on incidents of Pakistani nuclear smuggling and its consequences, the Indian side was not complaining. "The US Administration has to make up its mind. This is only another evidence of what has gone on for some time," said Indian Ambassador P.K. Kaul. India also formally conveyed its "concern" to the US Government.

Recently, US undercover agents arrested A.Z. Parvez, a Pakistani citizen-turned-Canadian for trying to buy 25 tonnes of the highly specialised alloy (maraging 350 steel) from Reading, Pennsylvania. The alloy is used only in nuclear plants. Three days later, a court in Sacramento, California, indicted an American couple, Arnold and Rona Mandel and their Hong Kong associate Leung Yu Hung for smuggling nuclear equipment to Pakistan.

The developments sent a clear message to the US Congress: despite assurances to the contrary, Pakistan was continuing with its nuclear programme, the one stumbling block in its relationship with an administration always eager to paper over its faults. But given the American laws, the public stance and Jewish concern over an Islamic nation acquiring nuclear weapons, such indiscretions are hard to ignore. "The anti-proliferation law-makers were upset and we were having a hard enough time after revelations of Pakistani smuggling from Europe (INDIA TODAY, July 31) when this new disaster came," said a senior US official.

The frontline newspapers reacted with outrage. "Pakistan has resorted to systematic theft and smuggling," said the *Washington Post*. *The New York Times* was more stringent: "The baldness of Pakistan's latest perfidy has shaken even those who had hoped to paper differences....It is time for stronger steps." Pakistan's defence was that the smuggling was a "rogue" operation; that Dr Abdul Qadir Khan was operating on his own; and it issued an arrest warrant against retired Brigadier Inam for whom Parvez was working. Inam, however, had disappeared.

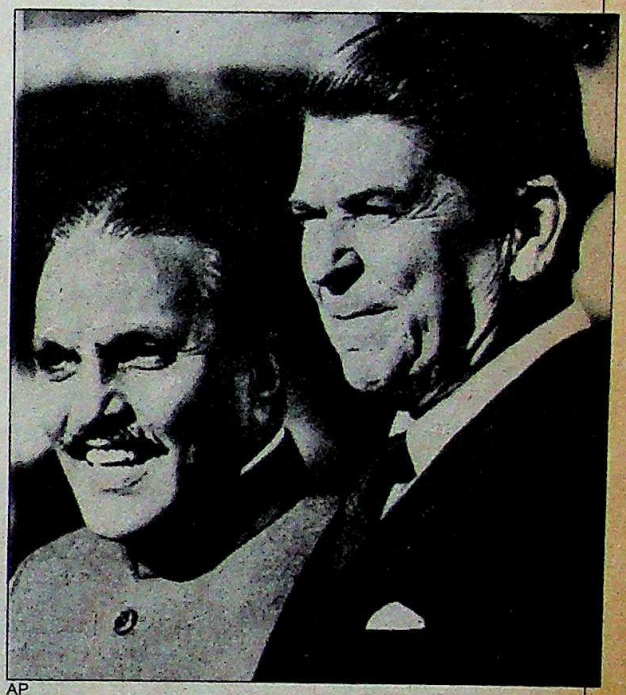
The US Administration, keen to push through the $4.2 billion aid (Rs 5,418 crore) package, faced congressional wrath. "I am appalled," said Brooklyn Democrat Stephen Solarz, author of a law barring US aid to a country which tries illegally to obtain nuclear materials and technology from the US. The incident was an "outrageous violation of our laws", he added.

> **The continuing incidents of nuclear smuggling by Pakistan remain the one stumbling block in its relationship with a US Administration always eager to overlook its faults.**

For Ohio Senator John Glenn this occurred when he was still questioning the Administration's stand on Pakistani smuggling operations in Europe. His aides now say he suspects the Administration knew about Parvez for several months but concealed it to push the aid package through Congress.

But they obviously failed to keep it under wraps long enough as US lawmakers are still to vote for the final aid package. Solarz defiantly called renewed hearings of the House subcommittee that he chairs. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Richard Murphy told the Solarz committee that while the Administration was committed to implement proliferation laws, it was waiting for the completion of explanations from Pakistan, its "trusted and deserving friend". But there were some ominous signals. On April 23, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had defeated 11-8 a move to cut aid to Pakistan as two democrats voted with the Republicans. Both, reportedly, have fresh doubts now.

With this new twist to the lobbying battle on Capitol Hill, India is pinning its hopes on the anti-nuclear lobby, which Pakistan dismisses as "the group of Zionists". And the Pakistani ethnic press has begun a smear campaign against Solarz, who has said as much in an open letter to Indian residents in the US. Pakistan, meanwhile, is strongly mobilising support on the Hill by arch-conservatives and even some Democrats.



AP

Ronald Reagan and Zia-ul-Haq (left): a mutual aid relationship

The key to the issue is Afghanistan, which is the epitome of the Reagan doctrine of supporting anti-communist movements. Reagan is disinclined to push Pakistan into cutting off supplies to the Mujahedin, a point indirectly underscored by Zia in Karachi last fortnight: "Pakistan is not America's policeman in South Asia. Pakistan has its independent, non-aligned foreign policy." In other words: if you push me too far I will talk to the Russians.

That, obviously, is the last thing the US wants and yet it cannot go against the Solarz and Glenn-Symington amendments on nuclear proliferation. What it desperately needs is a middle ground.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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TIBET

The Dragon's Teeth

FOR some weeks now, rumours of an impending border conflict between India and China have been circulating in informed circles. Chinese spokesmen in Beijing have accused India of violating air space, massing troops on the border and "unprovoked firing" and have threatened to teach New Delhi a lesson. Indian strategic experts have warned of a possible Chinese attack and the Indian Government has moved troops and air force fighters to the eastern borders. Finnish journalist JARI LINDHOLM, accompanied by a photographer, entered China on a tourist visa last month and is the first foreigner to travel to the security zone in the Tibetan border area from the Chinese side. He obtained a firsthand account on the Chinese military buildup and its implications for India. In an exclusive report for INDIA TODAY, Lindholm provides this eyewitness account.

THE Indians never wanted to negotiate. They violated our air space and sent troops to our territory. Clashes have already taken place, and a major offensive will start soon." The chief of security in the town of Miling in Eastern Tibet is a big cheerful man with a loud voice. He is in charge of nabbing Indian spies along the Sino-Indian border a few miles from the McMahon Line, an area disputed by China and India for 40 years.

"We are presently concentrating troops on the border, and so are the Indians. War has been in the air for months, and our patience has worn thin," says the security chief.

Rumours of fighting and air strikes have for several weeks been circulating in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. In the wastelands of eastern Tibet rumours become facts. Tension is obvious. The sound of big guns echo daily in villages near the Tsangpo river security zone. The firing is too close to the border for it to be artillery practice. Troops, weapons and fuel in convoys of 70-80 trucks surge to the military bases in Bayi and Zetang. American-made Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters fly regularly over the valley of the Tsangpo river to Metok, where most of the Chinese troops from the eastern garrisons are said to be stationed. Anti-aircraft guns guard the confluence of the Nyang Chu and Tsangpo rivers.

New roads have been built all over south-eastern and south-western Tibet. The supply route leading south from the town of Zetang towards Tawang near the Bhutanese border is almost blocked by heavy military traffic. Tens of trucks carry ground-to-air missiles from the north, and camouflaged ambulances drive on the busy streets of Zetang.

The south bank of the Tsangpo is closed to outsiders. Heavily-armed Chinese soldiers patrol the Tibetan villages and practice target shooting in the woods. The atmosphere is tense. The Tibetans of Miling are afraid of being caught in a cross-fire: the Chinese fear that Tibetans may welcome Indians as liberators. The security zone of Tsangpo has been cut off from the rest of Tibet. Two years ago villagers crossed the river in yak skin boats or by the ferry at Lusha village, but all traffic has long since been terminated by the authorities.

Lusha is in a sensitive area. The village previously existed on both sides of the Tsangpo river but, in the late '60s, the Chinese forced people to move from the northern to the southern side as an added

Chinese soldiers in Tibet; and (below) Tibetans in Lhasa: palpable tension

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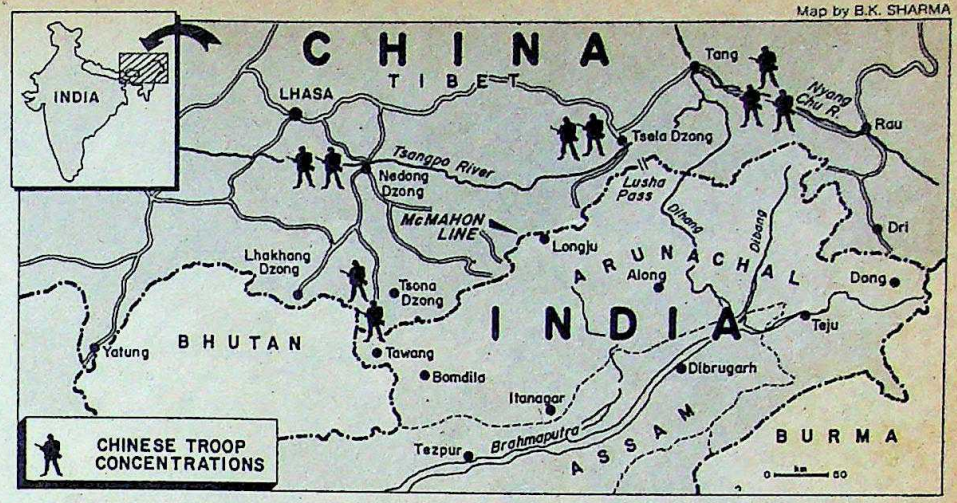
K.K. SHARMA

Map by B.K. SHARMA



defence against "Indian infiltrators" through the Lusha La Pass.

The Chinese seem anxious to keep the clashes secret. This is easily achieved in an area so mountainous and densely forested. The Tibetans have learned to keep silent, and Chinese suppression condemns them to turn in foreigners travelling without permits.

The policy of secrecy has resulted in a wave of rumours resounding even in Lhasa. Young English-speaking Chinese in the Tibetan capital claim that they have already been asked by authorities to act as interpreters for Indian prisoners of war. They are eager to fight India.

The Associated Press

Kong Po Bon Ri mountain is strategically situated near the confluence of the Nyang Chu and Tsangpo rivers. On the south side of the Tsangpo, a Chinese army supply route runs west towards the military centre of Zetang. In the east is Lusha La Pass, an old refugee route to Arunachal Pradesh in India.

The sound of heavy artillery fire can be heard almost daily from Metok in the south-east and Tawang in the south-west. Nobody in eastern Tibet wants to talk about fighting, and the army has orders to arrest all foreigners in the area. Local villagers are told by the military and the security police that every stranger is a potential spy, most probably an Indian.

A strictly controlled security zone has been created parallel to the Tsangpo river. Even the locals are not allowed to cross the river without a special permit. Rumours of war travel fast, and the repressive measures taken by the authorities have resulted in a paranoid atmosphere.

For the villagers, the bad days are back in eastern Tibet. Local villagers have lived under constant threat of Chinese atrocities since February, when regular troops were moved to the Indian border and frustrated trigger-happy youngsters were left in charge of the garrisons. Young soldiers have robbed travellers, beaten villagers and harassed hermits in remote caves. Local officials are not interested in filing charges against the military, and villagers feel helpless. "Soldiers just walk into our homes and demand food and drinks," said one villager. "They steal our valuables and insult our women. All we can do is keep out of their way."

One evening, the monks and nuns of Sekhora, a tiny commune of meditators on the holy Kong Po Bon Ri mountain in Eastern Tibet, congregated outside their abbot's cave. Like every night for 30 years, it was time for evening prayers. Two Chinese soldiers stepped from the shad-

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K.K. SHARMA

Tibetans working: under suppression

ows. They were young, short-tempered and armed with revolvers. They ordered the monks to disperse and dragged the abbot to his cave. One of the soldiers tied the old man up, the other one put a clip in his revolver and pointed the gun at the abbot's forehead.

A pilgrim rushed into the cave begging for mercy. "Save the man," the pilgrim begged. "He is just a simple-minded monk." The soldiers looked at each other. The other one pointed his gun at the pilgrim and screamed: "In the name of the state, we confiscate your belongings."

THE pilgrim relinquished his possessions—25 Yuan and an old wrist-watch. The soldiers threw him out of the cave and pistol whipped the abbot. The old man survived with bruises and a bloody nose. This was not the first time he had suffered in the hands of the Chinese military. Because of his religious commitment, he was jailed for 12 years during China's Cultural Revolution in the '60s.

Tibetans try to forget the tension, but it seems impossible. Loudspeakers in the Chinese garrisons blast political propaganda and ear-splitting military music day in and day out. Villagers crossing the bridge over the Tsangpo river without a permit are likely to be beaten by Chinese guards with AK-47 machine-guns. The chances of a beating increase if trespassers happen to be Khampas—the tribal warriors of Tibet who are especially despised by the Chinese because of their rebellious arrogance.

With rumours of fighting with India circulating in Lhasa, the locals in eastern Tibet are again under the shadow of fear.

Monasteries on the holy mountain have been cut off from the villages. "We have been told not to discuss the war even with other monks," said the abbot of Sigyal Gonchen monastery. "With villagers we can chat about weather and crops but talking about clashes on the border is considered to be spreading rumours." Another monk added, "We don't use our southern cave any more. It is impossible to meditate when guns go off all the time."

The north bank of the Tsangpo river is silent and hostile. Every village has its informers and party members, and people fear for their lives. The Chinese garrisons are almost empty. Snot-nosed youths in ill-fitting uniforms loiter around canteens harassing passers-by or playing basketball. Their comrades have been moved to the front.

Villages between the garrisons have been vacated and are now veritable ghost towns. The village of Lithing is practically empty. When we asked for a boat ride across the river, women and children ran away in terror and doors were slammed in our faces. Dogs barked in rage behind closed gates. In other villages we were told that the men and boys of Lithing had been forced to the south side of the river to cook and haul water for the Chinese troops.

Finally, in the village of Bana, an old man reluctantly agreed to ferry us across the river in his yak skin boat. The next morning he arrived at our camp obviously confused. The night before, the public security had visited him and politely threatened him about the serious consequences he faced if he helped the strangers.

That night the security police paid a social call to our camp-fire. They congenially told us to beware of poisoners. "Villagers are known to have poisoned travellers in order to get their power and good properties," said a policeman. "Do not buy or eat anything from the locals. Go back to where you came from."

Disregarding all the diplomatic threats, the old man hastily took us across the river the next morning. On a portage over one of the many sandbars braiding the river, the boatman indicated his throat would be slit if he were caught by the Chinese. His fear was reminiscent of the late '60s when Tibetan villagers scared for their lives were forced to destroy their monasteries and most valued religious possessions with dynamite and fire.

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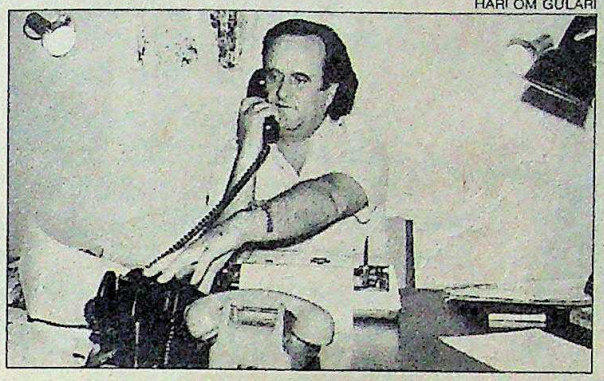
Indian Addiction

THE 40th anniversary of Indian Independence is being celebrated here this fortnight with a number of prestigious functions. With the BBC leading the way, the British media—already engrossed with Rajiv Gandhi's ceaseless troubles—plans to feature special programmes on India. Amongst the more enlivening features is a two-part 50-minute series on BBC 2 TV called *Maharajas*—one of its perennially favourite topics—where interviews and documentary are linked by dramatised vignettes. Simi Garewal plays a Rajput princess and Jugal Hansraj plays her nephew about to enrol in Mayo College.

The erstwhile princes who have been assembled include the maharajas of Jaipur, Kota, Mysore and Bikaner. Conceived and written by Charles Allen, a specialist on the Raj, the serial portrays the Jam-Saheb of Nawanagar—grandson of Ranji—who dreams of converting his crumbling palace grounds into a natural reserve, and Prince Richard of Indore and his Dallas-born wife's attempts to revive the fading art of handloom-weaving.

The imperishable Mark Tully—BBC's man in Delhi—is also back with a five-part serial for Radio 4 entitled *From Raj to Rajiv* which looks at the political crises of India's "dynastic democracy", and echoes familiar sights like Tirupati temple, Muslim villagers of Kashmir valley, the slums of Bombay. BBC's Eastern Service programmes in Hindi, Urdu and Bengali also feature interviews with a number of Indian personalities including Morarji Desai, Field Marshal Maneckshaw, Arjun Singh, Farooq Abdullah, Jyoti Basu, Ramakrishna Hegde and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Plans are also afoot—though not as yet finalised—to organise, on BBC world service, a special phone-in programme, titled *Calling India*, whereby Indians from all over the world can speak directly to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

HARI OM GULARI



BBC's Tully: specialised serials

Successor Signs

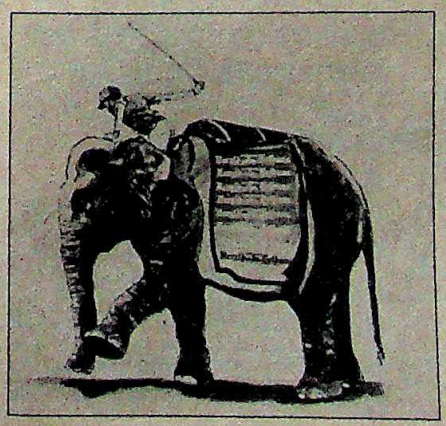
THE Indian High Commissioner Dr P.C. Alexander, who was yet again the subject of recent press speculation that he is tipped to return to India as governor of Jammu and Kashmir, steadfastly refuses to comment on the matter. The name of S.K. Singh—Indian ambassador to Pakistan—has now been added to the swelling list of possible successors to Alexander. The speculation on the British high commissioner's departure began soon after another visit to London by the former foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari, who reportedly confirmed the news. What is clearer, though, is that Alexander's book on his experiences as an influential member of the Prime Minister's Secretariat, during Mrs Indira Gandhi's momentous last years, is well under way. The book, on New Delhi's political nerve-centre, could well be one of the most dramatic political writings to be published by an Indian diplomat in recent years. The high commissioner, however, maintains that his political work will not be published without Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's approval, and, in any case, not for some time, because of the highly sensitive nature of its contents.

Alexander

Polo Play

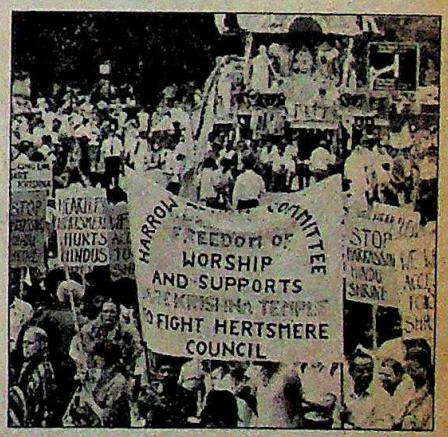
ELEPHANT polo—which originated in Nepal—came to Britain, last fortnight, by courtesy of the *International Herald Tribune*. The Paris-based daily, now celebrating its centenary, was founded by James Gordon Bennett Jr, who pioneered bringing a US newspaper to Europe as also the game of polo from Britain to the US. To commemorate 'Bennett's contributions to both international journalism and sport', the match was organised at Berkshire. Among the 700 invitees were Colonel Prem Singh (the erstwhile maharaja of Jodhpur), the former maharaja of Jaipur and, in a gesture to the Gurkhas, Bhunta Bahadur Gurung, MVO, senior Gurkha of the 6th Queen's Own Gurkha Rifles.

***Tribune* match: celebration**



Temple Trouble

LONDONERS were bemused to see a massive Hindu rally in central London last fortnight, protesting the decision to close Britain's largest temple—the Hare Krishna Temple at Bhaktivedanta Manor, outside London. A petition against the move, with 30,000 signatures, was handed in at Thatcher's residence. The Hertsmere borough council plans to close the temple—run by ISKCON (International Society of Krishna Consciousness)—after complaints of "noise and congestion" by nearby residents of Radlett. The normally divisive Hindu groups united to organise the march, which included a 30-ft tall chariot with Lord Krishna's effigy.



Hindu demonstration: unusual unity

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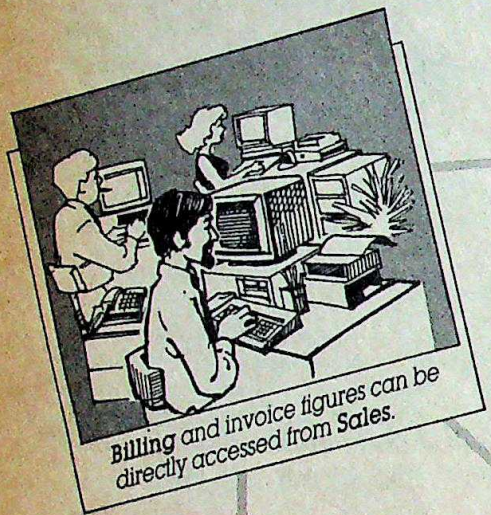
Is your organisation well-connected?

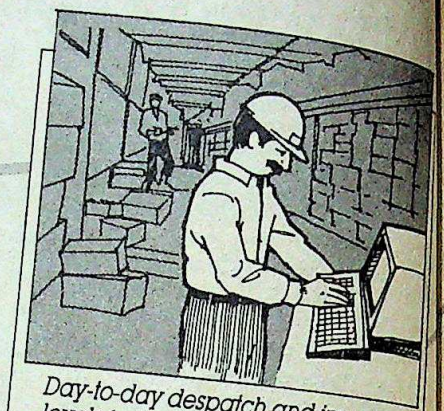


Billing and invoice figures can be directly accessed from Sales.

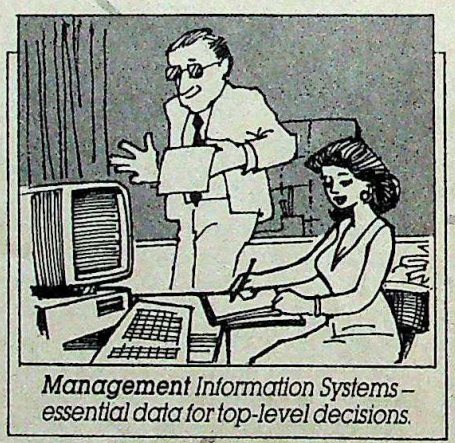
Are all your functional departments in constant touch with each other? Do they all have ready access to basic shared data?

Or are they dispersed in different rooms? Or on different floors? In different buildings? Or even in different cities?

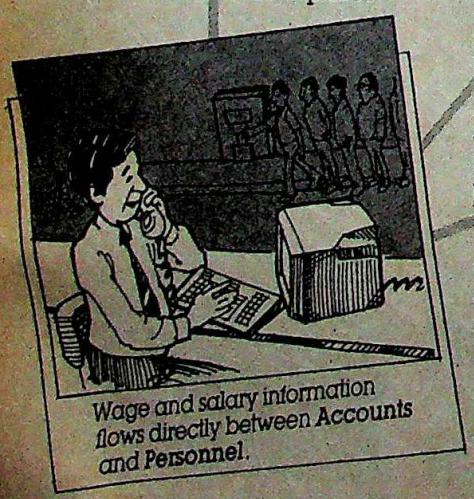
We understand. Growing organisations find themselves losing that **connectivity** along the way. Even the business computer revolution didn't really provide the answer. In fact, stand-alone personal computers actually increased the isolation of departments. Making them islands of incompatible information. Communication gap!



*Day-to-day despatch and inventory levels fed directly to **Marketing**.*



***Management** Information Systems – essential data for top-level decisions.*



*Wage and salary information flows directly between **Accounts** and **Personnel**.*

Supplying the missing links

Local Area Networks (LANs) of computers are the latest development in business computing. A few international brands of LANs go far beyond the limitations of large computers, and the drawbacks of stand-alone processing units scattered around the organisation. In India, it's Zenith SuperLan. A custom-configurable system. One that can service your specific needs, and conform to the operational and hierarchical structure of your organisation.

With SuperLan, your data capture, processing, on-line information dissemination and control action become one continuous and integrated activity.

Electronic mail is one example. You can send mail, memos, messages to any and all... and view your own mail selectively.

Information security, so vital to your orgainsation, is taken care of at four levels. You can pre-determine access rights of all network users.

Together at last

Simply explained, Zenith SuperLan provides connectivity between 255 user-friendly departmental systems. Enabling them to 'talk' to each other... and to share expensive devices connected to the Resource Server (based on the latest

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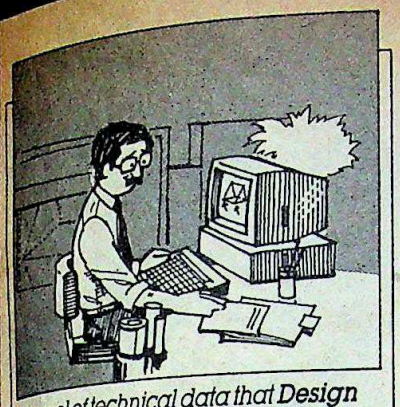

A pool of technical data that Design can draw on.

80386 Intel processor). High-performance peripherals of SuperLan include large Winchester disks, laser printers, line printers, tape drives, cartridges, plotters, optical scanners, attendance recording systems etc.

The departmental micros can be as small as micros based on floppy-less PCs. Or as large as super micros based on Zenith Personal System 3AT6. That's custom-configuration in the true sense of the word.

Any network is only as fast as its communication link. SuperLan transfers 25,00,000 bits per second.

Everybody's in touch: courtesy SuperLan

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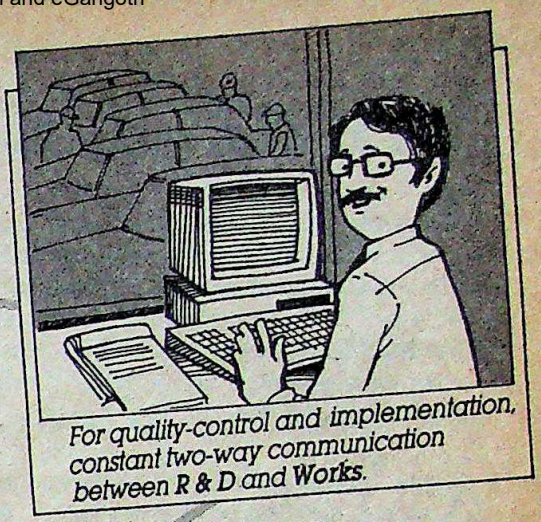

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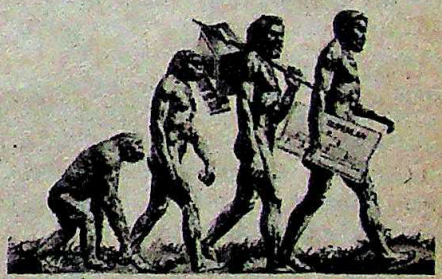

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USSR

A Breath of Fresh Air

Revisiting the Soviet Union after three years was like visiting another country. At first glance, the much-touted *glasnost* hit one in the eye with the subtlety of a sledge-hammer. Critics seem to have come swarming out of the woodwork and the nation looked sprightlier, the shop windows more coquettish. But was it only window-dressing? Did the changes run more than first impression-deep? INDIA TODAY Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN journeys through Russia. Her report:

A trifle loose-wristed, he ambles across: his shiny black ensemble a cross between a toga and a jump suit, a gold loop dangling in his left ear. "Do you want a fast portrait?" Behind him, on both sides of this curious old street of Moscow, stretch rows of painters and easels: slim women in mini-skirts and frilly blouses, young men with the mandatory beards; some with berets. Cafes with bell-shaped awnings divide the cobbled street, on which some break-dance. And some eat strawberries out of plastic bags. A slice of real Montmartre? **Arbat Street, Moscow.**

Neela, the copper-haired Intourist guide with earnest aquamarine eyes, chirpingly bustles through the 11th century Ouspensky Monastry. "Next summer we will have a big celebration, 1,000 years of Christianity in our country," she says. Behind, shuffle noisy busloads of Canadians and Americans. At the entrance, in truly secular spirit, is the dollar shop. **Ouspensky Monastry, Kiev, the capital of the Republic of Ukraine.**

The inevitable long table with dozens of mineral water bottles. At its head, the Novosti Press boss talks about the Great Second Cultural Revolution now taking place in the Soviet Union: "It is a real revolution. Imagine, they overthrew the old bosses in the recent congress of the union of film makers; there was militant debate, just like the British Labour Party." **Novosti Press office, Moscow.**

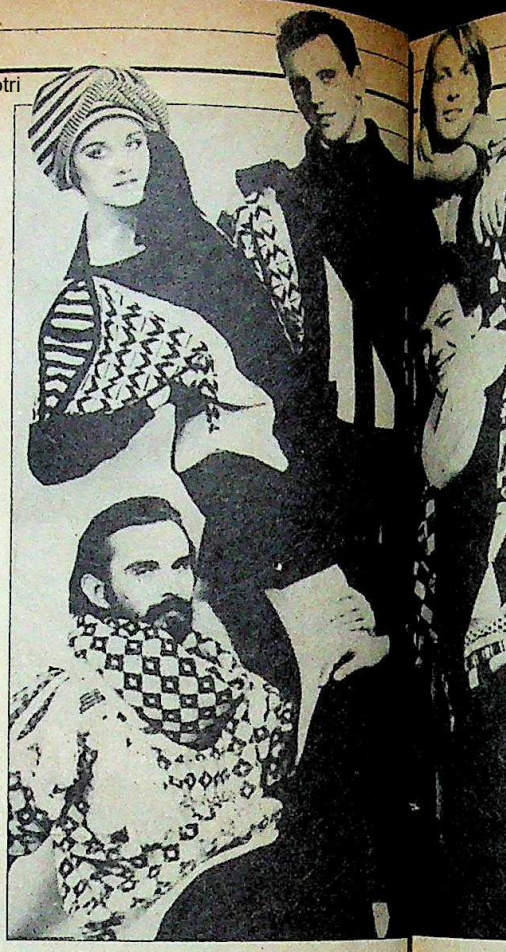
A rainbow of juices: papaya, banana, pomegranate, strawberry, and the new popular *Kwas* made from brown bread—ersatz beer—on tap. Juices, juices everywhere. But not a whiff of the headier stuff. The first encounter with it: the terse warning on the night train from Kiev to Moscow against drinking on board.

Was this for real? The skirts are shorter, the faces more made-up, the jeans less third-worldish, less square. The car radios only blare Soviet pop: where have all the Tchaikovskys gone? Girls rush past on the skyscrapered Kalinski Avenue on stylish wrap-round sandals with bright red toenails peeping out. The proverbial *babushkas* in mass printed cotton dresses over tree-trunk legs are fewer and more far between. And most surprising: the queues at newspaper kiosks are almost as long as those for the elusive strawberries; only the early bird now gets his paper. Suddenly there is a lot to read with journalists and letterwriters on a spree of criticism. Politicians, bosses, the arts, the establishment—nothing is spared. Except, of course, Lenin and True Socialism. Stalin is the bad word now.

Visiting Indian journalists get sermons on the brave new spirit of criticism, and self-criticism. The closest to a conversation three years ago—beyond weather and how much the Russians like Indian films and Raj Kapoor—was when the guide, three vodkas and a day's journey away in Leningrad, talked, rather whispered, about the underground jazz groups and *samzidat* literature. Now, literally a stone's throw away from the Kremlin, a Novosti man asks: "Do you want to go to a disco? Or do you prefer jazz?"

Siberia then seemed an unmentionable word. Now, our man in Moscow jokes about it. Worry about visas running out and return tickets not confirmed and he says: "That's OK. You go to Siberia." When a journalist threatens to break the drinking rules of Gorbachev—no alcohol in restaurants before 2 p.m.—"You go to Siberia," teases the guide.

Jokes are now routine. They must always have been. But *glasnost* has brought them, like much else, out of the closet. Muscovites now refer to the Red Square as Sheremetiavo III (Moscow's third international airport) after German teenager Mathais Rust flew through some of the world's best defended airspace and nuzzled against the Kremlin. Pre-



(Top) Russian fashions by Zaitsev; and Arbat Street, Moscow: *glasnost* in action

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MADHU JAIN

Gorbachev, it would have been no laughing matter. Publicly, that is.

Post-Gorbachev, the Gorbachev jokes *are* a laughing matter. The current one: A man in a serpentine queue for alcohol—after Gorbachev drastically slashed the liquor-selling time—begins to curse the general secretary and storms off to kill him. Only to return, crestfallen, to the queue—and grumbling: "There was an even longer queue there." Someone somewhere must have set up a Committee for the Fabrication of Jokes.

Glasnost and *Peristroika*. These are Gorbachev's two new commandments echoing through the land and giving the old guard the willies. To the left and to the right, Gorbachev is sacking ministers and the top bosses of state enterprises (the USSR has 48,000 of them) who failed to "deliver the goods". In other words: sell—your products or your books. Or, move over to less demanding jobs like pushing files or sweeping floors. The word market now comes with a capital M. The opposition in Gorbachevese is quaintly called "breaking mechanism". In the old days of purges, it would have cost them their heads; today, it is only their jobs.

The writing is literally on the wall in *Moscow News*. A weekly paper published in many European languages, it has become a forum for criticism against ministries, research centres, managers, novelists. Names are named, grievances aired, and those shoved-under-the-carpet problems like alcoholism, divorce, prostitution discussed.

Gorbachev's busy broom has swept up the most dust in the world of the arts. Suddenly, the "unmentionable" books and films of the Brezhnev era (now called *epokazastoia*, epoch of stagnation) and earlier, are being released and have become conversation pieces. The forbidden fruit is on public display and is for sale. Says Natalya, who works for a publishing house: "We used to read typed sheets of the poems of Gumiliov and Vardosky's anti-Stalin verse. It was a crime to read some of our good writers but now we can read them in magazines and books. Finally, our papers have become exciting."

The world of the intellectuals is abuzz; the debate has spilled over to the media. Last month, the magazine *Ogonyok* published a 1973 interview of *emigre* painter Marc Chagall; it publishes poems of the "rehabilitated" poets. The blacklist has been whitewashed: Osip Mandelstam, Vladmir Nabokov, Reimzov, Zamayatin (whose novel, *We*, about the Stalinist era, was recently published), Boris Pasternak and many others have now been cleared. Says Kuznetzov, first secretary of the Union of Writers of the USSR: "We have cancelled the decision to exclude Pasternak from the Union."

One of the more-talked-about books—which has "come alive", like Sleeping Beauty—after the kiss of *glasnost*—is Anatoli Rybakov's novel, *The Children of Arbat*, written in 1964. The book is about the tragedy of 1937, when many people of this old Moscow street were murdered during Stalin's purges. The author was also arrested. "Why should an honest man be arrested?" fumes Kuznetzov.

Suddenly, there is a lot to read with journalists and letterwriters on a spree of criticism; nothing—except Lenin—is spared. The forbidden fruit (in books, films, art) is now on display and is for sale.

Also resurrected is Dudinszev's controversial novel, *White Clothes*, begun in 1956. Published in *Nevaniva*, a literary magazine from Leningrad, it is about Stalin's pet scientist, Lysenko, whose peculiar theories on genetics did not go the way of the rational scientific world.

Works about mysticism and religion: Rasputin's *Fire*, which deals with topics like the creation of the world and the end of humanity and Chingez Aitmatov's much-discussed *Butcher's Block* ("which tried to reflect on Christ, fate and Pontius Pilate," says writer and union member Voronov) are also freely available. But the emphasis in the cleaning-of-literary stables is on critical books about the Stalin era.

It is the same with cinema. *Pokoyanije* (Repentance), made in 1982 by Georgian director Tenzig Abaladze, has become a cult film. And always cited as an example of *glasnost*. It is a stunning rendering of the Stalinist era: the central figure resembles Beria but it could be Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini or any dictator.

Yet another film, *Provierka na Dorogah* (Checkup on the Roads) made in 1971 and released last year, has a protagonist who—imprisoned by the Nazis and forced to work for them—is considered a spy. The film's message: a man can make a mistake, once. Considering the fate of Russian prisoners of war in Germany

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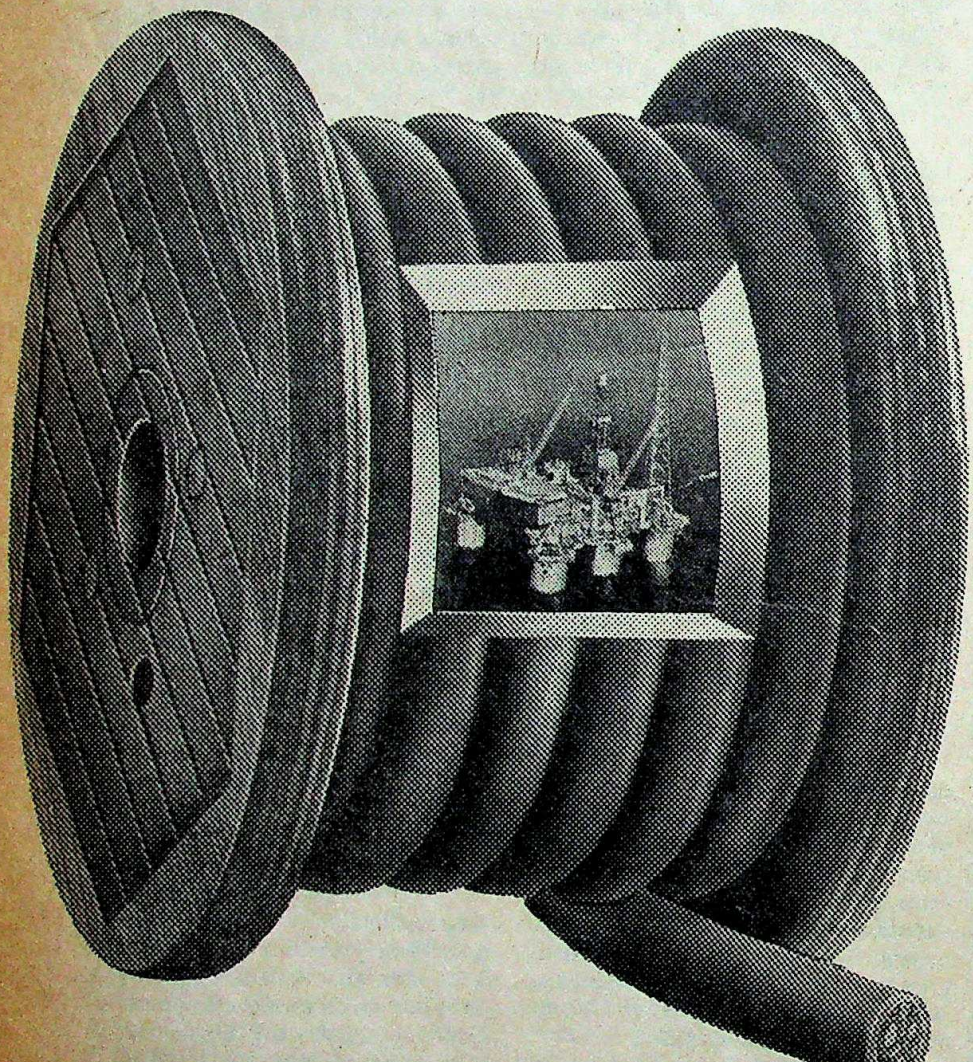

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SANJAY ACHARYA

GUM department store: shopping spree

when they came home, the film would certainly prick the Russian conscience.

Significantly, Elem Klimov, on the fringes of the establishment, whose brilliant film on Rasputin, *Agony*, has stirred the film world here, is now the top boss of the Cinema Workers' Union. Says the Novosti boss: "During the televised round-table on cinema, people said that they were tired of the life-on-the-agricultural-cooperative kind of film. They wanted boredom taken out of cinema and the untalented bosses of the union to go."

> **In the old days of purges, opposition—or "breaking mechanism" in Gorbachevese—would have cost people their heads; today, it is only their jobs.**

The winds of change are also sweeping across the theatrical landscape. Pre-*glasnost*, the Government told the theatre people which plays they could put up, who was to do what and where they could stage them. Today, the umbilical chords are being cut: the Government merely rents out the buildings. But there's a catch: if the plays don't do well, it is the cue for an exit. Salaries are varied and only the successful get more money. The greatest good, not for the greatest number but for the greater talent.

The stirrings in the world of art are less obvious and quieter but no less significant. Abstract art didn't go off in a huff into internal exile. It seldom emerged from the artist's studio, but it was still being practised. Now, abstract artists are not moonlighting—just as the embryonic private taxis, hair dressing parlours and the restaurant industry have now become legal, although with many strings attached. A walk through Gorky Park, or down Arbat Street on a sunny day, and you can see a few abstract paintings and a hint of surrealism.

Glasnost has not really touched religion; the Soviet Union is not Poland. But the churches appear more populated. And not just by heavily scarved old women. Young people have begun to go to church. In Kiev's Vladimir Cathedral, there were almost as many worshippers as visitors. A young girl comes up, crosses herself and offers some consecrated bread. In Odessa, an old woman stands at the door, with her hands outstretched for alms.

There are inklings as well of some kind of religious detente. The Intourist busloads of Americans and Canadians, seduced behind the iron curtain by Gorbachev's open-arms policy, now include expatriate Jews—coming home on a looking for roots and relatives journey. Says Neela, the guide: "Last week I took a Jewish couple, Ira and Patricia Potofski from San Francisco to Oran, 200 km from Kiev. A militia man actually helped them find their cousin. We visited her and she fed us."

Why *glasnost*? The Minotaur of materialism having been fed and almost satiated, the youth want more. That "more" is beginning to come in the shape of palmistry, yoga, skateboards, trekking and even jazz. And the current rage, restoring monuments, if anything, could stumble into a movement. The Assumption Cathedral of the Ouspensky Monastry was deliberately left in its bombed-out stage to remind people about "Nazi barbarism". But the young are now agitating for its restoration.

The present generation (untouched by the trauma of the last war when the USSR lost 20 million people and inherited a state of siege mentality: the soaring steel and aluminum monuments to the struggle against the Nazis) has begun to look at the past differently.

But is the secretary-general's sickle simply slicing away on the surface? Or is it more than propaganda-deep? The Gorbachev wave occasionally crashes against the boulders of resistance. Anatoli Kusch, a young sculptor, loses his temper when asked what he thinks of Marc Chagall: "Why do you insist on asking about those who left? We have far greater painters here." There was no such thing as art for art's sake. "There can be no art without socialist realism," insists Kusch.

The mention of Solzhenitsyn is enough to blow away some of the *glasnost*. "He is not a citizen of this country. There is no question of rehabilitating him. His was just a case of personal abuse against our country," explodes one of the journalists. Nor was Stalin all bad, he contends: "He did a lot of good for this country. Look at Moscow. It would not be like this had it not been for him." The adulation of Trotsky outside was, according to him, another example of ignorance about the USSR: "There have been far more important people and you have not even heard of them," he growls.

Gorbachev, with his liberalisation drive, has a long haul ahead, sandwiched as he is between a restless youth (some of whom wonder: "If we can make rockets, why can't we make jeans?") and the insecure old guard. And then there is his quixotic anti-alcohol drive. Jokes apart, alcoholism has become a dirty word but it has not disappeared. Some 60,000 people were recently punished for illegal distilling. In Odessa, there is a wail in the night. It is a drunk hollering. Soon a car screeches, dogs bark and the police bundle the man away. At dawn, old women hose the empty street. But in a new Socialist Utopia, not all the bad dreams have disappeared.

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OTIS ELEVATOR

Taking on a Titan

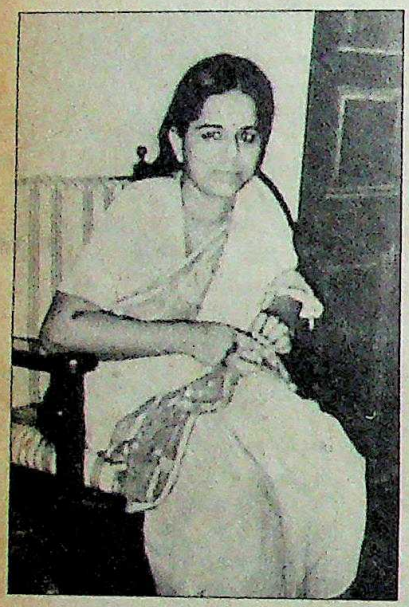
TWO years ago, Chitra Jayaraman, a young teacher in Calcutta's Don Bosco School, opened the gate of her school lift and stepped into a nightmare. There was no lift cage and she plunged straight into the lift shaft, shattering her kneecaps, a few bones, a happy middle class married life and hopes of bearing a second child. Then followed painful recovery, and the process of re-learning how to walk. When doctors told her she would require more operations, with no guarantees to walking normally, she finally decided to take on the elevator company.

For two long years, she battled Otis Elevator Company (India) Ltd and, last fortnight, was awarded Rs 50,000 as compensation for her medical expenses and loss of income. Says a triumphant Pradeep Mehta, secretary, Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS), who fought with Chitra for a full year: "Hundreds of people in this country have been maimed and killed in elevator accidents but Chitra Jayaraman is the first person to have succeeded to get the company responsible to work out compensation."

It was the efforts of 45-year-old Catholic priest George Tharayil, principal of Don Bosco at the time of Chitra's accident, that had initially made Otis sit up and take notice. Later, he roped in CUTS to follow up. "The company's basic attitude continues to be that it is in no way responsible for the accident. This upset me tremendously, especially since they initially contended the accident had not taken place at all," says Tharayil.

An Otis spokesman insists that the compensation is more in the nature of a goodwill gesture. The company statement says "an investigation after the accident carried out by the supervisor did not reveal any defect in the (elevator gate's) interlocking mechanism". The fault, it insinuates, was the school's, as it made it a practice to switch off the light in the lift cage, presumably to save electricity costs, and Chitra fell into the shaft because she did not realise in the dark that the lift cage was not present.

Photographs by KALYAN CHAKRABORTY



Chitra (left) and Mehta: setting a precedent

"But Otis is still unable to satisfactorily explain why the lift gate opened although the lift cage was not in position," counters Mehta. When CUTS first took up the case, Otis argued that it only had an "oiling and greasing (OG) agreement" with the school and would be responsible only if it had had a "comprehensive maintenance" contract.

"But this is trying to hide behind the small print," says Mehta, and refers to official correspondence between the school and Otis. On June 24, 1985, following a June 8 visit by the state Government's inspector of lifts, the school had written to Otis about the lift's defects. It had specifically asked it to rectify flaws in the "delocking arrangement of landing gates, the safety and governor switches, and the brake releasers of the lift". On July 4, Otis wrote to Don Bosco assuring them that the first two problems had been seen to and had submitted the cost estimate for the third. The accident occurred on the very next day.

"I remember noticing Otis servicemen coming down the stairs immediately after the accident. But I did not pay attention as we were busy attending to Chitra, lying at the bottom of the pit," recalls Tharayil. Chitra feels the accident might have been caused by the servicemen switching off the gate locking mechanism. Otis, however, contends the gate opening was a freak occurrence.

Indeed, initially, both Otis and insurance company inspectors denied that the accident had taken place at all, claiming that the door could not have opened without the lift cage in position. It is a charge that still infuriates Tharayil, who says the tragedy was witnessed by hundreds of schoolboys.

Chitra recalls sadly that Otis did not bother to send her so much as a note of regret. Saying that Rs 50,000 is a niggardly sum, given the two-year struggle, she says: "Why did Otis take so long to make this gesture of goodwill considering this compensation was not coming from it but from an insurance company?" Otis argues that, despite the precise cause of the mishap not being established, it negotiated with the insurance firm to provide maximum relief.

Mehta believes that Otis' attitude changed only when it realised that there was no other way out. Admitting that the company has a good safety record, Mehta explains: "Our intention was not to spoil any company's image but to establish a precedent so that in the future similar victims will get justice."

In the last three years, according to West Bengal Government records, there have been at least four fatal lift accidents in Calcutta alone. One involves a driver who was killed when the rope of an elevator in a multi-storied building snapped. In another bizarre incident, a student died when a lift gate opened; when he peeped into the shaft, the elevator car suddenly came down, hitting him from above. In none of the cases did elevator companies pay compensation. But after Chitra Jayaraman's triumph, they will no longer be able to operate with their former insouciance.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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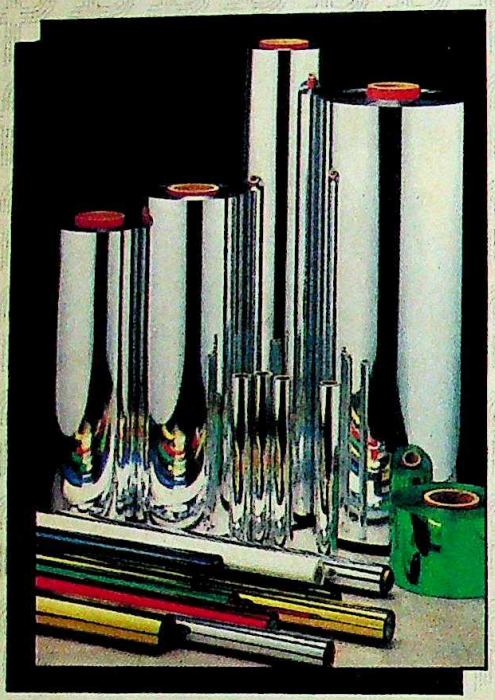

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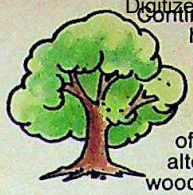

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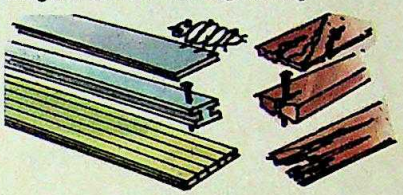

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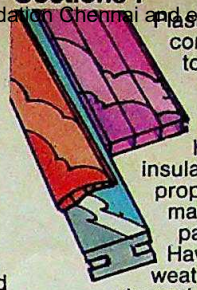

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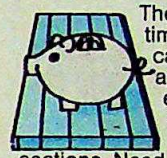

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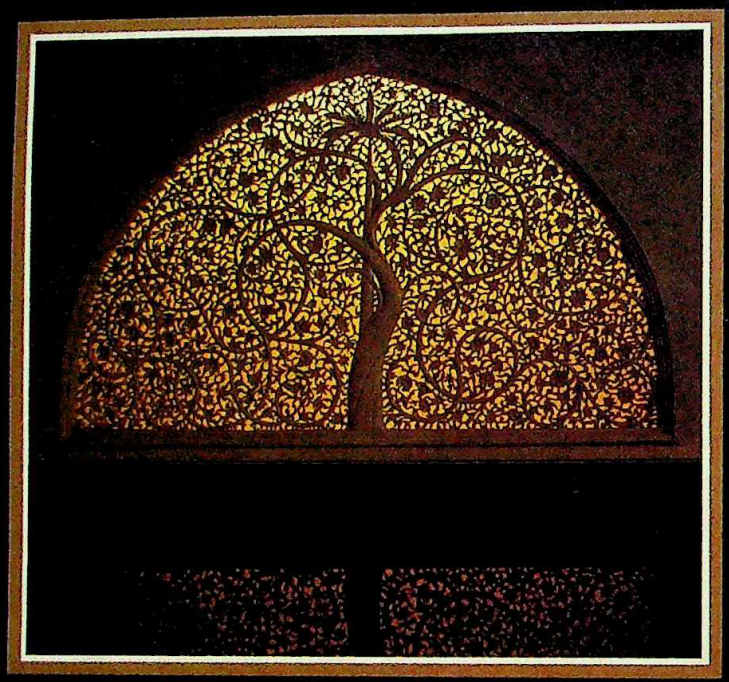

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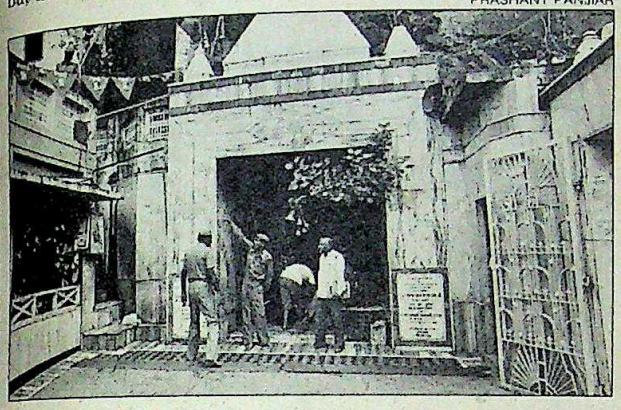
Beneficial Takeover

JAMMU and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan's most controversial reform—the take-over of the Vaishno Devi shrine by an independent board in August 1986—is drawing accolades from the state's Hindus. Pilgrims hailed the improvements in sanitation, lighting, transportation, but powerful Hindu organisations kept mum. But no longer. Many of them want the reform to cover all Hindu religious and charitable institutions in Kashmir. Said a memorandum on behalf of Kashmiri Hindus: "The administration and supervision of these institutions have passed into the hands of undeserving elements who've been treating them as their personal properties."

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Vaishno Devi shrine: improved facilities

Vaishno Devi Board records show that Rs 2 crore in cash and about 8 kg of gold have been offered since the take-over, which will be used to build a new library and research centre at the shrine, a dozen rest points along the route, a shopping and medical complex, a dry-cleaning plant for cleaning blankets and linen and a hospital at Katra, the starting point.

Protecting Partymen

IT was double-speak at its Orwellian best. While condemning hooliganism on the campuses, the Madhya Pradesh Government last month quietly ordered the withdrawal of a court case against Suresh Pachouri, Rajya Sabha member and a general secretary of the Youth Congress(I). The orders, issued by the Law Department, were addressed to the district magistrate of Bhopal. The department's letter, dated July 3, stated: "In the view of the Government, it is not in the interest of public justice to continue this case further." The case relates to Pachouri's arrest in 1982 on charges of using unfair means in an examination and intimidating the invigilators at Maulana Azad College of Technology, Bhopal. As the terrified teachers of that college had refused to invigilate, Pachouri—who was already a budding student leader at the time—as well as his friend Harshad Bafna, were shifted to a new examination centre, Hamidia College.

Pachouri: bailed out

By the time the case for criminal intimidation, criminal force to deter a public servant from the discharge of his duty and trespass reached the court after four years, the youth leader had graduated onto the national scene and had entered the Rajya Sabha. If convicted, the honourable MP would have faced five years' imprisonment plus fine. But the Government saved him and the party any such embarrassment by nipping the trouble in the bud. Now, the dissident group in the Madhya Pradesh Youth Congress(I) has submitted to the prime minister a list of 10 criminal cases registered against Pachouri in Bhopal. These relate to, among other things, attempt to murder, assault and intimidation. It remains to be seen if the Government will once again bail Pachouri out.

Populist Priorities

THE Lok Dal(B) Government, headed by Devi Lal, will have several "firsts" to its credit. In continuation of its populist image, the Government is considering several innovative measures to decentralise decision-making and, as Devi Lal says, "return the Government to the people". These include: appointing party workers and not MLAs as chairmen of government boards and corporations to "break up the nexus between bureaucrats and politicians"; holding elections to the municipal committees for the first time in the state; handling of development plans by new district development corporations which will also be in-charge of integrated area development plans. The district development corporations will coordinate their efforts with several mini-secretariats—where all branches of the state Government will be available—now coming up in major districts. Also, all the budget sessions of the Assembly will be at least a month long. "Previous governments," says state party President Om Prakash Chotala, "have always feared long budget sessions. But we want legislators to discuss anything under the sun. There will be a free-for-all on all issues."

Devi Lal: innovative

Political Resurrections

THE see-saw in Tamil Nadu's ruling AIADMK continued to swing erratically last fortnight. After sending former information minister R.M. Veerappan and his followers into political banishment last year, the ailing Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran did a double-take and rehabilitated dethroned former party general secretary

Veerappan (left) and Raghvanandam: swinging fortunes

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S. Raghavanandam—recently identified as being with the Veerappan group—as a deputy general secretary.

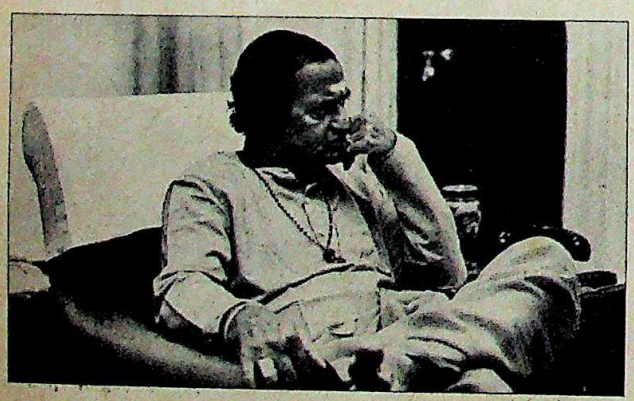
As if this was not all, K. Kalimuthu, former agriculture minister and a Veerappan man, also was made a deputy general secretary. Now, even Veerappan is being tipped to return to MGR's cabinet. Meanwhile, Food Minister S. Ramachandran—anti-Veerappan and considered MGR's confidant, is not seen as frequently around him as before. Remarked a party bigwig, who wished to remain unidentified: "It looks as if the wind is going to blow in Veerappan's favour for some time now."

Dogged by Disaster

THE embarrassment for Dr M.S.S. Koteswara Rao did not end with his being dropped from the N.T. Rama Rao's Ministry on July 11. Next day, a Sunday, some Christian-Harijans of the former minister's native Neerukonda village in Guntur district made offerings at the local church and had a feast as thanksgiving for "fulfilment of their desires". But the ceremony was misunderstood as a celebration over Koteswara Rao's exit. Its disastrous sequel, after a three-day build up, was the killing of a 77-year-old Harijan in an attack by a group of Kammas on July 15. Four others were injured.

A shocked NTR flew to the village to console the victims. But many Harijans, fearing further reprisals, had fled. It was only after a week that many of the 42 accused

NTR and Rao (left): facing a new scandal



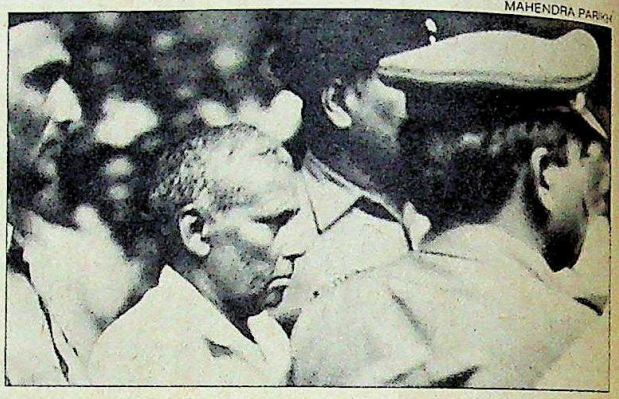
surrendered—and the Harijans returned. Said a crestfallen Koteswara Rao: "A single shameful incident in my village blackens the little good work I may have done for the entire state as the minister." It will take a long time for Neerukonda to wipe off the scar.

Sentencing a Psychopath

RAMAN Raghav, the self-confessed mass murderer who killed at least 42 people "on orders from Lord Surya and to avert a war between India and Pakistan" in the late '60s made a reappearance in court last fortnight, 18 years after he was condemned to death by a sessions judge in Bombay. Raghav, who was treated for paranoid schizophrenia after being sent to the Yeravada jail in Pune, had created a scare in the Bombay suburbs with a spate of senseless killings with an iron jemmy, usually for paltry sums of money. A misogynist, he had even had sex with some of his female victims after killing them. However, the Bombay High Court had not confirmed the death sentence as a panel of three psychiatrists found him mentally unsound.

Now 60, and after all these years in a solitary cell on death row, Raghav was back again at the high court after Dr Y.W. Kelkar, superintendent of the Central Institute of Mental

MAHENDRA PARIKH



Raghav in court: facing a death sentence

Health and Research, Pune, found him "fit to give instructions to his advocates". Escorted by three police constables, Raghav sat impassively, handcuffed and bound in ropes, as crowds thronged the courtroom of Justice R.A. Jahagirdar and Justice A.D. Tated. Raghav maintained he had killed because it was ordained by the gods and added: "I do not think God will ask me to kill anybody again. I do not want to commit any more murders. I will not do it again even if Surya speaks to me." After questioning Raghav for a second day, the judges ruled that the psychopath killer was fit enough to instruct his lawyers. The proceedings for reconfirmation of the death sentence passed on Raghav in 1969 have finally begun.

Dubious Developers

IN Calcutta, it is the Marxist Mayor Kamal Basu's turn to be quizzed publicly *a la* Rajiv. Doing a Jethmalani on him is Congress(I) MLA and Municipal Councillor Sultan Ahmed. Mayor Basu incurred his wrath the moment it was revealed that Rawdon Square Park, one of Calcutta's premier green areas, was being hawked to a group of dubious developers. The charge was that the public park had been handed over to a developer, Hirak Kumar Sen, without allowing others to bid for the Rs 20-crore contract. This spacious park is to be converted into a commercial complex with a whopping 200,000-sq ft built-up area, which will be sold to private parties. Curiously, the developer floated a company only a few months ago with a paid up capital of just Rs 2,000.

Even more curious, it has been found that the real financier is Arun Bajoria, who hit the headlines earlier this year when he was caught with allegedly unaccounted cash amounting to Rs 70 lakh during a raid. Even more interesting, Sen happens to be a close relative of the influential Marxist MP Amal Dutta, who is also related to the Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu. Insiders say that the issue could well precipitate a showdown in the CPI(M), with the party's Young Turks determined to root out all corruption and nepotism in government functioning.

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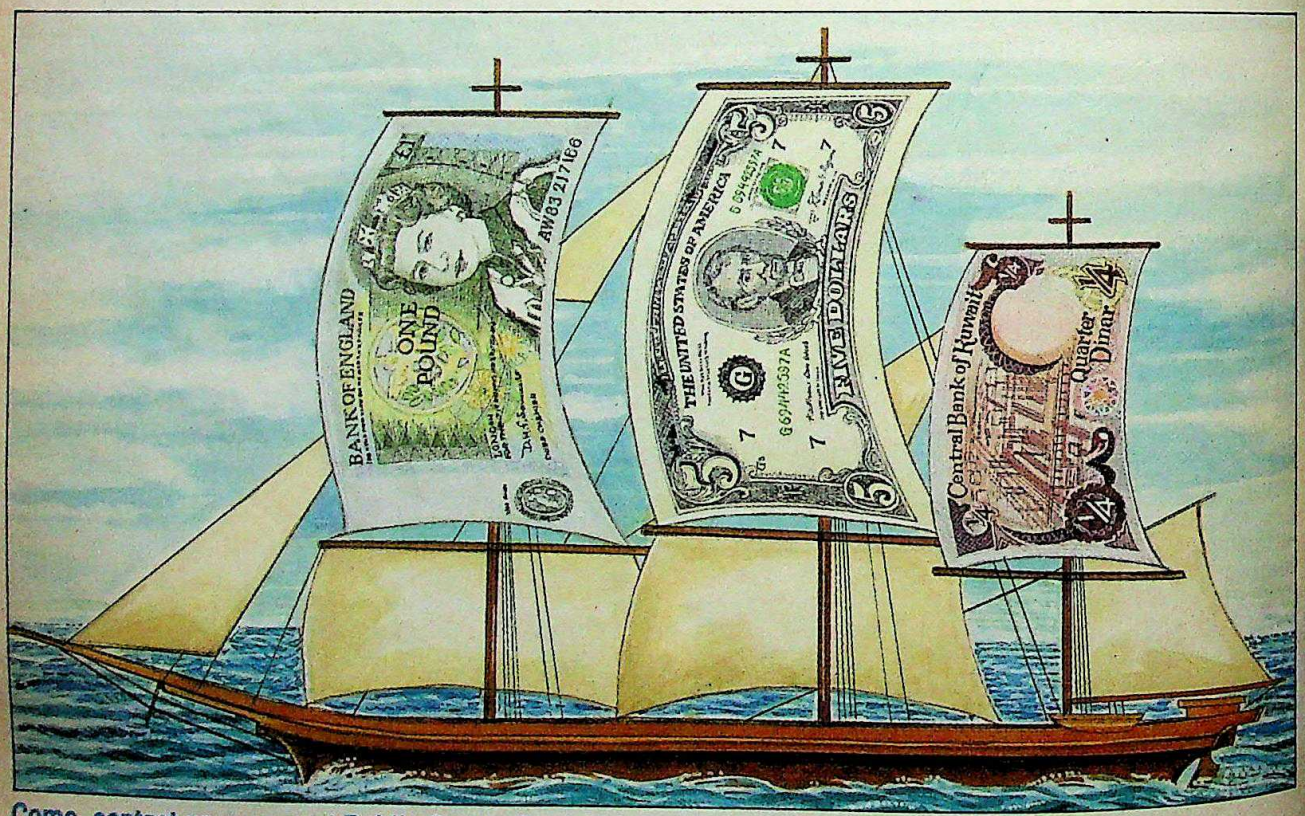

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- Canara Bank
- Central Bank of India
- Corporation Bank
- Dena Bank
- Indian Bank
- Indian Overseas Bank
- New Bank of India
- Oriental Bank of Commerce
- Punjab National Bank
- Punjab & Sind Bank
- State Bank of India
- State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur
- State Bank of Hyderabad
- State Bank of Indore
- State Bank of Mysore
- State Bank of Patiala
- State Bank of Saurashtra
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- Syndicate Bank
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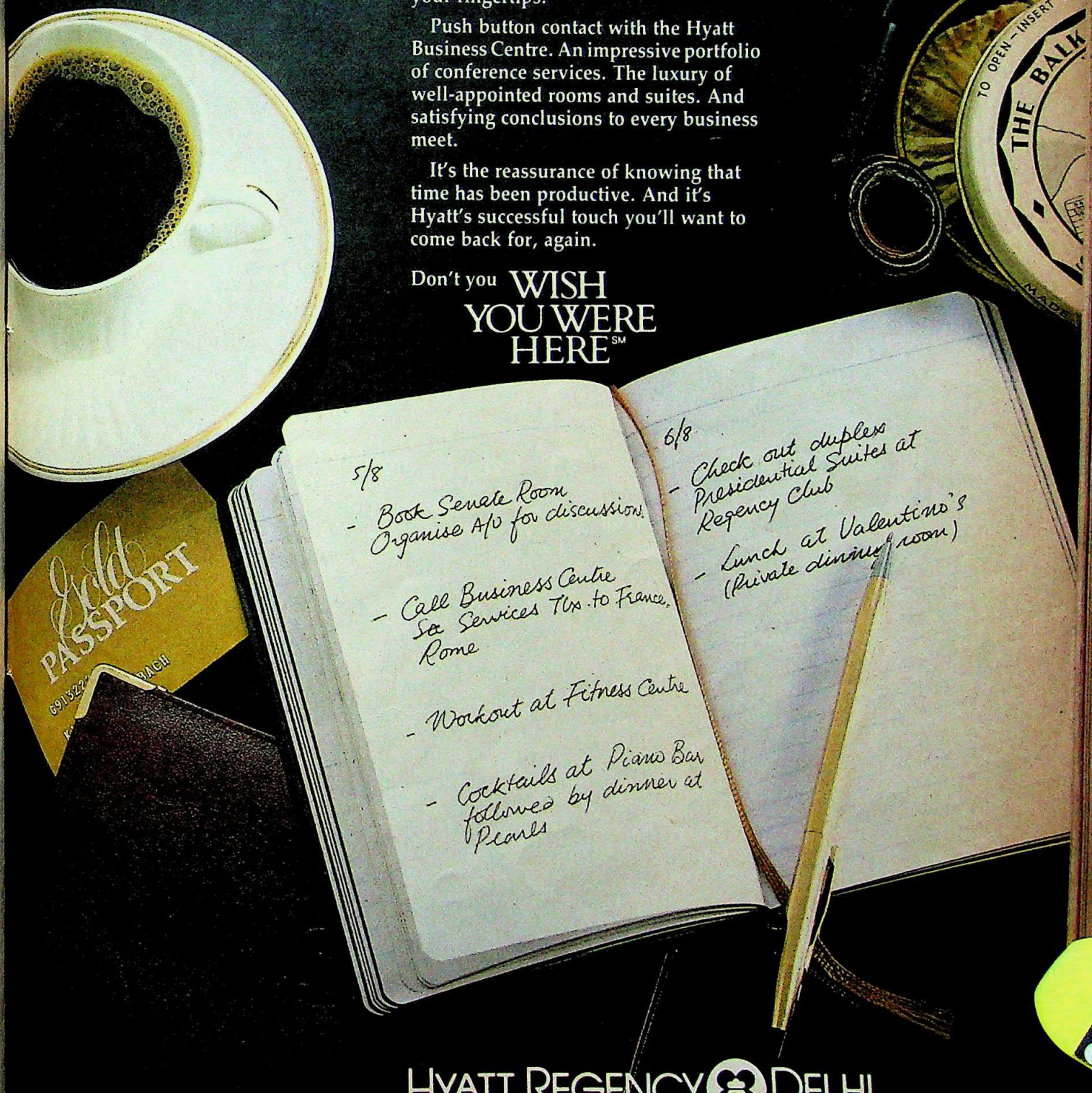

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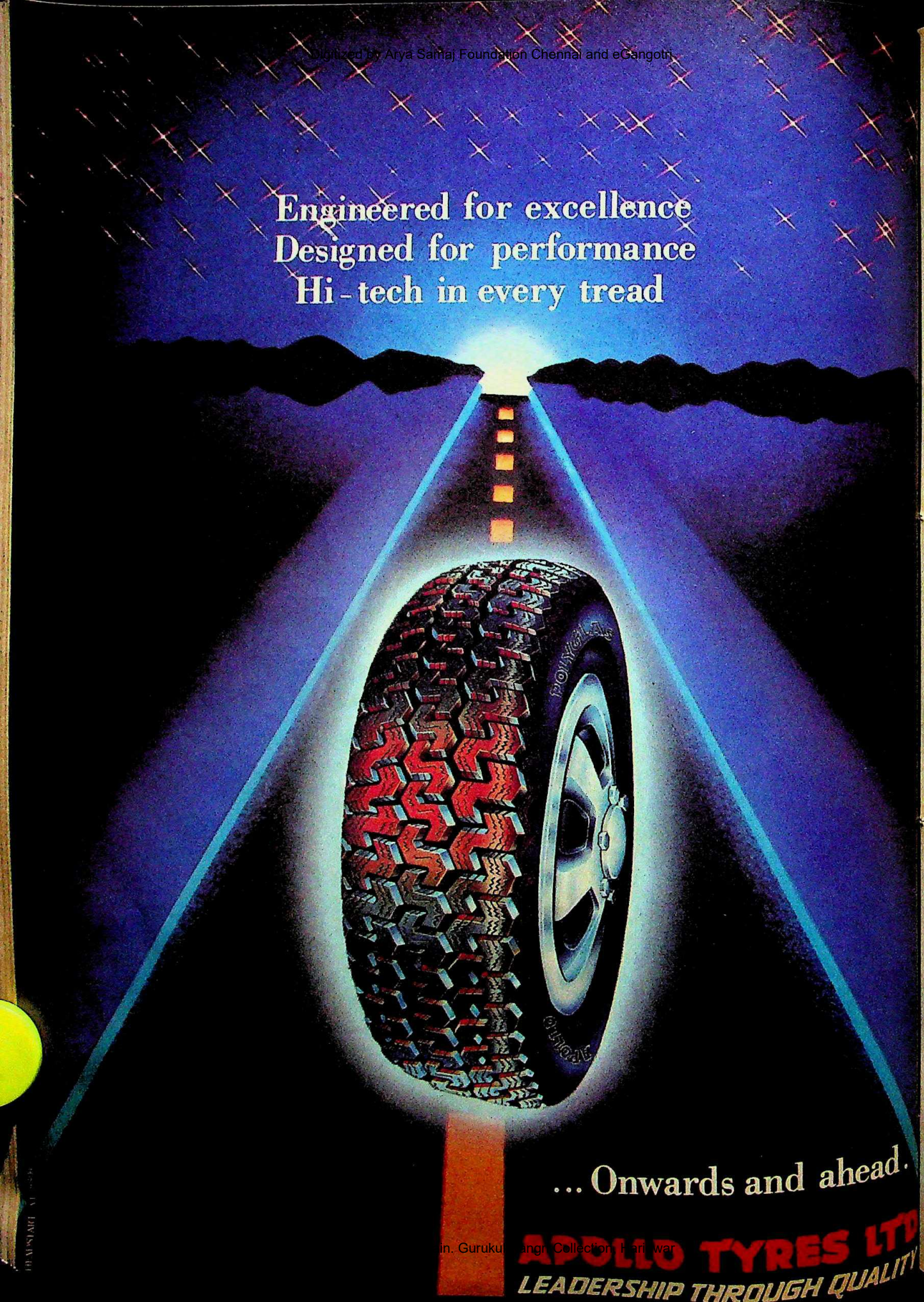

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NOVEL TAKEOVER

S.K. BIRLA has finally clinched the deal to get control of Chloride India, but in a novel manner. Chloride Group of Britain will not sell to Birla any of its holdings in its subsidiary Chloride Eastern (which in turn has 51 per cent of Chloride India). Instead, Chloride Eastern will make a public issue of half its holdings in Chloride India, with Merrill Lynch being the midwife. Birla may or may not pick up some of these shares but he plans to buy some Chloride shares locally. Meanwhile, an agreement will be signed between Birla and the Chloride Group so that he gets control of the management.

While the deal has been carefully structured so as to obviate the need for any clearance from either the Government or the Reserve Bank of India, it now remains to be seen how much Chloride will raise from its public issue. One of the offers, from a Japanese company, for Chloride Eastern's entire holding in Chloride India had gone up to as high as Rs 70 crore.

NEW EDGE

EVEN as Indian Shaving Products, the company in collaboration with Gillette, tries to stay alive in the blades market, another foreign-collaboration blades company is trying to strengthen itself financially to take on the indigenous Malhotras, who control more than 80 per cent of the blades market. Wiltech, the R.P. Goenka-managed blade company, started seven years ago with Wilkinson collaboration, will now be merging with another company in the Goenka fold, Asian Cables. Wiltech has already notched up sizeable losses, and a merger will help Asian Cables set these off against its own profits. It will also give Wiltech the financial muscle to stay in the market-place and fight the Malhotras.

PREMIER RESEARCH

WHILE Premier Automobiles awaits the Government's new automobile policy and subsequent clearance of its proposal to manufacture the Nissan Sunny in India, the Bombay-based company has decided to go in for research and development tie-ups with a leading European firm. Among those being considered by Premier Chairman Vinod Doshi are Porsche of West Germany (a company that prides itself on its R&D strength), Ricardo of Britain and AVL of Austria. A tie-up, if it materialises, will be for joint R&D work to upgrade both the Premier Padmini as well as the new model, the 118 NE. The European firms do not come cheap, however, and price could ultimately be a deterrent.

DESTINATION INDIA

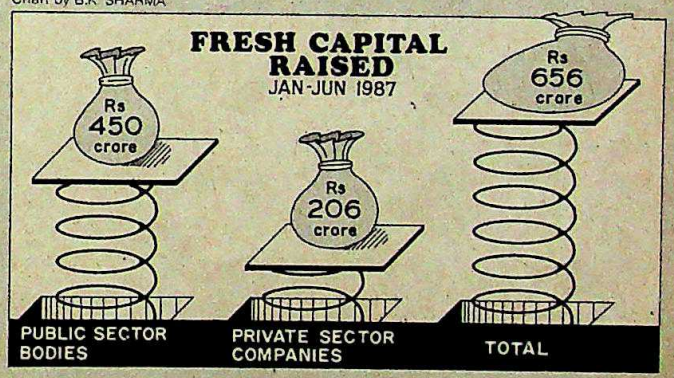
WRANGLER jeans will soon enter the Indian market. VF Corporation of the US (of which Wrangler is a division) has licensed the Bombay-based Dupont Sportswear to make Wrangler products at a Goa factory. The venture needs no government or RBI clearance as Dupont is a small-scale venture and Wrangler is not asking for payment either for its help to Dupont or for using its brand name.

Dupont has been promoted by A.K. Jalan in partnership with I. Rashid, a NRI who owns 40 per cent equity and who already has a tie-up with VF Corporation to make Wranglers in Pakistan. The Rs 1-crore Goa project is due to be launched next month and aims to reach upmarket customers, with a sales volume of three lakh pieces a year.

FADING HOPES

ANY faint hopes that companies will be able to raise over Rs 2,500 crore from the capital market this year, through the issue of new debentures and shares, has quickly evaporated, with the first six months of the year netting no more than Rs 656 crore. Of this meagre sum, Rs 450 crore was raised by the public sector Mahanagar Telephone Nigam, the railways and the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India. Net of this, the private sector raised no more than Rs 206 crore—probably the lowest sum in any six-month period over the last five years. That must be depressing news for the several companies waiting anxiously for better times to launch their large public issues to finance ambitious projects.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



THE GREAT RUSH

AFTER TV sets, the new great rush in electronics manufacturing is video cassette recorders (VCRs). Six private companies have applied for licences, though official plans are to issue only two licences—one each in the private and public sectors, with a capacity of one million each. Electronics Corporation of India Ltd and Electronics Trade and Technology Development Corporation will put up the public sector venture (a technology pact with National, Japan, is on the cards) while the race in the private sector is between Bharat Forge, Sonodyne, a consortium of Televista, Crown and Weston, British Physical Laboratories (BPL) along with the Karnataka State Electronics Development Corporation. BPL is believed to have an edge as it already makes tape decks. But Bharat Forge—a technology tie-up with Sharp of Japan is expected—could be the dark horse.

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TELEPHONES

The Model Revolution

PLUSH homes and offices may be used to imported push-button or cordless telephones and answering machines. But such gizmos are all set to go democratic—and *desi*, as part of a telecommunication revolution about to sweep the country.

A whole range of home-made push-button phones, including a wall model, will hit the market in a few months. Locally manufactured cordless ones will be on sale in a couple of years. And, at least two companies have plans to hawk domestically assembled answering machines, one of them by December-end.

Adjustable Chimer Phone

There will also be magnetic cards to pay for calls from public telephones. Some 2,000 'debit-card-type' pay phones are being imported for Bombay and New Delhi, followed by another 12,000 that will be imported for the rest of the country. Mobile radio telephones, for use in cars, are already being tried out in New Delhi (with a limited number of subscribers forking out Rs 48,000 as deposit). But, next year, the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTN) will formally launch its mobile radio telephone service in both Bombay and New Delhi, permitting people to dial from their cars. Some 1,200 radio phones will be available.

This is not all. A spectrum of new generation electronic private automatic branch exchanges (EPABX) are soon to be available. The Government has licensed half-a-dozen companies, including the Tatas, Blue Star and Escorts, to manufacture them in collaboration with Oki of Japan, Jeumont-Schneider of France and GTE-ATEA of Belgium. Twelve others have bagged licences to turn out EPABX using know-how supplied by the Centre for the Development of Telematics (C-DOT), the organisation set up to design exchanges indigenously.

Clearly, events are moving swiftly in the hitherto somnolent communications world. More places are accessible now, for instance, last year, you could directly dial 302 towns around the country. Now, you can telephone 32 more locations, including Bhusawal in Maharashtra and Bholpur in West Bengal. You can also directly dial the US, Nepal, Australia, most of the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland, among others. Says Sunil B. Mittal, a director of Bharti Telecom Ltd, which has tied up with Takachiho of Japan for answering machines: "We're on the threshold of a communications revolution: the next two to three years will see tremendous changes."

By April 1989, for instance, all subscribers in Bombay and New Delhi will receive detailed bills listing the numbers they called and the duration of their calls. A year later, they will be able to "send" their mail over a "packet switching system", called Vikram, that the Government plans to introduce. Vikram, meant to send data through the use of computer terminals, will be linked to eight cities and climaxes a successful three-city experiment launched last June.

The Rs 12-crore Vikram project is part of a more ambitious speech and data transmission network for companies. The business network is expected to start functioning in 18 months.

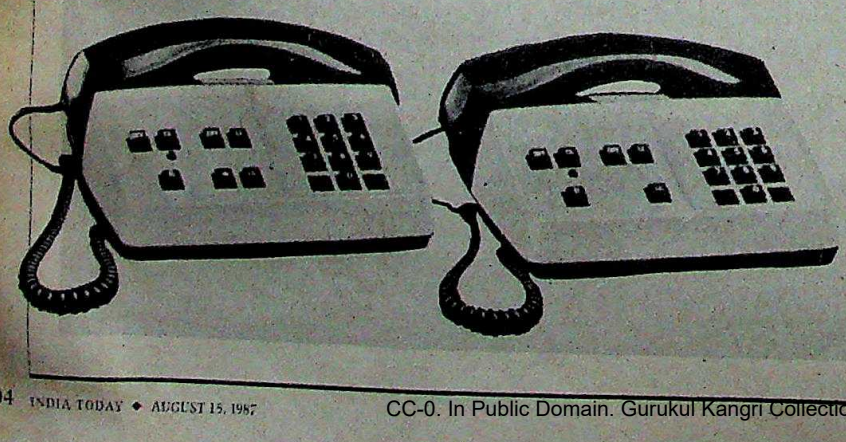
The burst of telecom activity flows from several government initiatives. At the beginning of the seventh plan, the Communications Ministry had asked the Planning Commission for about Rs 13,000-odd crore, only to be told that just Rs 4,010 crore would be available as there was not enough money in the kitty. But the ministry recently pressed its case again, and the commission relented enough to raise the sum to Rs 6,010 crore. "Telecommunications has been identified as one of the five priority areas. After that it has taken on new dimensions," explains Minister of State for Communications Santosh Mohan Dev.

Hotel Telephone

The push-button telephones are just one tiny sign of the renewed eagerness to mend the tattered communications system. "The current rotary dial instruments are worn out and not reliable," says MTN Managing Director M.P. Shukla. An MTN analysis of telephone faults in Bombay for one month last year found that while nearly 16 per cent of the city's phones went on the blink, the instruments contributed to 13 per cent of the faults.

The new phones could help change that. To be initially assembled from imported kits by seven companies that have

Two-Telephone System



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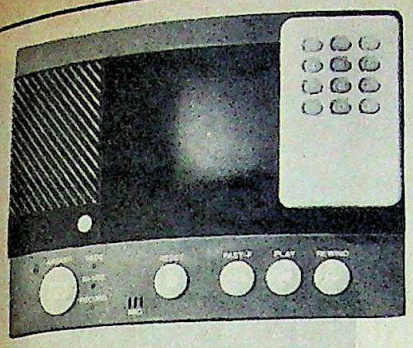


Answering Machine

tied up with either Ericsson of Sweden or Siemens of West Germany, the new sets "will be miles ahead in performance," says Sheeldhar Pande, managing director of the Bombay-based Set Telecommunications. Apart from minimising dialling errors, they have life spans of over 20 years (compared with five-year spans for electro-mechanical instruments) and will put calls through far more quickly. R.K. Sud, chief executive of Rajasthan Telephone Industries, one of the new telephone instrument companies, reckons that less than 10 per cent of the time now taken will be required.

Phone manufacturers are offering more than one model: a basic instrument with an adjustable chimer at the bottom and a last number redial facility; a wall version of the same model; a more sophisticated set which provides for two extension connections; and a 'hands-off speakaphone' with a 10-number memory.

MTN will, however, offer only the basic model. Last September, the company placed a Rs 30-crore order for nearly three lakh phones. Only 2,500 phones have been delivered so far, almost four months behind schedule—manufacturers blame delays in getting import licences—but the pace will quicken in the coming months. Even so, most people will have to wait a while—the new phones will first be installed at VIP homes and offices. K.C. Rajaram, managing director of the Bangalore-based Swede (India) Teltronics, claims that a number of his company's first batch of 50 phones have been installed at the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

But the sunny news is that subscribers may not be forced to buy instruments from MTN at all. They now have to purchase their first telephone from the Government, but it is considering the option of allowing phones to be bought from the market. The open market price tag will be double MTN's Rs 500 charge, but those who buy from shops will own them and won't have to pay the Rs 800 installation fee.

The new factories will turn out over 1.5 million push-button phones a year when production peaks. Over half of this is expected to go to the Government and MTN, but at least 10 per cent of the instruments have to be hawked retail. Where, then, will the rest of the phones be peddled?

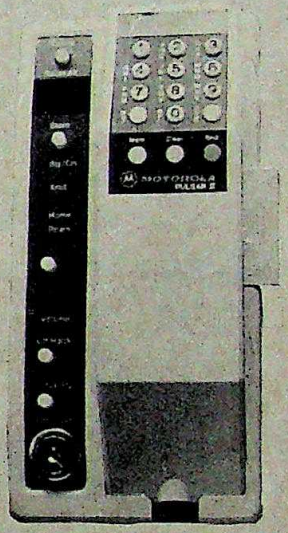
Enter the EPABX. "For every telephone line released, 1.6 instruments are needed on an average. With the influx of so many PABX manufacturers by 1990, four instruments will be required," argues Bharti's Mittal. On the principle that more private exchanges will help trim the demand for telephone lines, the Government has licensed huge EPABX production capacities. The big companies with foreign collaborations alone can turn out private exchanges of a total of three lakh lines. And adding on the 12 companies that have tied up with C-DOT, for exchanges with capacities of anything between 89 and 20,000 lines, the final tally will soar.

WITH so many in the fray, fierce wars for market shares have already started, with customers demanding—and obtaining—discounts. "In two to three years' time, there will certainly be a shake-out and not more than three will survive," forecasts Partha Sarkar, corporate planning and development manager at Tata Industries. Fearing the competition, Swede India has already decided not to make use of its licence.

Such corporate caution represents a dramatic reversal of the heady excitement of a year or two ago, when companies feverishly queued up for the technology. C-DOT Adviser Sam Pitroda says that the centre had charged each individual Rs 1.2 lakh for the privilege of just attending an EPABX conference at a five-star hotel in the capital—and 48 people paid the money.

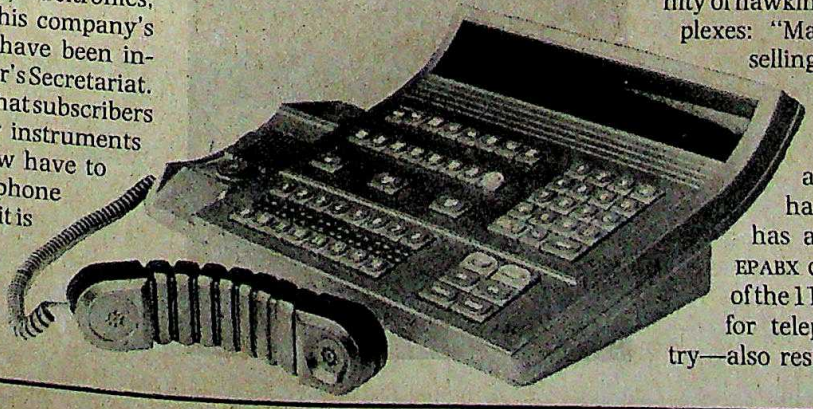
Still, the big hope now is that the attractions of the new systems will lure customers. Unlike the older exchanges, the digital ones offer several conveniences. They can be linked to computers, diagnose their ailments (the operator console will indicate bugs in the system), meter individual calls in an office and so on. "With all the special features that the EPABX has, like paging, automatic callback, direct outward dialling or trunk access three-way conferencing, Indian executives used to a bank of telephone instruments on their table today will need no more than one," says B.T. Jumani, Blue Star's marketing manager.

Car Phone



The key question for the host of EPABX companies is their long-term market prospects. Estimates of demand vary widely, but a telecom economist has forecast that it will balloon by over five times from 5.1 lakh lines last year to 27.1 lakh in 2000 A.D. "Even this is on the low side," argues Pitroda. He believes the market is much larger because it has not been fully explored, citing as an example the opportunity of hawking EPABX to apartment complexes: "Manufacturers are used to selling popcorn. They're in a panic situation because they don't know how to sell systems. You're selling a service, and have to hold hands and invest in time." He has a point. But the future of EPABX companies—and the hopes of the 11 lakh people on waiting lists for telephones around the country—also rests on the Government pro-

Online Operator Console



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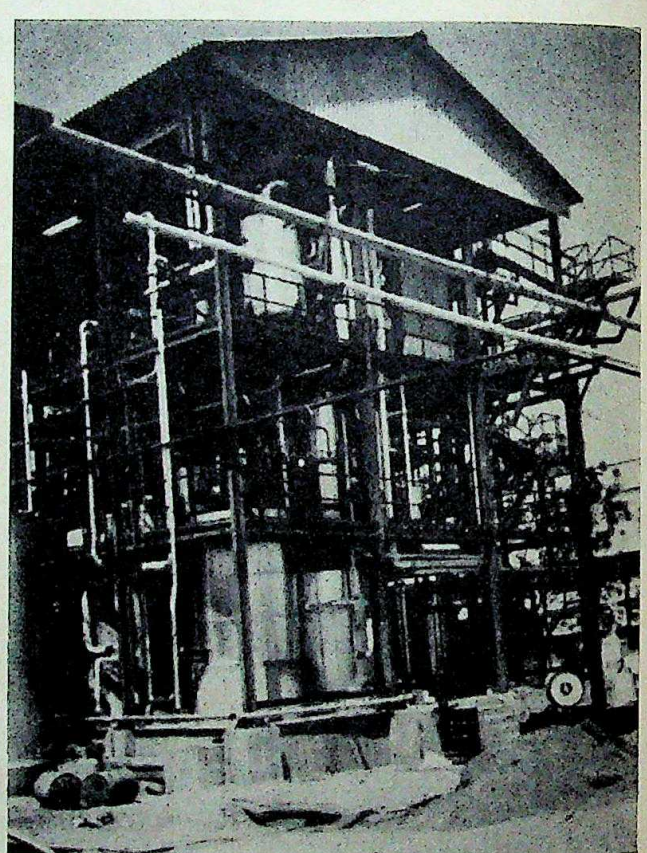

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viding enough telephone lines to subscribers and investing in factories to produce the necessary equipment. Said one observer dryly last fortnight: "What's the use of fancy phones and EPABX if you don't get a dial tone?"

The Government is aware of the problem. The public sector Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) is phasing out the manufacture of older switching equipment at its factories, and is going the electronic route. In fact, ITI has tied up with CIT-Alcatel of France to manufacture electronic switching systems at Mankapur. This year, the unit will produce over 2 lakh lines, and ITI Acting Managing Director D.V. Gupta says that by 1989-90, it will touch its peak production capacity of half a million lines. Even so, official forecasts place the demand-supply chasm at a staggering 8 million lines by the turn of the century.

So, the Government proposes to set up a second electronic switching systems factory with a five-lakh line capacity. Sensing an opportunity, the big boys of the private sector (including the Tatas) have thrown their hats into the ring, as has CIT-Alcatel. The fly in the ointment: C-DOT, which represents the indigenous effort at designing a system by next month. The lobbying to bag the job has reached such a feverish pitch that government officials are throwing up their hands in despair.

THE Government, however, is veering round to the view that C-DOT will be its best bet. CIT-Alcatel and C-DOT are in a face-off for the project, but the French company has quoted Rs 138 crore, against C-DOT's Rs 30 crore. Government officials believe that while the project may wind up costing more than Rs 30 crore, the C-DOT route will be vastly cheaper than that of the French company. The losers, in the process, are the Indian private corporations. Last fortnight, in an as yet unannounced move, the Government turned down an application by the Madhya Pradesh State Electronics Corporation and the Tatas to manufacture five lakh lines a year—even though the venture would have used C-DOT know-how. A senior bureaucrat said flatly: "There's no scope for anyone else but C-DOT. It's a policy decision of the Government."

So, the outcome seems to be a foregone conclusion. The question is: will a second factory clear the backlog of phone applications? It will help—to a limited point. For even as the list gets whittled down, more applications keep pouring in. Dev says that some 16 lakh telephone connections will be provided in the seventh plan period. "Even then, our calculation is that by 2000 A.D. there will be a need for 20 million lines."

The bill for this: a mind-boggling Rs 50,000 crore. Can money of this order be raised? Dev is confident that it can. Half is to come from the ministry's coffers, and the rest of it from market borrowings and budgetary support. If he is right, communications will have truly entered the 21st century. If he's wrong, the Government would have dialled a wrong number.

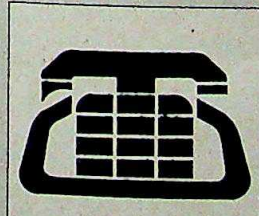
—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with M. RAHMAN and ANITA PRATAP

MTN

Sprucing Up

IF money can buy solutions, Bombay and Delhi could soon be the envy of the rest of the country. Over the next three years, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTN) will be spending a hefty Rs 1,633 crore—almost double the Rs 900 crore that was spent over the last 30 years—on sprucing up the telephone system in the two cities.

The process was kicked off last year after the Government decided to experiment with a separate telephone company for the two metropolises. Much water has flowed down the Yamuna since then. New electronic exchanges have been installed, expensive new cables have been laid in ducts (MTN Managing Director M.P. Shukla promises the roads will not have to be dug up for the next 20 years because cables will be pulled through pipes), and new long distance connections have been introduced.



Last month, the corporation held an open house in the capital for telephone subscribers. "The 100 staff members who attended faced quite some criticism from subscribers," chuckles Shukla. MTN subsequently set up Lok Adalats to arbitrate in corporation-customer disputes. "After MTN was created, there has been a qualitative change in the attitude of the top management. It is now more receptive to suggestions by subscribers," says consumer activist M.R. Pai, for long a harsh critic of the telephone authorities.

But have the telephone services in the two cities improved significantly? Referring to a letter published in a mainline daily, a senior bureaucrat laughed: "Their publicity has improved." MTN has been quick to blow its trumpet. And Pai argues that the company's accountability to subscribers requires some polishing.

Still, some genuine gains have been made too. There are fewer telephone faults, for instance. A year ago, only 77 out of 100 calls made between two free telephones went through. The figure is up now to 91. And while around 1.64 lakh new phone connections have been handed out in the two cities, the waiting lists have lengthened from 3.3 lakh to 3.8 lakh because more people have been applying for telephones.

"MTN has been around for one year," says Minister of State for Communications Santosh Mohan Dev. "It has met its targets, and in some cases even exceeded them." Dev also counters any suggestions that the gains of Bombay and Delhi are the rest of the country's loss—he says that most of the money the company raises from the market goes to the Government, to be used elsewhere in the country.

The MTN will be spending Rs 1,633 crore, almost double of what was spent in the last 30 years, to spruce up telephone systems in Bombay and Delhi.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI with bureau reports

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CANARA BANK

Hitting New Highs

HE swears by profits and an incentive-based system. He disdains uniformity, believing that "this is the root of inefficiency". And he certainly chafes at the rules.

A high priest of the private sector? Not quite.

Meet B. Ratnakar, the controversial chairman and managing director of the government-owned Canara Bank. In a world of prim bankers, he's the quintessential buccaneer, skating on the thin edge of banking conventions while vying for the customer's money, and coming up with audacious financial innovations that have set fellow bankers aflutter.

His innovations have set Canara Bank's bottom line afire too. Net profits soared so dramatically from Rs 4.57 crore in 1982—when Ratnakar took over as chairman—to Rs 55.16 crore last year, that the bank topped the profit charts for four years in a row, staying ahead of such redoubtables as the Bank of India, Central Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, and Punjab National Bank (*see chart*).

The profits have been squirreled away in reserves. Last year alone, Canara Bank transferred almost Rs 50 crore to reserves—a notable achievement considering that in 1985, 19 banks put a total of Rs 47 crore into their reserves. With such sums put away, Canara Bank's capital and reserves have climbed by an astonishing 800 per cent in the last five years, from Rs 20 crore to Rs 161.5 crore, prompting New Bank of India Chairman and Managing Director R.C. Suneja to exclaim: "That's tremendous. I don't think any nationalised bank has this kind of figure."

On other fronts too, Canara Bank has set a scorching pace. In the last five years, deposits have burgeoned by a record 127 per cent. That still has not been enough for the bank to hit Ratnakar's avowed goal of the top spot—at Rs 6,564 crore, the bank ranks fifth in deposits. But excluding overseas funds (unlike the other major banks, Canara has just one branch abroad), it ranks third on the totem-pole.

Such statistics have helped Canara Bank storm its way into the ranks of the top five nationalised banks (excluding the State Bank of India, which, with its huge public sector deposits, is way ahead of the pack), and transformed it from a regional bank into a national presence.

Inevitably, this kind of success has invited both admiration and envy and made the bank's chairman a talking point in the industry. "Ratnakar is someone who is constantly talked about in the banking industry," says the chairman and managing director of a rival bank. Another bank chairman adds: "He's become a formidable competitor to banks like Punjab National Bank and Bank of Baroda. But he's overambitious. He wants to be number one quickly so that people talk about him and his bank."

Ratnakar's colourful past may also have contributed to his unequivocally being star material. The son of a bus "agent" (a job akin to that of a conductor in Karnataka), he won a scholarship to college and worked his way through by giving tuitions, and then rose rapidly through the banks' ranks. At 24, he was branch manager; at 46, he became chairman. Along the way, he underwent tough times, sleeping in the bank's premises during a posting in Bombay since he could not afford the rent for a room.

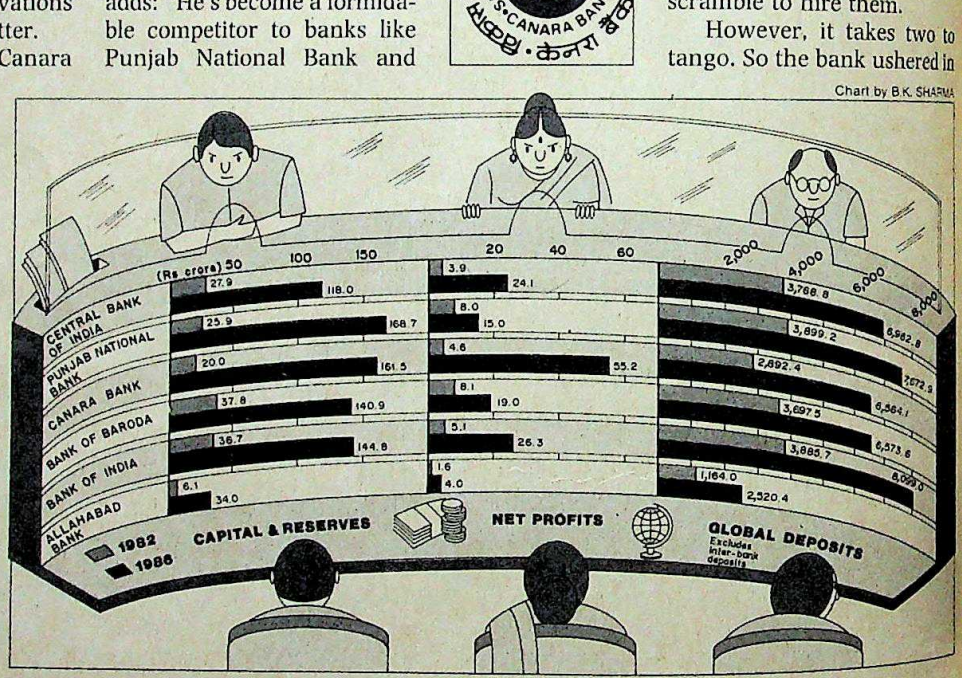
His past, of course, does not explain his spectacular success at the bank. What does? Why has his bank grown so rapidly and become a force to reckon with? One answer is that the Government helped the bank in a small way. Nearly two years ago, it handed over the losing Laxmi Commercial Bank with its Rs 200 crore in deposits to Canara Bank. That instantly gave Canara a wider northern base: 135 of Laxmi's 230 branches are situated here.

But the bank's fortunes have really been built on two corner-stones: its staff, and ingenious financial devices. "I took two decisions when I took over. Employees must develop pride in the organisation. And Canara Bank men and women must command a better market," says Ratnakar. That meant that employees would first have to build up the organisation before other banks would scramble to hire them.

However, it takes two to tango. So the bank ushered in sweeping internal changes. Decentralisation, for one. Power was delegated down to the circle—some 200 to 250 branches form a circle—so that each, in effect, became a bank within a bank. What is more, each of the nine circles prints its own balance sheet for circulation within the bank. "The basic idea is internal competition. It's a private sector approach in a public sector background," says Deputy General Manager H. Dinesh Nayak, who heads the bank's Delhi circle. To top it all, a deputy general manager's powers virtually equal those of the chairman of many of the smaller nationalised banks.

Some of the more recent changes could raise eyebrows in banking's more conservative bastions. Canara Bank

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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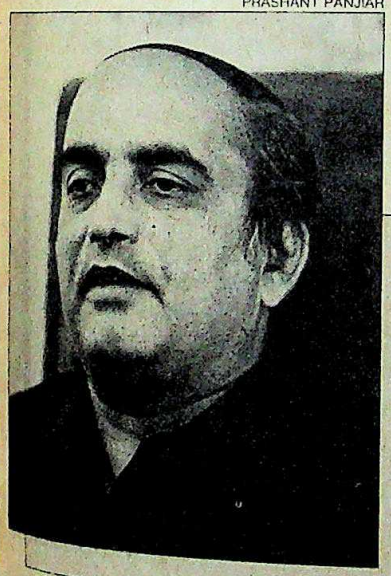
places a premium on fresh ideas, has several employee committees for the purpose, and even awards a Rs 5,000 prize to deputy general managers who accept the most employee suggestions.

Early this year, the bank's executives were told that they would have to periodically spend an hour alone in a meditation room at the Bangalore head office and jot down suggestions or criticisms on a scribbling pad. "They should get an opportunity to direct and even change the course of the bank if it is in the interests of the institution," explains Ratnakar. If they fail to scribble anything, the blank paper goes into their personal file.

For all the offbeat ideas, this is no oddball bank. Hard-nosed incentive schemes ensure that the cash registers keep ringing. Public sector banks have little leeway in rewarding performers with fatter pay cheques, but Canara Bank has beaten the system: it furnishes official cars to branch managers who meet their business targets. So, it boasts of some 800 cars, more than double the number owned by the vastly bigger State Bank of India.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Steps like these have worked. Employee productivity is the highest in the industry—on an average, each employee brings in business worth Rs 21.78 lakh. Last fortnight, a senior Finance Ministry functionary also testified that the bank had one of the best customer service records in the industry.

Still, it has clearly taken more than employee enthusiasm to push the bank to its present eminence. The centre-piece in Ratnakar's grand design has been a series of canny financial moves aimed at jacking up profits. With the bulk of their funds locked up in low-interest priority sector loans and with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in officially-determined reserves, state-owned banks have little room to manoeuvre and make fat profits.

RATNAKAR, therefore, sought to break new ground. The bank plunged into portfolio management, offering liquidity to corporations that bought, say, 14 per cent public sector bonds. When they wanted to unload the bonds, the bank would then buy them, offering 8 per cent or 9 per cent interest, and pocketing the difference. Such operations cost little because they are handled by just one employee and net the bank cool profits: up to Rs 10 crore a year.

Secondly, Canara Bank leaped into the business of trading in gilt-edged securities, selling short-maturity bonds, buying long-dated ones which other banks unload at a lower price, and then depreciating them in its books, thereby saving on taxes. Securities now provide a turnover of over Rs 3,000 crore, and offer attractive returns. Says Ratnakar: "Even if you increase yields by half per cent, that means a profit of Rs 10 crore."

Finally, the bank aggressively lured plum corporate clients, at times daringly raiding other banks for accounts, through the simple expedient of offering a return on non-interest earning money.

"Today, if I'm aggressive, they (other banks) say I'm unethical. If I'm able to give better service in a discretionary area like merchant banking, can I be regarded as unethical?"

B. RATNAKAR
chairman & managing director, Canara Bank

The gambit was brilliant and simple. For example, a company which had say Rs 5 crore lying in a current account (which pays no interest) would be offered a return of 7 per cent—on condition that it bought Rs 2.5 crore worth of 14 per cent public sector bonds and put the remaining Rs 2.5 crore into a Canara Bank current account. While the company, in effect, wound up with 7 per cent interest on half its original sum, the bank got a hefty deposit. Over 100 companies responded eagerly to the scheme.

Predictably, such ploys have not gone down well with other banks. They blew the whistle and cried foul. Canara Bank's portfolio management, for example, once figured at a meeting of bank chairmen with the RBI governor. He is widely believed to have cleared the bank of any wrongdoing. An official RBI committee did, however, indict the bank (including five others) for having given large loans to companies associated with Reliance Industries in what has come to be known as the Reliance loan mela case. Canara Bank was also involved in back-dating letters of credit for Reliance.

Guilty or not—Ratnakar's explanation is that the error in the letters of credit issue was one of interpretation at the branch level—some of the mud has stuck. The chairman has, at times, been unfairly accused of a spectrum of sins, from merrily ignoring RBI norms to quoting lower than other public sector merchant banks to grab business. Says a bank chairman: "He doesn't really care about RBI or government guidelines. If the RBI has said this year that staff expansion should be restricted to 1.5 per cent, Ratnakar will say 'who is RBI' and do what he thinks the bank needs. I think this is wrong."

A rattled Ratnakar vigorously argues that his bank has never consciously flouted RBI rules. In any event, its more controversial operations have focused on areas on which the RBI had no clear-cut norms. Counters Ratnakar: "Today, if I'm aggressive, they say that I'm unethical. If I'm able to give cheaper service in a discretionary area like merchant banking, can I be regarded as unethical?" Referring to one bank, he neatly expresses his dilemma: "When I break its monopoly, it's unethical. When more banks do this, it's competition."

Ratnakar is really an entrepreneur functioning in a rule-bound system. As a Bombay-based industrialist put it: "He is concerned not so much with the rules, as with finding a solution to a problem. Sometimes he runs risks while doing this, but then every entrepreneur has to take risks. Otherwise, he would be like all the other bankers."

Uncommon he is, and even the Finance Ministry thinks so. In a ringing endorsement, the senior bureaucrat said: "Ratnakar arouses a certain amount of jealousy. Canara Bank's assets, capital, reserves and profits have been the best. What is it you want from a bank? A man should be judged by his performance."

With that kind of acclaim, not just from the Government but from most of his customers as well, Ratnakar can be considered a safe bet for creating even more ripples in the staid world of banking.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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US BANKS

Enter the Indians

IF you are middle-aged and Indian, settled in the US and already a millionaire, at the top in your business, but not yet satisfied, what do you do next? Buy a bank, or better still, raise a brand new one of your own.

After making their mark in businesses ranging from medicine to motels, computers to clothes and restaurants to real estate, Indian settlers in the US have suddenly discovered banking. Three Indian-owned banks are now functioning in Chicago, Junction City (Kansas) and San Francisco. And their success has had obvious impact down the line in the community, for rich Indians are getting together in other business centres to launch their own banks.

So if in Dallas, Texas, Chandrakant C. Patel, with 10 other Patels, a Parsi and an American, is finalising his $2 million (Rs 2.5 crore) State Bank of Texas, a group in Flushing, New York, is set to launch the East India Bank. And in Washington D.C., a group of 25 Indians has received federal approval for its First Liberty National Bank, which will begin functioning later this year with a capital of $4.5 million (Rs 5.8 crore). Says Chairman Dr Vidya Nand Singh: "Ten years ago, there were just about a hundred Indian millionaires in the greater Washington area. Today, there are thousands. In fact, more than a hundred are worth between $50 million and $150 million." Singh says a feasibility study done for them states that the 50,000-strong Indian community in the greater Washington area can support three banks.

The move into banking was a natural, if belated, effort for the community with the highest average family income of all immigrants in the US. According to the 1980 census, an average Indian household in the US earned $25,644 (Rs 3.3 lakh) annually; the national average is $16,841 (Rs 2.7 lakh). A large number of the half-million-strong community's millionaires came from a despondent, famine-hit India in the late '60s, armed with no more than an Indian graduate degree, just $8 in cash and 20 kg of baggage, but with plenty of ambition and enterprise.

These ventures are steps in the same direction. Indian businessmen complain that many of them suffer a subtle discrimination while dealing with American banks. Sometimes, there is lack of articulation and often no credit references for Indian beginners. "The treatment in American banks was never completely fair," says Patel, chairman and chief executive officer of the State Bank of Texas, which will open on September 1.

Such a situation is obviously unacceptable to rich Indians who have established themselves in business and science. "For some strange reason, the Indians left the vital fields of media and banking untouched so far," ruminates Singh, an economics teacher from Ranchi who moonlighted as a real estate agent before becoming chairman of the First Liberty National Bank. Adds Amrish Mahajan, president of the National Republic Bank of Chicago, with assets of over $40 million (Rs 51.6 crore): "No immigrant group can reach the top unless it has the backing of its own financial institutions. Finally, that gap is being filled." He points out that all minority and ethnic groups have their own banks.

In a small way, Mahajan was responsible for pioneering this foray. In 1968, he arrived at the Michigan Technological University with a masters in geology from Punjab University, Chandigarh, and returned to Pathankot after graduating in geological engineering. But soon enough, he was back for his MBA. His first job was as a teller in an obscure, tottering bank. In a year, Mahajan was an officer and in four more, a vice-president.

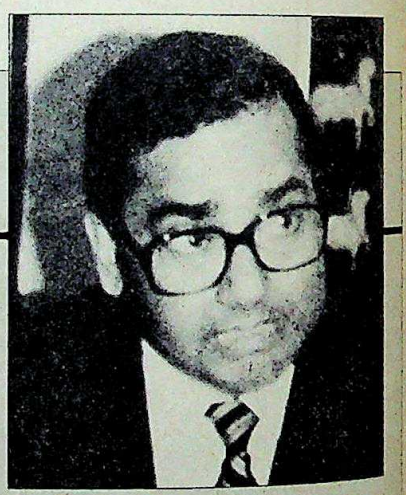
As Mahajan job-hopped to Lakeview Bank, one of the biggest in the Chicago region, he met a client called Hiren Patel, a real estate tycoon. Soon they were looking for a bank to buy. And Mahajan could hardly have thought of a better one than the one where he had begun. Patel says they are already being offered around $5 million (Rs 6.4 crore): they bought it for $2.7 million (Rs 3.4 crore) three years ago. Says Mahajan: "We are not selling. We will take our deposits to $100 million in two years, and perhaps even open a branch in Bombay." Mahajan claims that their next step is the formation of a mortgage banking corporation.

Though their bank was supposed to be directed towards the Indian population, much of its business now comes from non-Indians. Bank officials estimate that about 30 per cent of all the lending is to Indians.

A few hundred miles away, in the mid-western heart of the US, however, another Indian banker is in great shape in a city with no more than three or four Indian families. Anant Pandurang Labhsetwar is one of the pioneering Indian entrepreneurs in the US. A topper in veterinary science from Jabalpur University, he came to Wisconsin University in 1959 and quickly made his name in physiology, publishing more than a hundred papers in 10 years of research. But as his doctor wife's medical practice boomed, the entrepreneurial instinct brought him out of the confines of the laboratory. Soon, he found that money grows faster in real estate than bacteria in the most fertile cultures. Labhsetwar now owns four large shopping centres, two in Kentucky and one each in Nebraska and Kansas.

It was thus not hard for him to fork out the cash—"more than a million", he says cryptically—to buy the tottering First National Bank and Trust Company of

1st Liberty National Bank
(IN ORGANIZATION)



"Ten years ago, there were 100 Indian millionaires in Washington. Today, there are thousands. A hundred are worth between $50 million and $150 million."

VIDYA NAND SINGH, *chairman, First Liberty National Bank*

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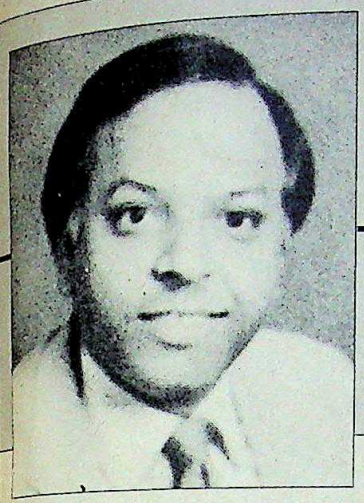

THE NATIONAL REPUBLIC BANK OF CHICAGO

"No immigrant group can reach the top unless it has the backing of its own financial institutions."
A. MAHAJAN, *president, National Republic Bank of Chicago*

Junction City, Kansas in December 1985. "I basically looked at it as an investment," he says, pointing out that the bank now makes more than 1 per cent profit on its assets, that is, $4,00,000 (Rs 51.6 lakh) after tax last year. The book value of the bank, which recently opened its second branch, is $3.1 million (Rs 4 crore), and most of its clients are soldiers from the nearby headquarters of the 1st US Army division. "We are not directed towards the Indian community," he says.

But as the banks in Chicago and Kansas prosper and grow, the most ambitious Indian banking project of all is only now beginning to bloom down San Francisco way. The First Indo-American, inaugurated in February this year, in structure, dimensions, reach and potential, stands way apart from the other Indian ventures. Launched with an initial equity capital of $8 million (Rs 10.3 crore), one of the 10 highest for all banks in the San Francisco area, it is owned by 630 major shareholders, almost 80 per cent of them Indian. And they are not confined to the US: there are Indians from the Gulf, Hong Kong and Europe. In fact, Hari Harilela, the Hong Kong-based hotel tycoon, is on the board of directors.

As many money-making ideas do, this one also came out of a cocktail party that turned into a brainstorming session. Ramesh Murarka, a Stanford engineering graduate, decided in the mid-'70s to launch the ethnic weekly *India West*, (circulation: 10,000). "In December", he recalls, "I was working on a story when I called real estate developer Noor Billawala home and the idea of an Indian bank came up." Soon enough, he says, the story was forgotten and he brought together Billawala, Indian academician Dr Rajendra Prasad and Dilip Munshi, then a Bank of India official posted in San Francisco. The group expanded, collected money and the result is the latest addition to the wide world of ethnic banks.

The bank, Murarka says, is making a special effort to help out the richer sections of the Indian community that may not be articulate or polished: "There are hundreds of motel owners here whose buildings are valued between half-and-three-quarters of a million dollars. They need banking help." But First Indo-American is not going to stay put on one side of the Golden Gate. "We will expand," Murarka says, pointing to the success of Bank of Credit and Commerce International, run with Pakistani personnel and Saudi money.

With such rapid growth in Indian banking, it is only obvious that some of the planners have already begun to think of a wider operation, including collaboration with Indian banks here. There is also the possibility of linkages with them and with Indian financial institutions like Unit Trust of India, which has been trying to garner overseas Indians' investments. "Ultimately, we would welcome something like that," says Dr Suresh Arurkar, a director of First Liberty and the owner of Allied Exterminating, a group of companies that makes money killing pests.

But even in this heady mood of growth, doubts linger. Banking is a highly regulated, yet competitive, business in the US and, as Murarka points out, it is not easy to manage on a mere half per cent spread, the difference between borrowing and lending interest rates. Doubts are also expressed by the Indian Government's financial experts and officials of Indian nationalised banks here. Says K. Ramakrishnan, chief executive officer of State Bank of India in New York: "I do not know what special benefit anyone expects to get out of launching ethnic banks." He does not agree that the Indian community will prefer to deal with Indian banks and says that though his branches have opened, many new Indian entrepreneurs take away their accounts to the more competitive American banks as soon as they begin to make some money.

None of these doubts, however, seem to nag the proud owners of the new banks who all reel off the same set of statistics to paint a great future: an Indian population that will grow 80 per cent to nine lakh by 1990, an average income which may cross the $40,000 (Rs 5.2 lakh) mark by then and the increasing availability of cheaper ethnic personnel as they get trained in a profession they had not taken to so far. And if the projections prove realistic, there will be no stopping these enterprising Indians as they go laughing all the way to their own *desi* banks.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

FIRST INDO-AMERICAN BANK

"There are hundreds of motel-owners here whose buildings are valued between half and three-quarters of a million dollars. They need banking help."
RAMESH MURARKA, *director, First Indo-American Bank*

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TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Battling for Buyers

TELEVISION dealer Bharat Bhushan has reason for cheer: he has won a white Maruti car. A few months ago, the chubby Delhi dealer bought 200 colour sets from a TV company, thereby qualifying for a company sales incentive scheme. Before the year is out, he can win two more cars if he continues to meet the company's sales targets.

Bhushan's latest prize—he earlier won free trips to Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok from other TV manufacturers—is just one sign of the rip-roaring battles that are sweeping the country's TV industry. Faced with intense competition, manufacturers are offering dealers a dazzling array of incentives. Among them: Standard 2000, Premier 118 NE and Maruti cars, and round-the-world trips—all being tax deductible as business promotion expenses. Bush India alone has distributed some 35 Marutis to dealers. Explains its Marketing Director J.R. Mulchandani: "A marketing war is on."

The furious jockeying among TV companies for greater market shares will only increase. Last month, Videocon India (operating mainly in the south and west) moved into the north by kicking off a new factory on Delhi's outskirts. That puts it virtually in the backyard of Weston and Televista, and Videocon Joint Managing Director Venugopal N. Dhoot says: "We are planning to become the number one colour TV manufacturer in India." And rival Bush recently launched a new premium colour TV model, even as Televista was readying to replace its current models with four new ones by the year-end.

The battling in the market place reflects the dramatic changes that have been sweeping the TV business in the last few years. A couple of years ago, four or five firms dominated the industry, operating in a sellers' market. But after the Government decided to expand the transmission network, it changed the rules of the game and licensed huge production capacities. So dozens of TV companies set up shop virtually overnight.

One result: production climbed from around 2.5 million sets in 1985 to nearly three million sets in 1986, and is expected to almost touch four million sets this year. (Such figures compare well with South Korea and Brazil's 1.5 million sets each, but are still well under China's estimated output of nine million sets.)

At a time when the industry was all set to go places last year, the Government jacked up taxes on black and white TV sets by Rs 100 to Rs 400 and on colour sets by Rs 1,000. This year, it slapped an additional excise duty of Rs 750 on colour TVs priced above Rs 7,500. Manufacturers responded by absorbing the tax increases on black and white sets—the price is however being raised by Rs 100 from this month—and passed on the burden to buyers of colour TV sets. In fact, colour TV prices shot up by roughly Rs 900 (the sales tax also went up).

Logically, however, companies would have been expected to slash prices in a competitive market. Some did precisely this. But most did not. Instead, dealers (who could afford to be generous because they were pocketing valuable prizes from manufacturers) offered price discounts to customers. This could be one reason why more TV sets continue to be hawked.

In a growing market, some of the new concerns have flourished and have locked horns with the older ones. They have also been quick to latch on to the industry's dealer schemes, obliging the more traditional companies to climb on to the bandwagon. Bush, for instance, joined in last October, trimming its advertising budget and using the money for dealers' prizes.

Since the Government has allowed huge production capacities in the TV industry, which has created a buyer's market, companies are going all-out in the war for greater market shares.

Incentives have been around for a couple of years in the industry—as in other consumer durables. But the prizes have grown fatter. Videocon, for example, holds out plots of land and bungalows worth Rs 2 lakh to its dealers, apart from cars and trips abroad, awarding points for the various models sold. Crown offers a Maruti Deluxe for achieving a sales target of 500 colour TV sets in 1987.

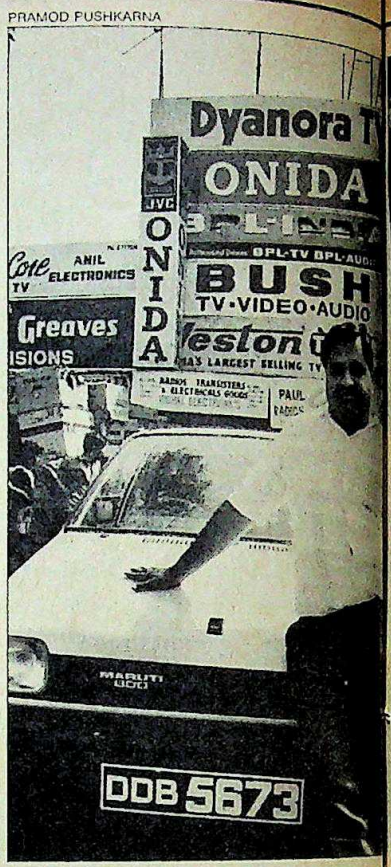
Fat prizes are, however, only one symbol of the competition. Almost every manufacturer is turning out more TV sets. But some, like Onida, are stepping up production more quickly than the others. One result: they seem to be quietly grabbing market shares from a few of the market leaders and some smaller companies. While they have a long way to get to the top, they are snapping at the heels of the big boys.

An independent analysis of the market for colour TVs, which sell less than black and white sets but take more in overall value, shows that while the colour TV market was up by 32 per cent between 1985 and 1986, the chief beneficiaries were Onida, Bush, and Videocon.

According to Indian Television Manufacturers' Association (ITMA) figures and some company statistics, Bush's colour output climbed from 41,941 in 1985 to 73,796 last year. Onida claims to have more than doubled production from 33,070 to 77,914, while Videocon says that it has fared equally well (31,200 to 61,000). Even Orson and Binatone have begun to modestly step up production.

The key question is: has their growth been at the expense of other firms?

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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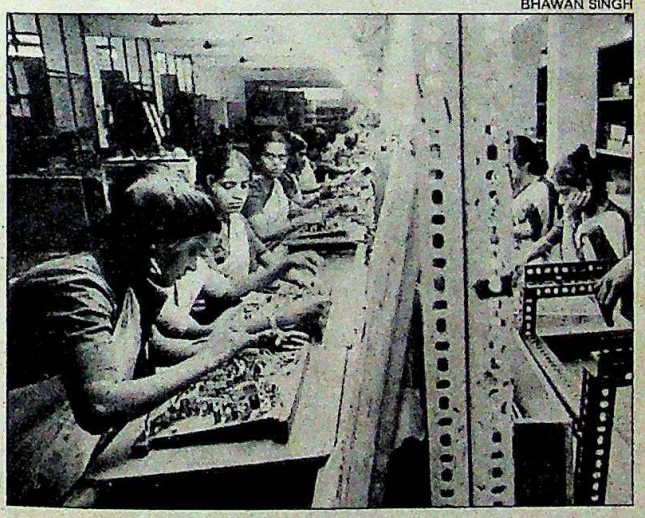
BHAWAN SINGH



(Clockwise from left) Dealer Bhushan with the Maruti he won; TVs on view; and sets being assembled: cutthroat rivalry

claim a few in and out of the industry, pointing out, for example, that Weston's colour TV output dipped marginally from 48,919 to 43,030, and that Televista's colour TV production too is believed to have dropped.

This may or may not be true. But such assessments are hotly contested by manufacturers whose market shares are said to be dropping. "We had a strike," explains Sunder T. Vachani, managing director of Weston Electroniks. "In any case, we purchased sets from other manufacturers and sold them under the Weston brand. The newer companies are taking the shares of small firms." Televista Chairman and Managing Director Ved Luthra adds: "We may not be on top of the world, but we have a good image. We have already regained part of the market share we lost." A former ITMA president, Luthra is quick to caution that the ITMA figures are not certified and therefore are not wholly reliable, and that they are meant to provide the Government with broad indications of the industry's production trends.

Nonetheless, few dispute the fact that some companies could be under pressure, and that others are doing well. Inevitably, the explanations for this come thick and fast. Says the head of one of the newer companies: "The older companies had a good time and took it easy. When new companies entered the business, they slept, and one fine day we just overtook them." That may be an uncharitable—and simplistic—interpretation. For the older concerns were handicapped by their black and white TV business. "We could not create our image in colour overnight and dump our black and white sets. We had to divide our capacity between both," argues the head of an established company.

The new rivals certainly plunged into colour television sets, moving to newer markets and cashing in on a low price strategy. "Videocon's pricing doesn't make sense. They introduced a model in the south for Rs 7,400. It should have been priced at Rs 8,000," grumbles one manufacturer.

But Onida's colour TV sets (Rs 12,675 for a set with remote control) do not come cheap. What then explains its success? "It is innovation and quality," argues Sonu Mirchandani, managing director of Monica Electronics, one of the two Onida companies. "We were the first to put the control panel on the bottom of the set." That is true. "Everybody else hadn't tried that model. We were too busy producing what was selling," admits Televista's Luthra. But he counters that quality is not a factor because all sets have to clear tests by a government-sponsored agency.

The newly prospering companies have also benefited from the discriminatory sales tax in Maharashtra and Gujarat, which accounted for over 30 per cent of the total colour TV market. While firms sited in these states pay only 1 to 2 per cent tax, 15.5 per cent tax is levied on out-of-state wares. A manufacturer, who did not wish to be identified, accused his rivals of blatantly parading their foreign collaborations. "The industry has an understanding with the Government that it will not use foreign brand names. But some companies are flouting this."

For all the sound and fury, the question that remains is: will the changes in market shares last? Televista's Luthra believes they will not. "Fortunes keep shifting in this industry. No company has been number one for more than two to three years. Ultimately, things will stabilise. There'll be 10 to 20 companies with similar market shares." If that's the case, the fierce marketing wars may eventually end—and the good times may not long continue for dealers like Bharat Bhushan.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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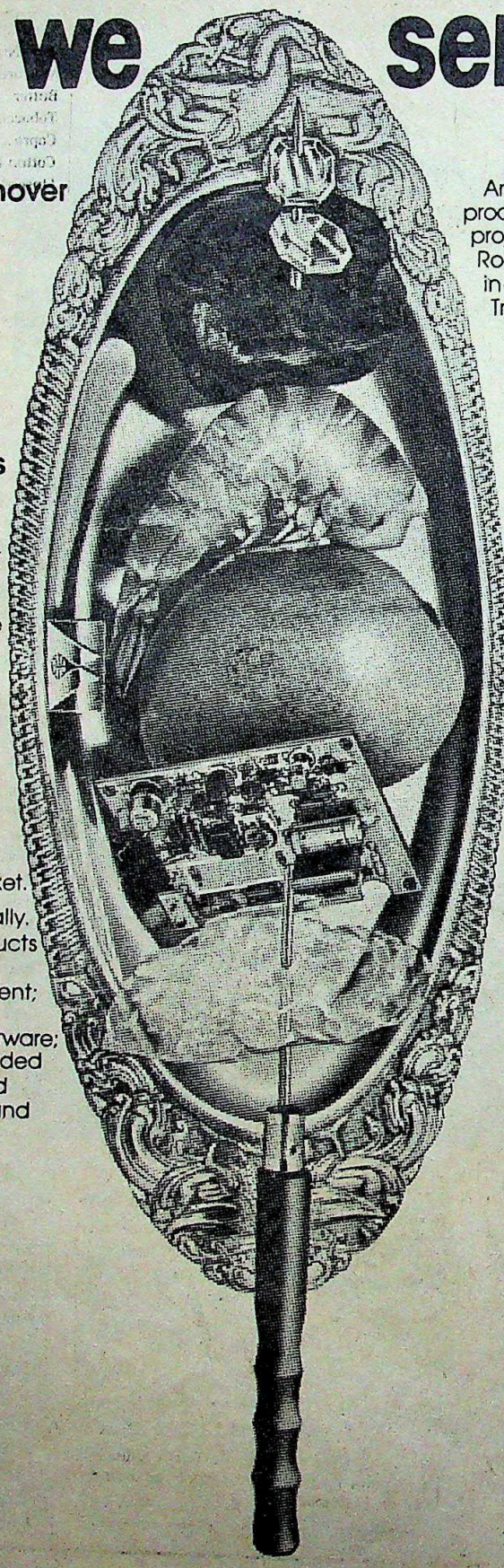
The world loves everything that we serve



In 1986-87, MMTC's turnover stood at Rs. 2783 crore with a pre-tax profit of Rs. 44.18 crore. Export earnings touched an all-time high at Rs. 700 crore. And MMTC emerged as India's largest exporter, financing nearly half its free foreign exchange needs for imports.

MMTC today is a new anchor of stability for the country's exports and for the small entrepreneurs producing a wide range of products that are finding ready markets overseas.

Yes, as a catalyst of the country's economic growth, MMTC today helps export a Rajasthani mastercraftsman's intricate jewellery to USA; a Cochin fisherman's tempting catches of shrimps to Japan. Introducing new entrepreneurs and products to the export market.

And MMTC is doing it continually. Identifying more and more products for exports: from fasteners and tractors to earthmoving equipment; cameras and radio/TV kits to photocopiers and computer software; diamonds and emeralds to studded gold jewellery; sandal soaps and cashew to tobacco, garments and sewing machines.

And not just non-traditional products. MMTC "delivers" projects too. Like the recent Road Construction assignment in Jordan. Or HMT's Mechanical Training Centre Project in Malaysia.

At home, MMTC has been initiating a number of developmental projects—building up infrastructure to facilitate exports from the source. Like the Paradip port. And development of mining in the backward districts of Bihar and Orissa. Activities that have created innumerable employment opportunities.

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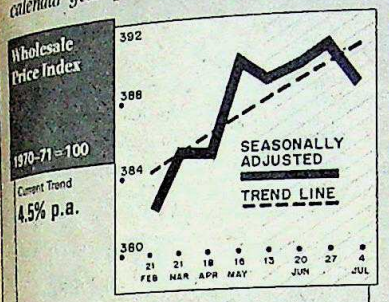
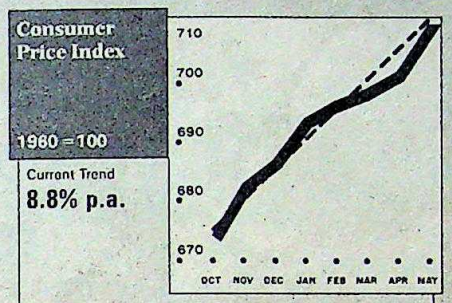
ALTHOUGH most economic indicators suggest a healthy economy, this may change radically if the monsoon remains elusive. The Government needs to take immediate measures to step up distribution of its huge foodgrains stocks and increase edible oil imports due to no rain in the groundnut-growing region of Gujarat.

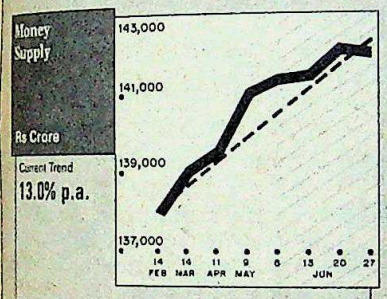
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



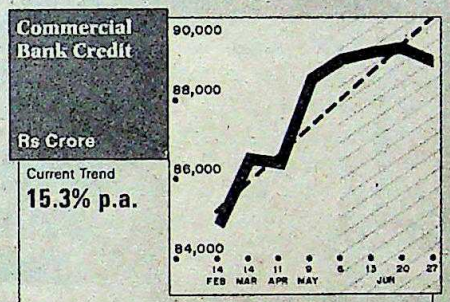
Although the rate of increase in wholesale prices is currently on a healthy trend, it is unlikely to last with this year's poor rainfall.



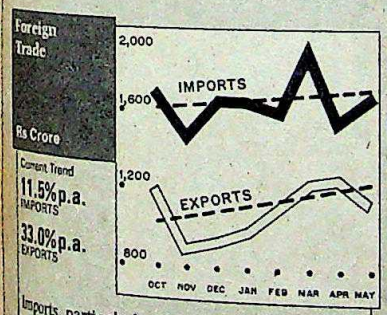
Prices for the consumer jumped sharply last month and, at this rate, may push the rate of inflation into double digits.



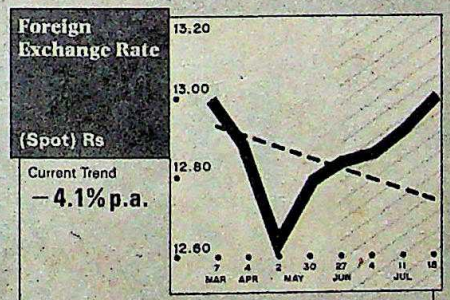
Money supply remains reasonably well in check, though a spurt towards the latter half of the year is quite likely.



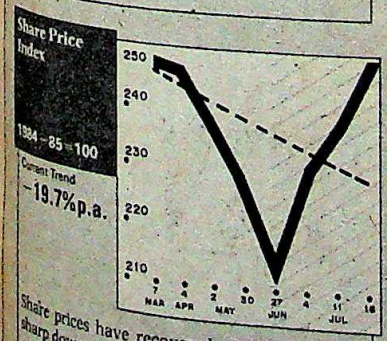
The commercial sector had hoped for a slightly faster increase in bank credit, in the last fortnight, as is normal at this time of the year.



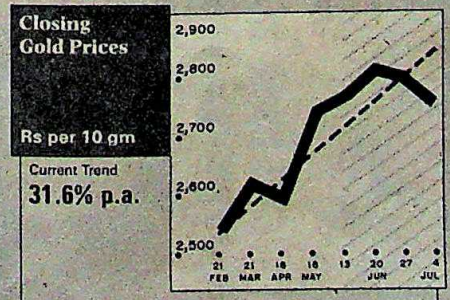
Imports, particularly of agricultural commodities, may need to be stepped up if the monsoon remains poor.



The gradual increase in the value of the rupee against the US dollar was reversed over the last fortnight as the rupee weakened.



Share prices have recovered after being on a sharp downward trend due to the political uncertainty and raids on brokers.



The sharp increase in gold prices is mainly due to money flowing out of a bearish stock-market and into gold investments.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in June, 1987

	% Growth
Internal Combustion Engines	53.66
Betel-Nuts	40.54
Mustard Oilcake	13.93
Butter	8.08
Tobacco Raw	6.95
Copra	6.63
Cotton Raw	6.52
Linseed Oil	5.70
Mustard Oil	5.45
Solvent Extracted Oil	5.44
Cotton Seed	5.37
Coconut Oil	4.73
Groundnut Oil	4.46
Oranges	4.34
Groundnut Seeds	4.22
Cotton Yarn	3.91
Jute Textiles	3.64
Maize	3.63
Gingelly Seed	3.35
Ghee	3.03
Khandsari	2.7
Rape & Mustard Seed	2.28
Wheat	2.22
Vanaspati	2.12
Silk Raw	1.93
Coir Yarn	1.88
Linseed	1.87
Handloom & Powerloom Products	1.74
Meat	1.47
Cashew-Nuts	1.31
Pet Crude and Natural Gas	1.26
Coir Fibre	1.24
Electrical Motors	1.21
Arhar	1.19
Aviation Spirit	1.14
Mining Machinery	1.05
Rails	1.02
Bolts & Nuts	1.02
Caustic Soda	.92
Cement	.92
Machine Tools	.88
Transformers	.86
Limestone	.85
Pig Iron	.82
Kerosene	.81
Silk & Artificial Silk Fabrics	.80

Of the 139 series considered, 88 of them with a total weight of 52.359 had a positive growth and 51 of them with a total weight of 34.267 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, June	13,240	12,116
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, June	547.3	458.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, June	2,850	2,784
Crude Petroleum		
Thousand Tonnes, June	2,384	2,463
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, June	3,732	3,477

Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP

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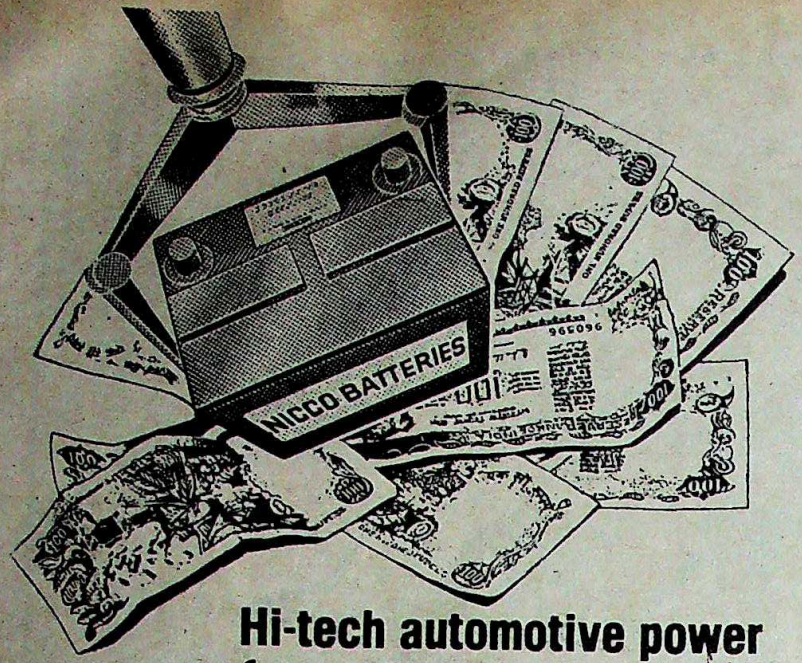


Hi-tech automotive power from a high-return venture. NICCO BATTERIES.

Yet another blue-chip investment opportunity.

On a 20,350 square metre site at Surajpur, in Uttar Pradesh, Nicco Batteries prepares to meet the challenge of the automobile boom in India — backed by a marketing agreement with co-promoter Crompton Greaves, a company with a time-tested sales and distribution network in the field of electricals.

Nicco Batteries is located strategically in the heart of the country's major battery markets, and in close proximity to major automobile manufacturers. And what's more NICCO and Crompton Greaves have already made a commercial arrival with two-wheeler batteries.

Technology beyond compare

The know-how for Nicco Batteries comes from Globe International (USA) the world's largest manufacturer of automotive batteries.

With as many a 17 manufacturing facilities in the USA, and with a total annual output of 22 million batteries accounting for a turnover of US $ 1.3 billion, Globe International has revolutionised the very art of battery technology.

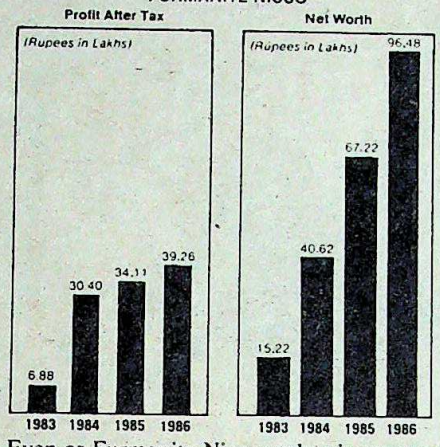
The biggest names in the automobile world have Globe International as their Original Equipment supplier — Chrysler, Ford, American Motors, Jeep, Ranault and Nissan, to name just a few. And Globe International has helped manufacturers produce top performance batteries in 79 countries throughout the world.

Promoters par-excellence

Nicco Batteries' Rs 8.5 crore project is promoted by one of the most dynamic members of the Nicco family — Furmanite Nicco Limited, a pioneer in Industrial Leak-sealing Services in India, and a company with an outstanding record in terms of operating performance.

In 1987, Furmanite Nicco's gross profit amounted to approximately Rs 1.15 crore. And having issued bonus shares in 1984 in the ratio of 1:1, the company repeated the performance in 1987 with bonus shares in the same ratio. In 1986, the company declared a dividend of 50%; in 1987 it has already declared an interim dividend of 25% and is expected to propose a final dividend of 18.75% on the enhanced share capital. As on April 30, 1987, the company's share capital stood at Rs 40 lakhs, and reserves at Rs 86 lakhs.

FURMANITE NICCO



Even as Furmanite Nicco stakes its proven reputation on Nicco Batteries, it draws upon the resources of co-promoters — Crompton Greaves Limited and the Pradeshiya Industrial & Investment Corporation of Uttar Pradesh Limited. Together, these three promoters along with technical and financial collaborators Globe International account for 51% of the equity share capital.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ☐ **Financial and Technical collaboration with Globe International (USA) — the world's largest manufacturer of storage batteries.**
- ☐ **Short gestation period — commercial production commences in early 1988.**
- ☐ **High commercial viability through a marketing tie-up with Crompton Greaves Limited.**
- ☐ **Promoted by Furmanite Nicco Limited — a company with an outstanding financial track-record, having declared two Bonus Issues in six years.**
- ☐ **Co-promoted by Crompton Greaves and the Pradeshiya Industrial & Investment Corporation of Uttar Pradesh (PICUP).**
- ☐ **Nicco Batteries — backed by superior technology from Globe International (USA).**
- ☐ **All critical equipment, plant and machinery being imported from the USA.**
- ☐ **Easy liquidity — Listing at Kanpur, Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi Stock Exchanges.**
- ☐ **80 CC obtained. Other usual Income Tax/Wealth Tax benefits.**

Issue of 15,00,000 Equity Shares of Rs 10/- cash at par.

Issue Opens On: August 10, 1987

Managers to the Issue :

SBI Capital Markets Limited.

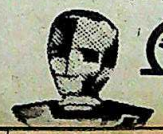
The Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India Ltd. Merchant Banking Division

CANBANK FINANCIAL SERVICES LTD. CALCUTTA

Advisors to the Issue :

Indian Bank Merchant Banking Division

Hambro Nicco Financial Services Ltd.



Nicco Batteries Limited

Regd. Office : Plot No. B-9, UPSIDC Industrial Estate. Surajpur, Phase II, Tehsil Dadri, Uttar Pradesh.

Hi-tech, high diversity Nicco Family

SOBHAGYA/NB4787

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Bata India
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Blow Plast
Bombay Dyeing
Britannia Ind.
Brooke Bond
Cent Text
Century Enka
Chloride India
Cipla
Colgate
DCM
Deepak
EI Hotels
Escorts
Fenner
Ford Specialities
Garware Nylon
G.E. Shipping
Gesmon St. Fertil
Glaxo Ind.
Hind. Aluminium
Hindustan Cocoa
Hindustan Lever
Hind. Motor
ITC

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THE MARKETS

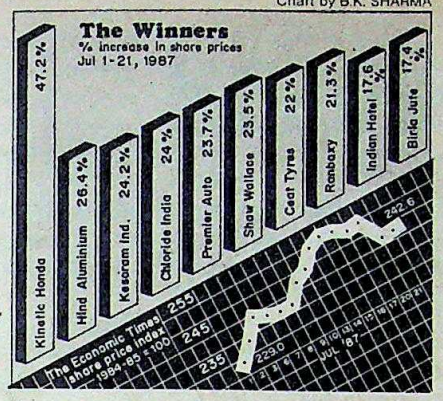
Animated State

THE recovery has proved short-lived. Though share prices haven't dropped through the floor again, and are holding their own in most cases, the initial upward thrust is over. And as political battles are fought in New Delhi under cloudless skies with no sign of the monsoons, the future remains a question mark.

Perhaps this was to be expected. Bears who had over-stretched themselves after weeks of squeezing the market dry, had been forced to cover their operations by picking up scrips—hence the sudden recovery. But the bulls, tired of holding on to shares in the hope of improved prices, obviously decided to get rid of their holdings as soon as values reached acceptable levels. The result is that *The Economic Times* share price index rolled back gently from 251.4 on July 14 to 242.6 a week later.

But some companies did make substantial gains in the first three weeks of July. Kinetic Honda bounced back with a 47 per cent hike, followed by Hindustan Aluminium, Kesoram Industries and the company that has been in the take-over news: Chloride India.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



What next? The answer could lie in the sudden burst of good corporate news, with encouraging results from such companies as Colour-Chem, Tata Oil, East India Hotels, Indian Dyestuff and Borax Morarji. There were disappointing results from others, like Pfizer, JK Synthetics (half-yearly losses) and India Cement, but this was perhaps neutralised by hopes of good results from Bajaj Auto, Tata Chemicals and others.

Against this optimistic scenario, there is the continued clamour by experts that the markets will now be bearish. That may well turn out to be the case, but the market has in fact borne up quite well so far in the face of the political games in New Delhi, the promise of political uncertainty, the certainty of temporary government paralysis, even the possibility that economic policies will be subjected to a leftward shift.

But there is little doubt that the markets will fail to bear up if the news from New Delhi remains bad, and the flow of corporate news turns depressing again. Also, share values are still propped up with artificial supports by the market authorities. Without these props, the markets could plunge yet again.

Thus the share price index is only slightly lower than what it was a year ago. And the fall since the 1987 pre-budget peak is less than 10 per cent on *The Economic Times* index, which should be par for the course when so many industries face different problems and reflect these in their annual accounts. Indeed, given the political buffeting about, the fact that the shares have more or less borne up, not losing too much, indicates confidence about the future.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 21.7.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	37.00	28.00	34.00	1.00 +
Associated Cement	241.50	138.00	156.00	3.00 +
Atlas Copco	152.00	105.00	118.00	1.00 –
Associated Bearings	1155.00	500.00	1070.00	5.00 +
Avery India	169.00	108.00	140.00	10.00 +
Bajaj Auto	4925.00	3950.00	4525.00	50.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	172.50	205.00	55.00 –
Bata India	160.00	110.00	148.00	15.00 +
Bayer	785.00	375.00	395.00	5.00 –
Bharat Forge	88.00	63.00	85.00	3.00 +
Blow Plast	130.00	92.50	112.50	1.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	89.00	40.50	87.00	12.00 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	101.00	122.00	4.00 +
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	93.00	0.50 +
Ceat Tyres	70.00	45.00	61.00	6.00 +
Century Enka	1160.00	815.00	910.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	93.00	14.00 +
Cibagrig	75.00	53.00	66.00	6.00 –
Colgate	391.25	327.50	353.75	1.25 –
DCM	47.00	23.00	35.25	2.25 –
Dunlop	79.50	71.25	79.00	1.50 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	52.00	3.00 +
Escorts	84.00	39.50	42.00	nil
Finolex Cables	262.50	114.00	240.00	11.25 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	142.00	3.00 –
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	26.00	1.00 +
G.E. Shipping	29.25	16.00	26.00	0.50 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	98.00	104.00	3.00 +
Grasim Ind.	114.50	80.00	114.50	11.50 +
Hind. Aluminium	134.00	71.00	134.00	19.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	182.50	6.25 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	84.00	88.00	2.00 +
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.20	26.40	0.30 –
Hind. Dorr	407.50	265.00	267.50	26.25 –
ITI	64.75	45.00	60.00	2.00 +
Indian Organic	78.00	41.00	45.50	1.00 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	57.00	2.00 +
Indrol	510.00	160.00	221.25	16.25 +
Ingersoll-Rand	355.00	265.00	320.00	10.00 +
ITC	78.00	40.00	53.50	1.25 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	46.00	1.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	195.00	nil
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	47.50	nil
KSB Pumps	375.00	220.00	330.00	nil
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	73.50	0.50 –
Lipton	79.50	57.00	67.00	2.00 +
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	15.00	1.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	50.00	3.00 –
Mc Dowell	91.50	41.50	82.00	3.00 +
Motor Industries	475.00	317.50	435.00	20.00 –
Mukand Iron	81.00	62.00	73.00	3.50 –
National Organic	677.50	382.50	435.00	nil
Nirlon	26.00	11.00	12.25	1.25 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	29.50	37.00	3.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	46.50	0.50 –
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	215.00	5.00 +
Ponds	375.00	222.50	280.00	10.00 +
Premier Auto	30.00	17.00	23.50	1.00 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	91.00	3.00 +
Raymond	97.00	48.00	92.00	12.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	200.00	143.00	182.00	14.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	110.00	116.50	6.50 –
Richardson Hind.	327.50	210.00	285.00	nil
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	28.50	0.50 +
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	71.25	6.25 +
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	74.00	4.00 +
SPIC	53.50	36.50	44.00	0.25 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	607.50	702.50	5.00 +
Telco	665.00	350.00	415.00	40.00 –*
Wimco	56.50	30.00	35.00	1.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.3730	9.2773
Austria	Schilling	100	100.7830	99.7137
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.5610	34.2422
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.67	42.52
Canada	Dollar	1	9.9920	9.8898
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8659	1.8462
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3200	9.2200
France	Franc	1	2.1285	2.1058
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6899	1.6720
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0798	0.0699
Iran	Rial	100	17.7332	17.6922
Italy	Lira	100	0.9800	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	8.8000	8.5500
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7900	0.7532
Kuwait	Dinar	1	45.7229	45.6136
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1735	5.1205
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0000	0.9900
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6200	0.5800
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.2881	6.2232
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7300	0.6829
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.2331	6.1688
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1029	0.0926
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4456	0.4339
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0350	2.0134
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.5388	8.4492
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2232	0.2000
Thailand	Baht	100	49.8000	46.8600
UK	Pound	1	21.0225	20.8925
USA	Dollar	1	13.1925	13.0625
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5423	3.4732
USSR	Rouble	1	20.3043	20.2226
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1994	7.0175

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 24.7.87.

Nicco Batteries Limited
Regd. Office : Plot No. B-9, UPSIDC Industrial Estate, Surajpur, Phase II, Tehsil Dadri, Uttar Pradesh.
Hi-tech, high diversity Nicco Group
American Motors, Jeep, Renault and Nissan, to name just a few. And Globe International has helped manufacturers produce top performance batteries in 79 countries throughout the world.
markets, and in close proximity to major automobile manufacturers. And what's more NICCO and Crompton Greaves have already made a commercial arrival with two-wheeler batteries.

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TAMIL NADU

A Five Star Scandal

THE sale of prime land in Madras by the Defence Ministry to a politically powerful family has raised a major controversy. Not only was the land sold at a price far lower than the market rate, the deal was finalised with unusual haste. S.H. VENKATRAMANI and PRABHU CHAWLA examine the deal and its background. Their report:

As land scandals go, this one belongs in a class by itself. Five months ago, the Union Government sanctioned the sale of 3.44 acres of prime land on the Grand Southern Trunk Road in Madras to liquor baron Ramaswamy Udayar's son-in-law, A.S. Thillai Nayagam. The price: Rs 22.11 lakh. The seller: the Ministry of Defence.

This prime piece of property, maintained by the Cantonment Board, was sold for under Rs 7 lakh an acre: the actual market price in the area is nearly Rs 60 lakh an acre. Under current market rates, the plot should have fetched the Government at least Rs 2 crore.

It served to focus public attention on Udayar's skyrocketing fortunes. During the tenure of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, he has acquired two local companies, Tamil Nadu Chemical Products and Binny. This deal can only strengthen the family's financial muscle. Nayagam plans to build a five-star hotel on the land which is perfectly located—equidistant from the city and Meenambakkam Airport.

Says A.P. Elias, an elected AIADMK member of the Cantonment Board, which has seven elected and seven nominated members: "For an individual to buy defence land is itself very difficult. For him to purchase it like this literally for a song implies that everything has not exactly been above board."

The deal had looked odd from the word go. The land was leased to C.T. Thirunavukarasu Chettiar and his wife Pattammal on May 30, 1944, for 90 years at a nominal monthly rent of Rs 46. The lease was renewable every 30 years. After Thirunavukarasu's death, his two sons, C.T. Shanmugam and C.T. Muthukumaraswamy, became the lessees; the lease was renewed in their favour on May 30, 1974 for another 30 years.

On October 17, 1981, the two brothers wrote to the defence minister requesting that the land be sold to them: "The land we are holding now...has lost importance from the defence point of view, and hence we request your honour that the land may be sold to us in a nominal value...for a small-scale industry."

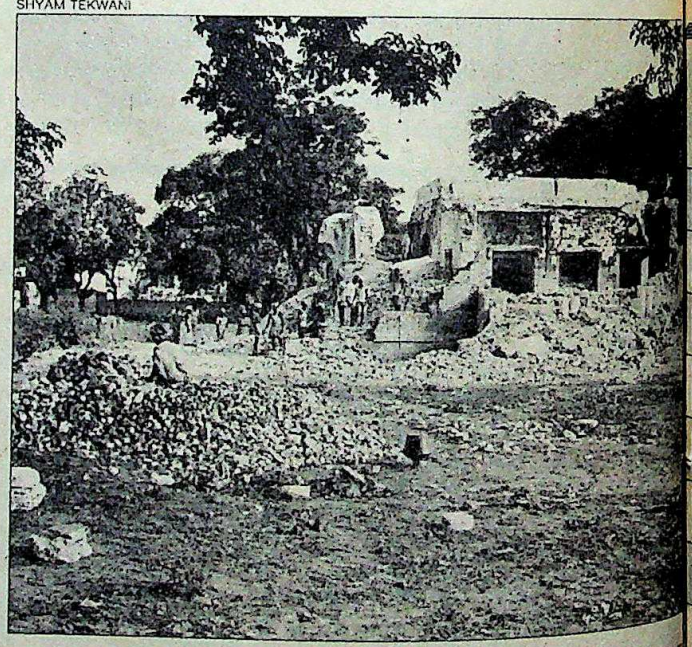
While the letter gathered dust in the Ministry of Defence files, the following year, the Government of India modified its defence land policy. A government order No 11013/7/73/D was issued on June 18, 1982, laying down that Defence Ministry lands classified as 'civil', or 'bazaar area' could be converted from leasehold to freehold and sold to lessees if they were interested. Defence Ministry lands fell into four categories: 'bungalow area', 'bazaar area', 'outside bazaar area', and 'unity area'. This land was 'outside bazaar area'.

So, according to the 1982 order, if this land could be converted into a 'bazaar area', it could be sold to the lessee. While the land did not belong to this category, the onus of reclassifying the land was on the Government itself. And there were enough reasons to justify this change. three sides, its boundaries impinged the Alandur municipality in Chingl district; the land did not strictly fall w the cantonment area; and the Def Ministry did not seem to have a use f

In fact, the board had wanted reclassify the land. Resolution No 12 the August 29, 1984 meeting read: consider the proposal of converting GLRS No 190 (the piece of land in q tion) in St Thomas Mount from 'ou bazaar area' into 'civil area'." A res tion was passed that the board's reco mendations for the conversion be sen headquarters for consideration and s tion, if permissible by the rules and land policy of the Government.

But, despite the financial benefits the decision, the resolution drew a bl from the Government. Defence He quarters forwarded it to the Defence M istry but that was all. Frustrated at t getting anywhere, on April 29, 19

SHYAM TEKWANI



(Clockwise from top left) C. Shanmugan; the property; and Venugopal: land scam

Shanmugam and Muthukumaraswa sold the lease to Nayagam for Rs 3 la

Then things started moving quick Elections to the Cantonment Board w held in December 1985, and a new bo was constituted with a see-saw po balance. Among the seven elected me bers, S. Venugopal and D. Mahadeva the DMK were re-elected as was Elias o AIADMK. C. Shanmugam was the n entrant on a DMK ticket, and he bec the vice-president, the president alw being the brigadier in charge of the co tonment. R.D. Sundaram was the AIADMK member, N. Anantharamakri nan the Congress (I) representative,

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Boopalan belonged to the CPI. The DMK-opposition had a narrow 4-3 edge over the AIADMK-Congress(I) tie-up on the board. But the political line-up did not always work, as events showed.

Within eight months of the new board's assuming office on August 2 last year, the Central Government issued a gazette notification reclassifying the land as 'civil'. Less than a month later, before even the board members came to know about the change, on September 8, 1986, Nayagam formally wrote to the board requesting that his leasehold be converted into a freehold and the land sold to him. He said that he planned to build a five-star hotel on the land.

Vice-President C. Shanmugam placed Nayagam's letter before the board on October 14, 1986. It was not the board's job, but it had to decide whether or not to forward the request to the Defence Ministry. Interestingly, the board itself was reformed of the Central Government's reclassification only in that meeting. Shanmugam, in spite of coming from the DMK, was interested in forwarding Nayagam's request to the Centre and easing things for him. Said he: "As a member of the board and as the vice-president, I was not supposed to further the interests of my own political party, but act impartially and in the interests of the board."

THE other two DMK members, S. Venugopal and D. Mahadevan, refused to go along with Shanmugam and pressed for deferring consideration of Nayagam's letter. Said Venugopal: "Our basic point was that only in that meeting were we being informed about the land having been reclassified. And yet, in that same meeting Shanmugam was trying to push through a resolution forwarding Nayagam's request to the Central Government. So we smelt a rat and cried foul." Elias of the AIADMK also objected, in spite of his party's closeness to Udayar: "Whatever be Udayar's links with our leader, I knew our leader is honest and would support me in urging that certain norms be followed in the Cantonment Board." Shanmugam was, however, able to get the support of the new entrants, R.D. Sundaram, Anantharamakrishnan and Boopalan to carry the resolution.

Then things moved at lightning speed. On March 19 this year, Defence Estates Officer A.S. Rajagopal wrote to Nayagam asking him to pay Rs 22.11 lakh, a throw-away price. Nayagam paid the money on March 30. The next morning, the land was handed over—setting a speed record for a government transaction.

Brigadier Santoke Singh, president of the Cantonment Board, however, maintained that the proper procedure had been followed: "Defence Ministry lands are not sold at commercial prices. We go by something called a standard table of rates worked out by the district collector."

But once the scandal became public, Venugopal and Mahadevan openly said that they had protested against the sale of the land from the outset. They also handed over to DMK chief M. Karunanidhi letters to the board president resigning from their positions. Besides, the DMK has expelled Shanmugam from the party for his alleged complicity in the deal.

Having invited the scandal, the authorities are now faced with some embarrassing questions:

► After the Central Government amended its land policy in 1982 and when the Cantonment Board requested the Government in 1984 to convert the land to 'civil', why was it not reclassified and sold to the then lessees? Why did the Centre wait till the lease came into Nayagam's hands?

► What are the reasons for the uncanny speed of governmental action after Nayagam came into the picture?

► The board wanted to reclassify the land to earn property and other taxes. Hasn't the sale defeated that purpose?

► Why was the land sold at a ludicrously low price to an individual?

► How can an area as large as 3.44 acres be sold to an individual in violation of urban land ceiling laws?

► The Income Tax Department has been cracking down on undervalued properties in Madras. In this case, why did the department issue a no objection certificate for the sale?

These and other questions regarding the fortunate family's political connections are going to ensure that the scandal does not die down in a hurry. After all, it is in the five-star class.

Table by B.K. SHARMA

THE PLOT'S PROGRESS

May 30 1944	3.44 acres of land in Madras is leased out to C.T. Thirunavukarasu Chettiar and his wife at Rs 46 a month, on a 90-year lease, to be renewed every 30 years.
May 30 1974	After Thirunavukarasu's death, the lease is renewed in his sons' names, C.T. Shanmugam and C.T. Muthukumaraswamy.
Oct 17 1981	Shanmugam and Muthukumaraswamy write to the defence minister requesting that the land be sold to them.
Jun 18 1982	The Government of India changes defence land policy so that defence ministry lands classified as *civil* or *bazaar area* can be converted from leasehold to freehold and sold. This land was classified as *outside bazaar area*.
Aug 29 1984	The Cantonment Board, which controls the land, recommends that this land be converted into *civil area*, but nothing happens.
Apr 29 1985	Frustrated at the lack of progress on their application, the brothers sell the land to A.S. Thillai Nayagam.
Dec 1985	A new set of members is elected on to the Cantonment Board.
Aug 2 1986	The Central Government issues a Gazette notification reclassifying the land as *civil area*.
Sept 8 1986	Nayagam formally requests the Cantonment Board to convert his leasehold into a freehold.
Oct 14 1986	The board comes to know about the Government's reclassification and Vice-President C. Shanmugam places Nayagam's request before the board. Some members protest but the resolution is passed by the majority.
Mar 19 1987	The Defence Estates Officer writes to Nayagam asking him to pay a paltry Rs 22.11 lakh.
Mar 30 1987	Nayagam pays the money.
Mar 31 1987	The land is handed over to its new owner.

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The Case for Dismissal

R. Venkataraman is in palpable error in asserting in an interview that "so long as he enjoys the confidence of the Lok Sabha, no power on earth can remove the prime minister from his office".

Equally wrong is Venkataraman's laboured attempt to apply one set of rules to the President-prime minister relationship and another to the governor-chief minister relationship. The suggestion that the Supreme Court's ruling in the Antulay case is inapplicable to the prime minister is deplorable.

Let us begin with the issue of the President's sanction to prosecute the prime minister.

On April 12, 1982, a division bench of the Bombay High Court held that no private complaint for prosecution of a "public servant" for offences punishable under Sections 161 and 185 of the Penal Code and Section 5 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, was maintainable unless the requisite sanction had been obtained under Section 6 of the Act. Section 6 lists the authorities competent to accord the sanction. They are Central or state governments in the case of their respective employees. "In the case of any other person, the authority competent to remove him from his office."

Ministers are "public servants" and the authority competent to remove them is the head of the state, the President or the governor.

Having ruled that the governor was the authority competent to remove Antulay, the court added that "it deserved to be decided by the governor in his individual discretion". The Government of Maharashtra appealed to the Supreme Court unsuccessfully.

Antulay's counsel A.K. Sen had conceded the sanction could be given only by the governor acting "on his own" independently of the ministry.

This is the court's own view: "We are satisfied the concession was made to advance the cause of justice as it was rightly thought that in deciding to sanction or not to sanction the prosecution of a chief minister, the governor would act in the exercise of his discretion and not with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers."

This applies as much to the President vis a vis the prime minister as it does to the governor vis a vis the chief minister. Both the prime minister and chief minister "hold office during the pleasure" of the President and the governor respectively. (Article 75/2 and Article 164/1).

As Dr B.R. Ambedkar told the Constituent Assembly on December 30, 1948, while discussing the prerogatives of the head of the state, "the position of the governor is exactly the same as the position of the President".

> "The President might not be justified in dismissing a prime minister because he finds a strong prima facie case....But if there is an apprehension that the prime minister might subvert the course of justice...dismissal would be justified."

Therefore any petitions to the President requesting him to accord the requisite sanction under Section 6 of the Act must be considered "in the exercise of his discretion and not with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers".

Two years later, on February 16, 1984, the Supreme Court had occasion, once again, in the Antulay case, to consider how the evidence must be evaluated before the sanction to prosecute is given. It said: "The legislature has advisedly conferred power on the authority competent to remove the public servant from the office to grant sanction for the obvious reason that the authority alone would be able, when facts and evidence are placed before him, to judge whether a serious offence is committed, or the prosecution is either frivolous or speculative...whether on the facts alleged, there has been an abuse or misuse of office held by the public servant."

The President is therefore entitled to call on the petitioners to place before him enough evidence to warrant prosecution. He is also entitled to call upon the prime minister to offer his explanation.

To assert that the power of dismissal of the prime minister who commands a majority in the Lok Sabha does not exist is to fly in the face of the record.

Article 75(2) figured as Article 62(2) in the Draft Constitution. Here is the chairman of the drafting committee Dr B.R. Ambedkar's authoritative exposition in the Constituent Assembly on December 31, 1948: "Article 62(2) states that the ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the President. That means that a minister will be liable to removal on two grounds. One ground on which he would be liable to dismissal under the provisions contained in clause (2) of Article 62 would be that he has lost the confidence of the House; and secondly, that his administration is not pure, because the word used here is 'pleasure'. It would be perfectly open under that particular clause of Article 62 for the President to call for the removal of the particular minister on the ground that he is guilty of corruption or bribery or maladministration, although that particular minister probably is a person who enjoyed the confidence of the House. I think honourable members will realise that the tenure of a minister must be subject not merely to one condition but to two conditions and the two conditions are purity of administration and confidence of the House. The article makes provision for both."

The use of the word "guilty" suggests that there must be either a judicial finding of guilt or proof beyond reasonable doubt, incontrovertible proof.

The President might not be justified in dismissing a prime minister because he finds a strong prima facie case which warrants prosecution. He ought to leave it to the play of democratic forces and the impact of public opinion. But if there is a reasonable apprehension that the prime minister might try to subvert the course of justice by improper use of governmental machinery, it will present a clear case of reasonably apprehended subversion of the rule of law and his dismissal would be perfectly justified.

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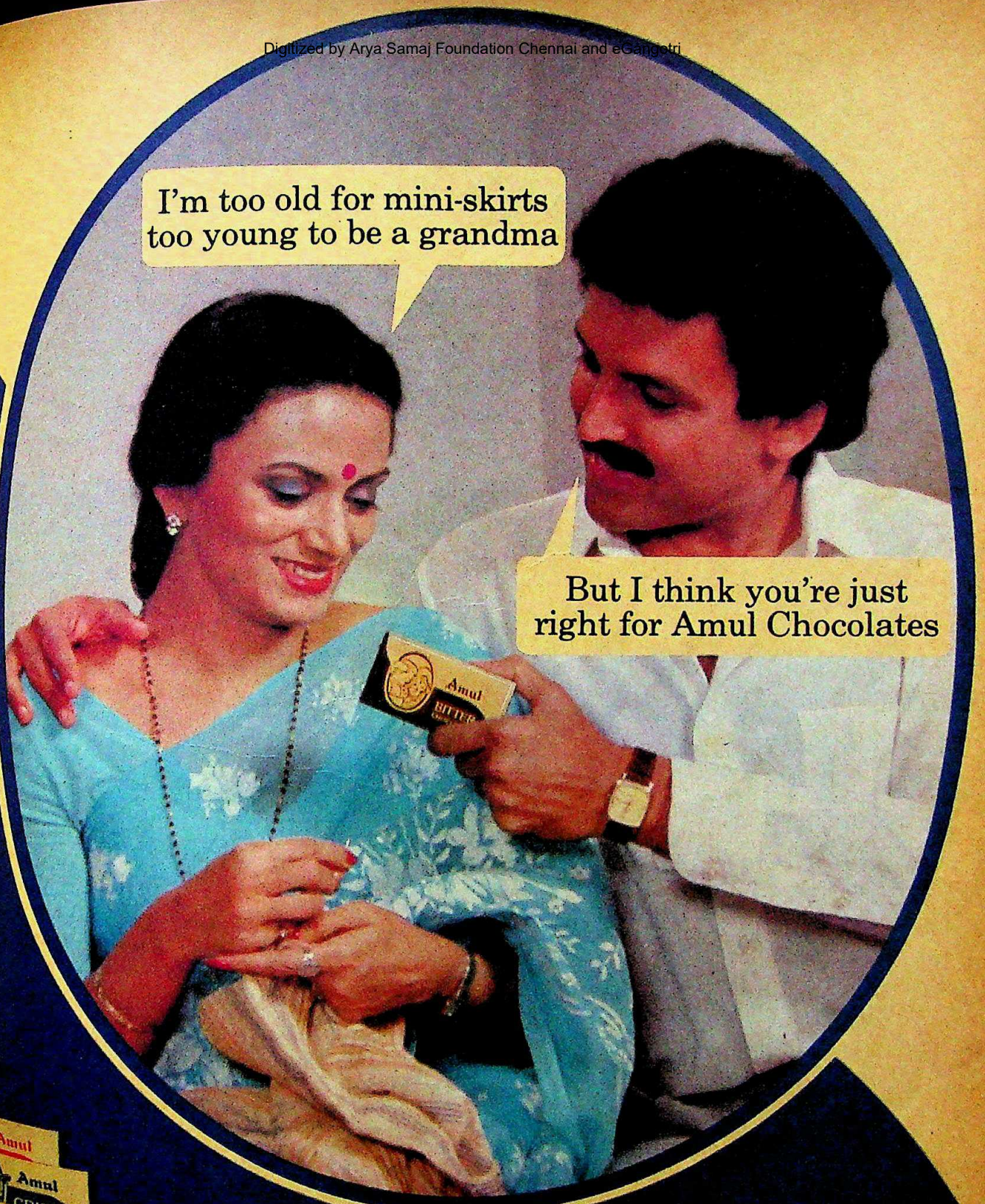

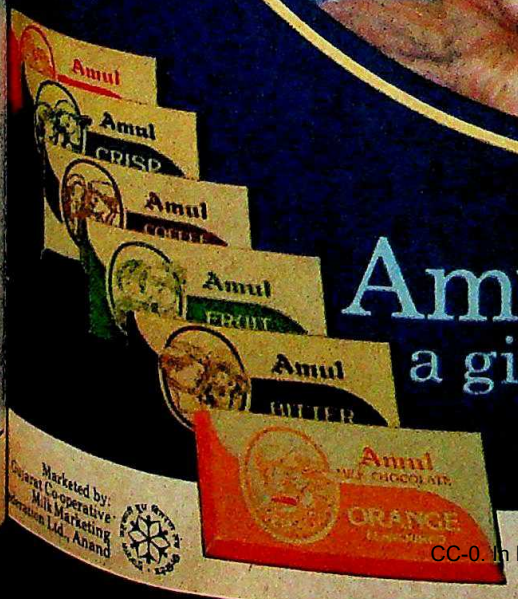

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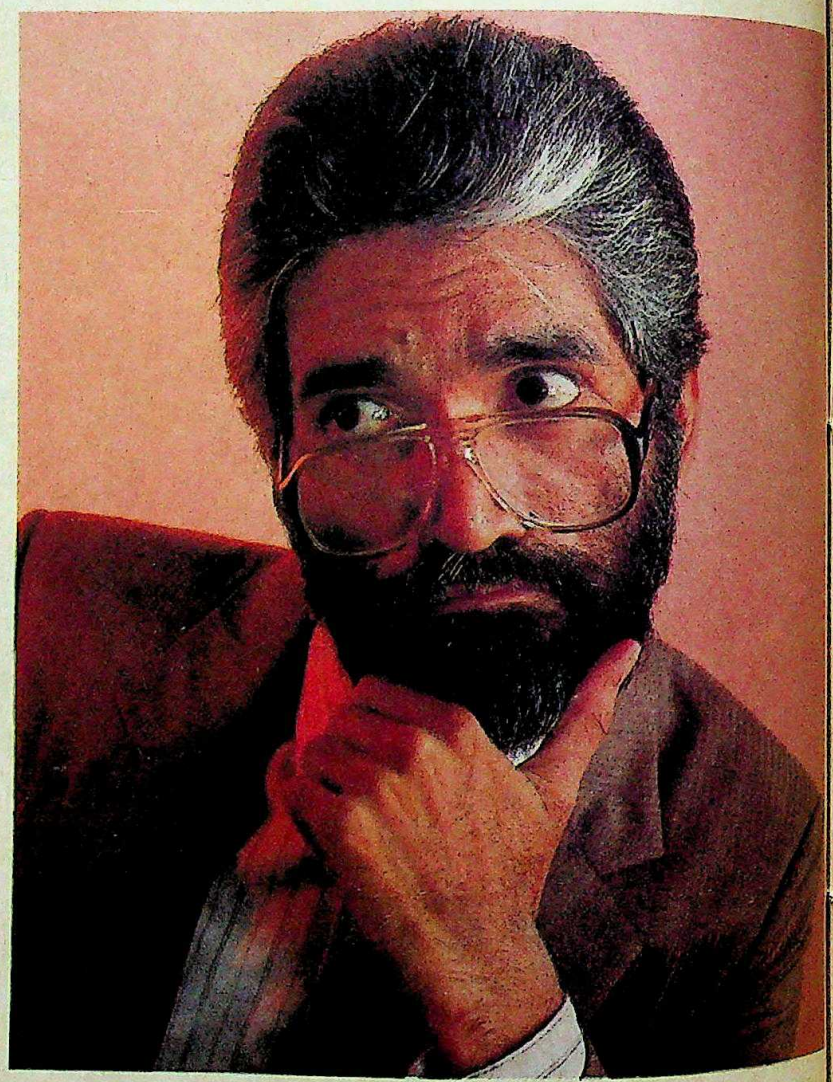

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QUEENIE

An Oriental Exotica

THERE'S good news for Rajophiles: another dollop of oriental exotica in the shape of *Queenie*, the latest Raj offering, a film of the same breed as *Jewel in the Crown* and *The Far Pavilions*, although not as pedigreed. A $13 million (about Rs 16.9 crore) extravaganza, it premiered recently on American television, sweeping the screen with palaces and elephants and temples and gracious ladies in brocade sarees shopping for vegetables. It is more raj than the Raj ever was, and so shiny, it looks like it's been gift-wrapped in cellophane.

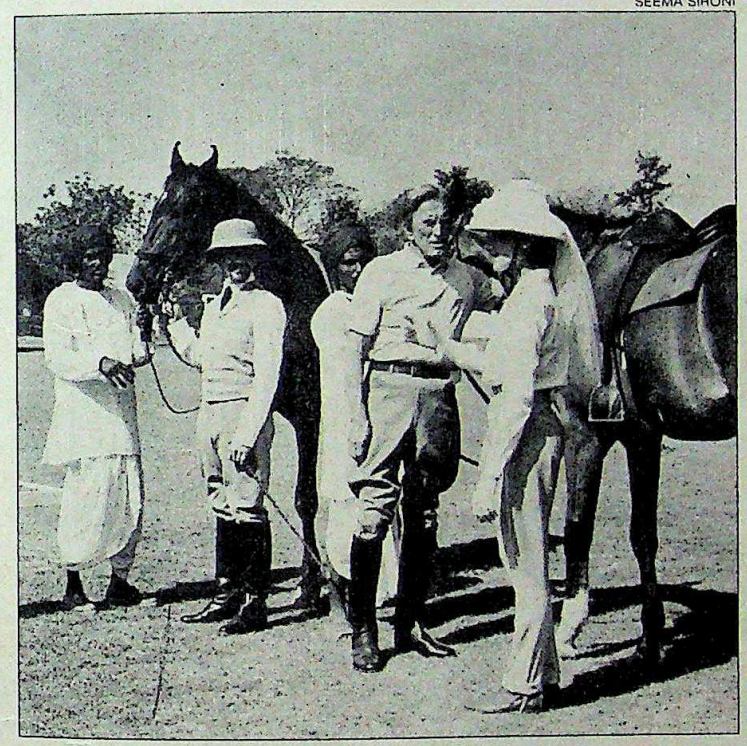
A high class soap, *Queenie*—based on Michael Korda's best-selling book—is an interesting enough story, more so because it's true. It traces the rise of Merle Oberon from Calcutta's Chowringhee bazaar through Soho's strip joints to life as a glamorous Hollywood queen. It stars Kirk Douglas—70 years old and looking it—and a fresh young actress, Mia Sara.

This is India of the '30s, lush and beautiful but shadowed by the colour brown, Indian brown. Queenie is a half-breed, an Anglo-Indian touched by the tar brush who somehow finds her way into a propah white girls' school. Known as "the little cheat who tried to pass for white," she cannot come to terms with her colour. She is not accepted as white and her mother won't let her be brown. "Who am I supposed to be?" she asks herself, again and again.

Her mixed blood makes her different, dangerous. In sensational deviations from Korda's book, the director, Larry Peerce—his earlier films include *Goodbye Columbus*—sneaks in three rape attempts on Queenie. As a little girl, her English teacher tries to seduce her in a deserted class room. "It's your black blood that makes you so exciting," he says, his lips drooling with desire. The grown-up Queenie is beautiful and has the body of a goddess. She is raped by a senior British officer, a fat toady of a man whose daughter went to school with her. He then accidentally falls down the balcony, and Queenie is charged with his murder.

Three months later, Queenie and her beloved Uncle Morgan—brilliantly portrayed by Joel Gray—arrive on a boat to England, a cold sunless land where there are no jobs unless "you're white or happen to look white". With the money

SEEMA SIRONI



A still from the film: nostalgia for the Raj

running out, Queenie takes the only job she can find: as a stripper in a sleazy nightclub. "Are you aware what happens to a man when he watches you," the owner asks her. "You must know what kind of power you have over us." In a movie that is teeming with such cinematic cliches, there are a few bursts of artistic spontaneity. As Queenie tears her clothes off, one by one, in the smoky haze of the club, Uncle Morgan—her mother's brother—turns his head away, ashamed yet aroused. Later, sobbing and drunk, he tries to rape his niece.

Thereafter, Queenie becomes a new woman with a new name: Dawn Avalon, ready to take on the world on her own terms. She falls in love with a poor photographer but marries a famous Hollywood producer, David Konig, played by Kirk Douglas. David's film brings her back to India. She is rich and famous now, serenaded by elephants when she arrives but "they're still looking out for the murderer there". After some semi-tense moments when Queenie is about to be handed over to the police—the viewer, of course, knows that she won't be—she returns to England victorious, but still tormented by her mixed identity. "Who am I supposed to be?" Queenie asks, yet again. It is only at the end, when she has become a Hollywood goddess, that she reveals to the lily-white world her dark secret—as Merle Oberon never did—that she is a half-caste, born in the back streets of Calcutta. "My mother is an Anglo-Indian. So am I," she proclaims in a sudden burst of pride. Her confusion miraculously vanishes and the gathering of rich English folk burst into applause. Queenie goes into the arms of her photographer lover and the film ends with a neat little "they lived happily ever after" flourish.

As far as soaps go, that's fine. It has no great artistic merits, no memorable performances. The few political moments in the film—like the Hindu-Muslim riots that were shaking British India in the '30s—end up looking like a stage play. No, this is a pretty India, without its heat and dust. Jaipur has to double for Oberon's Calcutta, since obviously, dirty old Calcutta would never do.

Queenie certainly entertains, but that's about all it does. Again and again the director's camera pauses on all those charming Indian cliches—women sitting placidly behind spinning wheels, elephants strolling through bazaars flushed with colour, classical dances in ancient temples. If anything, the film should give tourism a good shot in the arm. As John Cutts, the producer put it: "There is beauty, palaces, temples. In America, people are going to see the film and say 'C'mon, let's go to India'." *Queenie* is, ultimately, American in spirit. It is like pizza: it has the most exotic toppings, but is quite forgettable once it's over.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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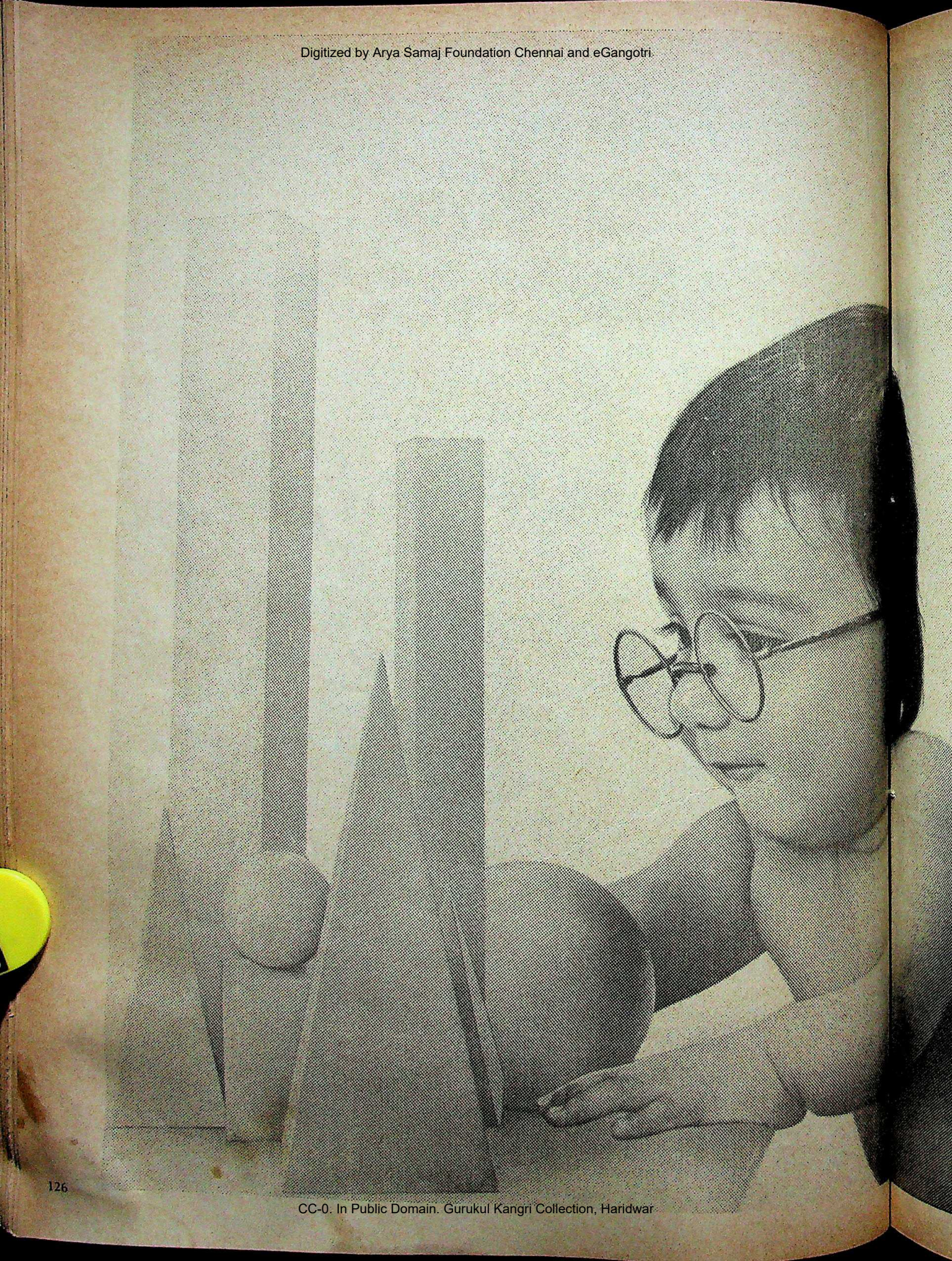

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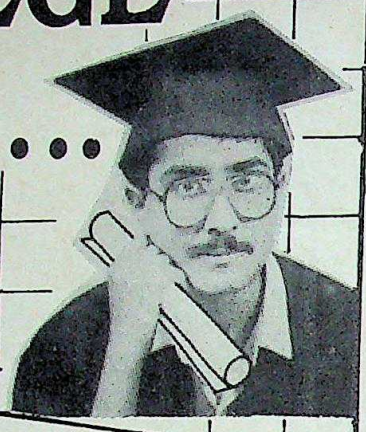

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DAVIS CUP

Proving a Point

IT was V for Vijay once again last fortnight as India brushed aside the Israeli challenge without dropping a set to sweep into the semi-finals of the Davis Cup Tennis championship. The tennis itself was insipid, though, and the matches seemed an anti-climax after the months of wrangling over whether Israelis could play on pro-Arab ground, the obsessive security arrangements and the expectation of a tough tie.

Israeli veteran Shlomo Glickstein, 29, looked as if he might melt in the blistering sun as he met the quiet, measured strokes of 26-year-old Ramesh Krishnan in the first match. Apart from a 10-minute knock at the end of the first set, which included an incredible 10 deuces, the 7-5, 6-1, 6-2 rubber was entirely Ramesh's. Vijay Amritraj, the old warhorse of the Indian stables, sallied forth next to meet Israel's star, Amos Mansdorf, and the tie became tougher.

Mansdorf, ranked 37th in the world last year—about 300 or more places above Amritraj—appeared obviously confident even at practice sessions before the match. The standard of tennis he was confronted with that afternoon must have made him think again, but too late. Vijay was undoubtedly in the driver's seat and he drove a hard bargain. Mansdorf went down 4-6, 4-6, 5-7.

The next day saw another uninspiring match as the Amritraj brothers faced Glickstein and Bloom. In 96 minutes, the doubles were over and India was in the semi-finals for the first time since 1974.

India will now face the daunting Australians from October 2 to 4 in Sydney. "It's tough," said Vijay of India's chances. "They're like a tank, a very solid tank and we're like going in with hand grenades." His US coach Gene Malin, though, was more optimistic. "Cash is a great player," he said, referring to Australian and Wimbledon star Pat Cash. "But he's still beatable." Both felt that a great deal hinged on Vijay, who at 34, has been on Davis Cup courts for a decade and a half now.

In both India and Israel, a great deal of enthusiasm had been generated before this quarter-final tie, since neither nation had been particularly hopeful of finding itself in this second round of the world group. Israel's victory over formidable Czechoslovakia in the first round was something of a national celebration and is reported to have pushed up the popularity of tennis in an essentially football-loving country.

India too had been euphoric after the dramatic come-back from near-defeat against Argentina last March. India had been virtually out of the running after Ramesh Krishnan lost to Martin Jaite and the Amritraj brothers went down in the doubles. But a splendid show of form by Vijay in his reverse play-off against Jaite on the last day had brought the stadium to its feet and quite likely saved India from becoming a had-been in the Davis Cup world group.

However, there was a catch: would the Government allow the Israelis to visit? First, the Government seemed willing only to allow play on neutral ground. But the International Tennis Federation was adamant—rules were rules.

Once before, India had refused to meet South Africa, in the finals, in 1974. It seemed as if that would be repeated. But India obviously doesn't class Israel with South Africa and after meeting Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Vijay—renowned for his charming personal relations—secured clearance for the tie.

That left the Delhi Lawn Tennis Association (DLTA) just a fortnight to organise it. DLTA Organising Secretary Yashwant Singh and his team did a good job. Even the Israelis, champions at security themselves, were satisfied and Indo-Israeli relations were as smooth as the silken flags flapping over the court.

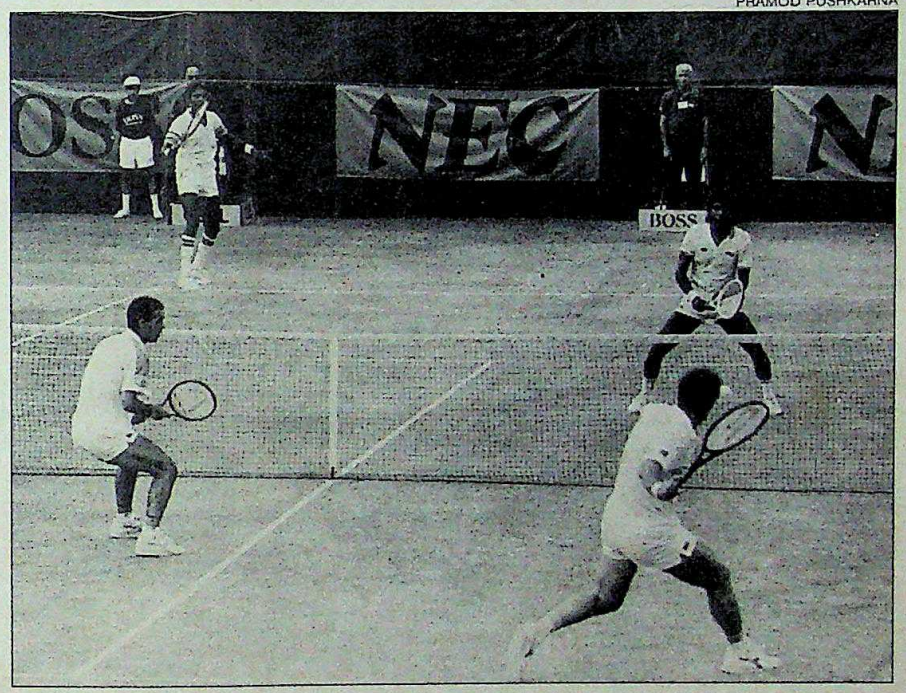
But a potentially sticky situation was building up—Palestinian students had already demonstrated near the courts—with Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat scheduled to visit New Delhi on July 27, when the Israelis would still have been in the city. However, Arafat was persuaded to postpone his visit and all was well.

Security arrangements were unprecedented, with 12-ft high barricades, makeshift watch towers (one of which initially had a bird's eye view of a ladies' toilet), and the ubiquitous Sten gun armed personnel of the Delhi Police, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo-Tibetan Security Force and even some armymen during practice sessions.

Setting all this up under the sun, often blazing 43°C, was not easy. But the organisers were not complaining for, as the Israeli team's non-playing captain Josef Stabholz indicated after the tie, the heat played a part in his team's defeat. "Still", he added, "we have no complaints, we lost the tie purely because of the edge of the Indian team, sportwise." Now the men from Madras will be hoping to spring an even greater surprise in Sydney.

—DAVID DEVADAS

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Amritraj brothers (facing) in the doubles match: convincing win

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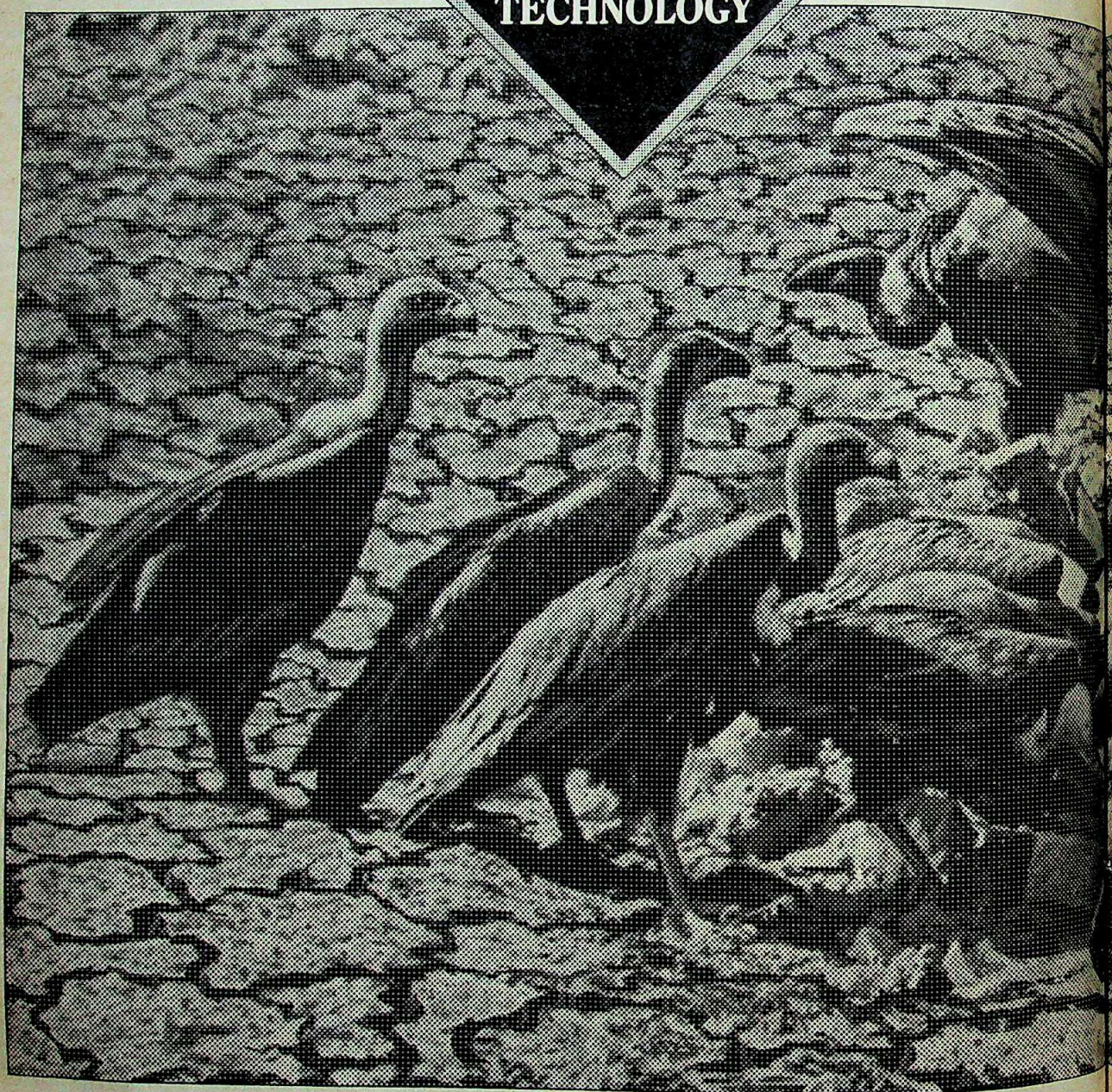
CALAMA TAMES TRAGEDY IN A TRIUMPH OF TECHNOLOGY



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ASIAN ATHLETICS

Usha Does it Again

SHE has made medal-winning a regular business. Last fortnight, at the seventh Asian track and field meet at the National Stadium, Singapore, Indian track superstar P.T. Usha ran to a gold or silver in all the five races she took part in to be acclaimed as "the track queen of Asia". After striking gold in the 400 m hurdles and 400 m race and a silver in the 100 m, Usha anchored superbly to help the 1,600 m quartet win the silver. There were only two other Indian medal winners—Vandana Shanbagh got the silver in the 400 m and Balvinder Singh managed to heave the shot put far enough to win the bronze. And India with a haul of three gold, three silver and one bronze slipped to the fifth position.

Right from the start, Usha had hinted that a repeat of the sensational gold rush (five gold and one bronze) of the earlier 1985 Jakarta meet was not possible. In her syndicated column—the first by an Indian athlete—Usha declared: "I don't think winning four gold medals will be any problem." She listed the 400 m, 400 m hurdles and 1,600 m relay as sure gold prospects, and said "with a little luck" India could win the 400 m relay gold. Though the races were well spaced out—she had only three events a day—Usha was not confident about the short sprints. Arch-rival Lydia de Vega of the Philippines swept to the gold in the 100 m dash. Lydia clocked 11.43 seconds and Usha picked up the silver with a time of 11.74 seconds. Usha's only consolation was that her Asian record of 11.39 seconds still stood.

In the 200 m, Usha pulled out after running a few metres to conserve her energy for her favourite event—the 400 m hurdles. "I decided to drop out of the 200 m because the final was scheduled to be 70 minutes before the 400 m run," said Usha. The strategy worked. Gliding gracefully over the hurdles, she made a frenzied dash to the finish line, clocking 56.48 seconds, which clipped 0.16 seconds off her Jakarta record. But this was far from her best timing of 55.43 seconds, which almost gave her the bronze at the Los Angeles Olympics.

Even in the 400 m, Usha won the gold with a timing of 52.31 seconds, which clipped 0.31 seconds of her previous meet record, but did not better her Asian record timing of 51.61 seconds. Before the meet, Usha had said that her only rival on the Asian circuit was the clock. She vindicated her stand by clocking timings above the planned timings she expected to run in the Singapore contest—56 seconds and 52 seconds in the 400 m hurdles and 400 m respectively. In fact, she—accompanied by coach Madhavan Nambiar—spent almost a month at Crystal Palace, London, under the watchful eyes of British coach Jim Alford, before flying out to Singapore. But though she refined her hurdling technique, her Achilles heel—a poor start—remained.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment at Singapore was Shiny Abraham. Though reckoned as the gold medallist in the 800 m, she ran a poorly phased race. Shiny picked up a strong pace very early and remained about 10 m ahead of the rest all through the run, until the final 20 m. Lamented Usha: "It's a sad way of losing after leading for 750 m." The winner, a 15-year-old South Korean. Se Bum-Choi, clocked 2:05.11, which is much lower than Shiny's best timing of 2:03.16. In 1,500 m Shiny finished a poor sixth.

The Indian male competitors fared badly. While Balvinder managed the bronze in the shot put, Manjit Singh finished fourth in the discus and Sri Prasad Mahanta failed to even qualify for the 800 m final. Said the Indian coach Vidyasagar: "There was no centralised training. It began in April, was broken in May for various competitions and then resumed in July." Also, a relatively small team was fielded at Singapore, as the Sports Ministry stuck to its rule that only those who reached the bronze medal grade in the last Asian games could qualify. But, for the sports officials, the lesson remained that unless talent is spotted early and systematically trained—like the present women medallists—Indian athletics may be reduced to the solitary successes of Milkha Singh and P.T. Usha. —AMARNATH K. MENON

Photographs by AFP

Usha (right) running the 100 m; Shiny in the 800 m race

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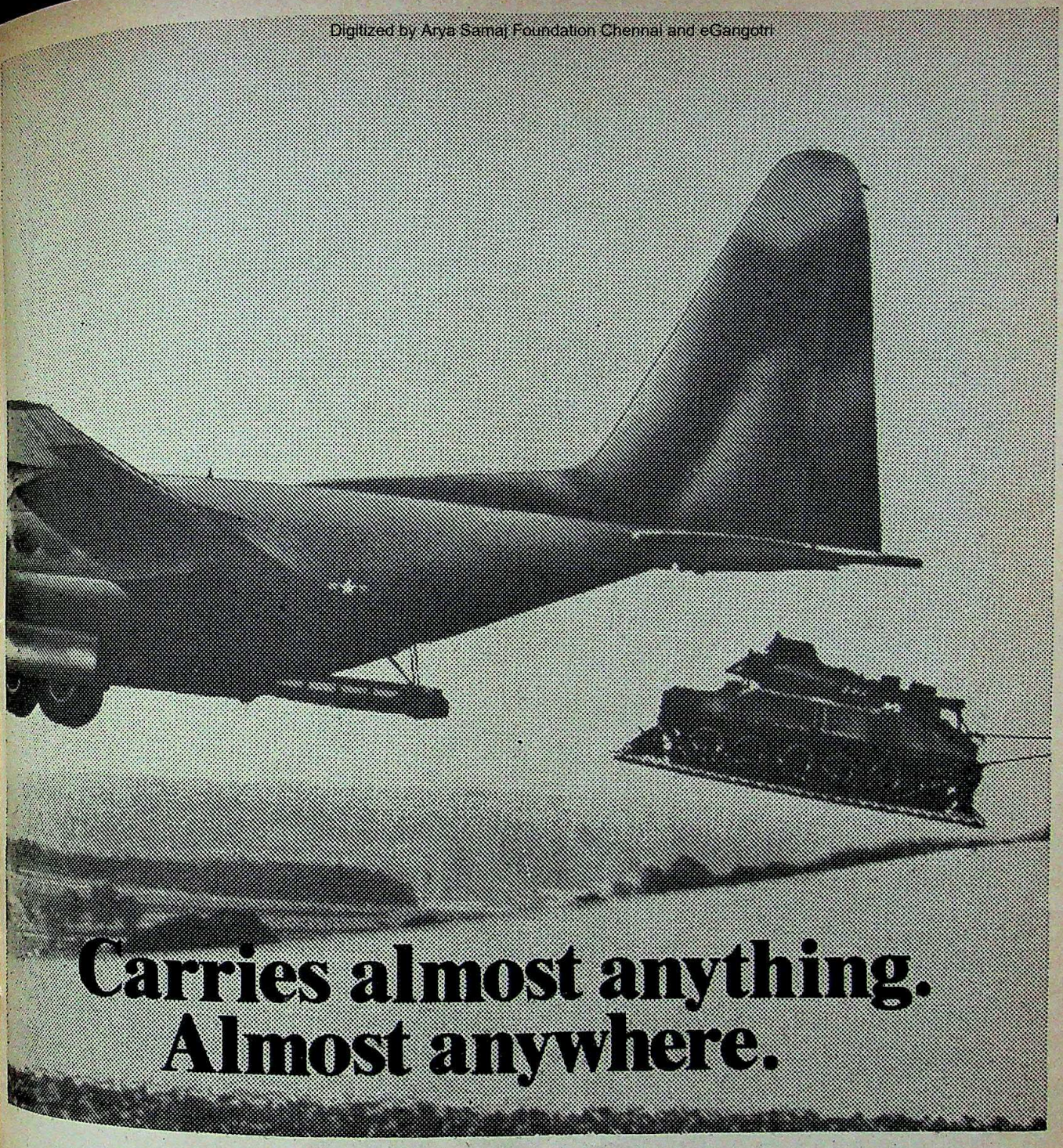

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MADHYA PRADESH

Repressive Law

JAGANNATH Mishra would approve. The Madhya Pradesh Government is about to send for presidential assent an official decree that appears even more draconian than the infamous Bihar Press Bill. Under the Madhya Pradesh Regulation for Restriction on Photography and Research in Scheduled Areas, a press photographer can be arrested for merely "possessing" a camera and jailed for one year along with a fine of up to Rs 5,000 for entering a tribal area of the state "without prior permission from the Government". Moreover, the reporter accompanying him can also be imprisoned for "abetting" the crime.

The Government says it has taken the step "in view of the unethical commercial exploitation of certain aspects of tribal life under the garb of tourism, research and study". But so sweeping are the powers that photography, research work and even possession of photographic equipment by an individual in 21 of the state's 45 districts will be a cognizable offence. Press photographers accredited with the state Government too will require licences to enter the notified districts. Says Ashok Verma, general secretary of the Madhya Pradesh Working Journalists Union: "It will be a severe blow to the freedom of the press." Adds R.C. Sahu, convenor of the Bhopal Press Photographers Association: "Under this vague and sweeping law, any professional or amateur photographer will not be able to shoot even Republic Day parades, private weddings or flora and fauna without government permission."

While a blanket exemption has been provided to not only all government organisations but also to "educational, cultural, technical or scientific institutions, societies and clubs", the press has been pointedly ignored. "The blatant discrimination shows that the officials are trying to curb the rights of the press," Verma said in a letter to Chief Minister Motilal Vora last fortnight, demanding the exemption facility for accredited journalists as well.

Ironically, the entire matter began six years ago when a section of the press charged that the BBC had shot a pornographic film by portraying the sex life of tribals—an allegation that later proved to be untrue (INDIA TODAY, May 16-31, 1981). All the same, the state Government's Home Department issued an order at that time banning photography and filming in the Bastar, Jhabua, Mandla and Surguja districts and parts of 17 other tribal districts without permission.

Bastar tribals: curbing exposure

PRAKASH HATVALNE

With the new regulation on Madhya Pradesh's tribal areas, photography, research work and even possession of a camera in 21 of the state's 45 districts will be a cognizable offence.

Nothing much happened until December 21, 1985, when the Cabinet approved the regulation. The regulation does not need to be placed before the state Assembly because it is being enforced under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, empowering the state Government to frame rules for tribal areas. Only in the last week of April, 16 months after cabinet approval, was the regulation sent for printing. "Once that is done, it will be sent for presidential approval," says a source in the Tribal Welfare Department.

It is this administrative inefficiency that has prevented a vocal protest from newsmen and photographers so far. Most district officials have until now been unaware of the very existence of the executive order and later the regulation, and the ban has been observed more in the breach.

All the same, some incidents of harassment indicate what lies in store for photographers. Anandilal Parekh, widely known for his work on the Bhils, was intimidated by officials for taking pictures in Jhabua district—which is his home. Prakash Hatvalne, a Bhopal-based photographer, recalls that "in Bastar, a constable asked me to accompany him to a police station when I was shooting a weekly market." In another incident, the subdivisional magistrate of Narayanpur, Bastar district, took away the exposed film rolls of some missionaries who had tried to capture the mood at an annual tribal fair. Not surprisingly, many journalists and cameramen are concerned about how the regulation can be misused by an unimaginative and unsympathetic bureaucracy.

Officials of the Tribal Welfare Department argue that the measure is regulatory and not prohibitory, under which licences will be issued to applicants who will have a right to appeal. There is nothing to worry, they assure newsmen. But asks Verma: "If there is firing in a tribal area tomorrow can a newspaper afford to wait to acquire a licence before rushing its photographer there?" He has a point. If the efficiency shown in getting presidential assent for the regulation is any indication, the state Government seems determined to ensure that its tribal areas will be taboo for the press.

—N.K. SINGH

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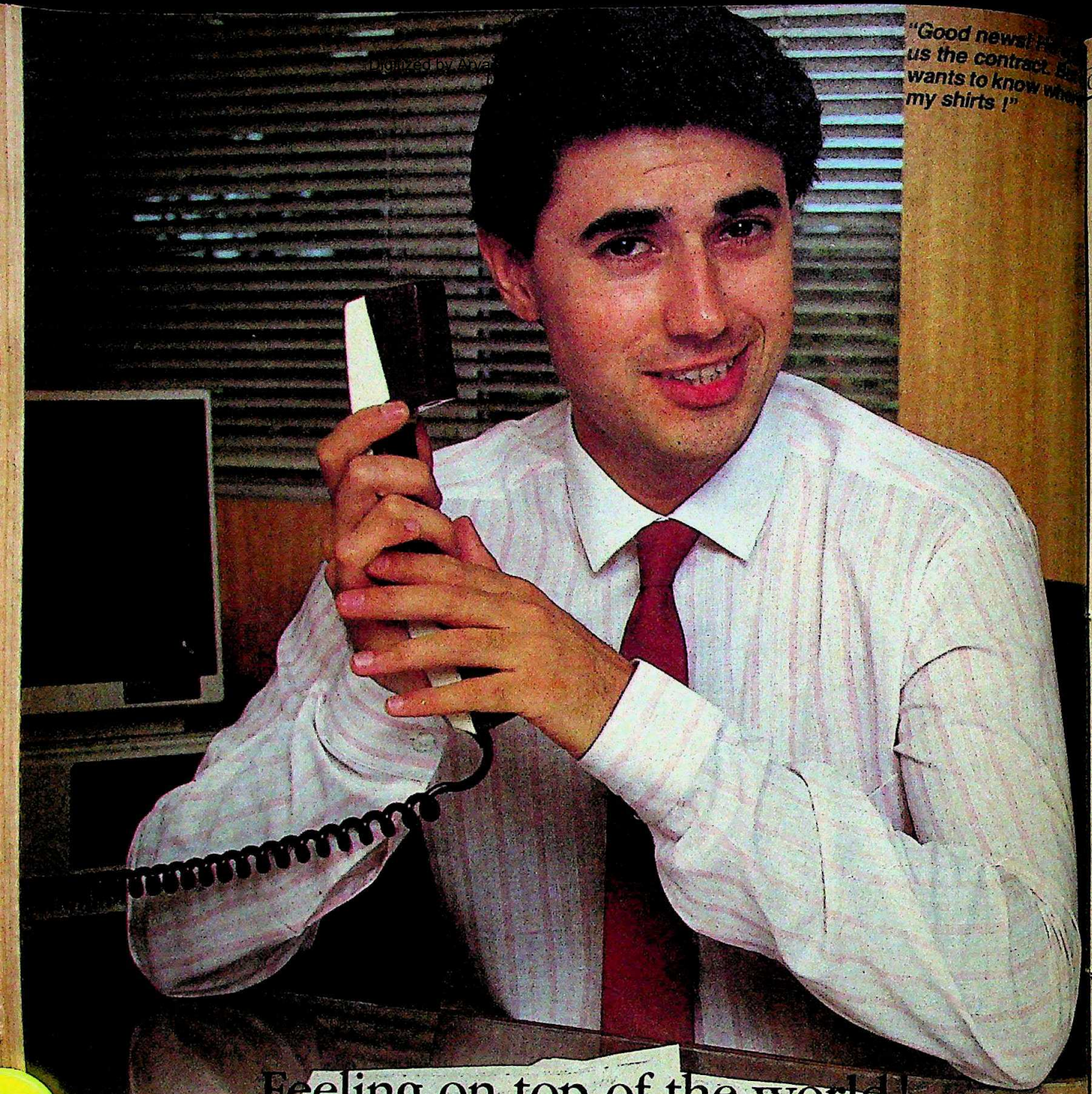

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ASLV

Finding the Flaws

IN the rarefied world of space rocketry, the mist is slow in lifting on a failure. The sleek five-stage 23.5-metre-long ASLV-1—which lifted off at 12.09 p.m. on March 24 this year from Sriharikota—tumbled, broke and then fell into the Bay of Bengal after going 12 km. The problem: the first-stage motor did not fire.

Now, three months later, the 200-odd scientists of the Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle-1 (ASLV-1) mission—recovering from the project's failure—are slowly firing on the probable technical snags that caused things to go so wrong. While no firm conclusions have been drawn, two possible scenarios have emerged. In the first, the wafer-thin switch of the safe arm device was at fault. And the second theory refers to an unidentifiable flaw in the ignition system and circuitry of the first stage motor.

The switch is a thin disc at the top of the safe-arm device, which is a cylindrical, tumbler-sized contraption to regulate the flow of current, and fire the motor on command. It also prevents accidental firing from the time the rocket is assembled. Both the switch and safe-arm device were chosen after detailed vibration studies, to stay fool-proof under extreme conditions.

Scientists say the switch either did not open or there was a short circuit which brought ASLV-1 and the Indian rocketry programme crashing down. Explained a senior engineer: "Similar safe-arm devices fitted to the strap-on motors functioned perfectly, but it can fail in strange ways—like when lightning struck a rocket in the US recently."

But ASLV Mission Director M.S. Raghuchandran Dev denies that the switch of the safe-arm device is the culprit. "It is difficult to identify the cause," he said. Concurred S.C. Gupta, director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Trivandrum: "The real reason can never be found and the most important lesson is to accept failure in our scientific programme even though it may be at a heavy price."

The Failure Analysis Committee (FAC), headed by VSSC Associate Director R. Aravamudan, has come up with a more broad-based theory of the possible malfunction of one or more elements of the ignition system and circuitry of the first stage motor. The suspect elements are the pyrotechnique initiator, the igniter booster charge (which provides energy for sustained ignition), the safe-arm device and associated circuitry. But the FAC has been unable to pinpoint which elements failed. This is ironic, as the flaw in the more complex Challenger was found quickly and conclusively.

Director Gupta: facing a harsh lesson

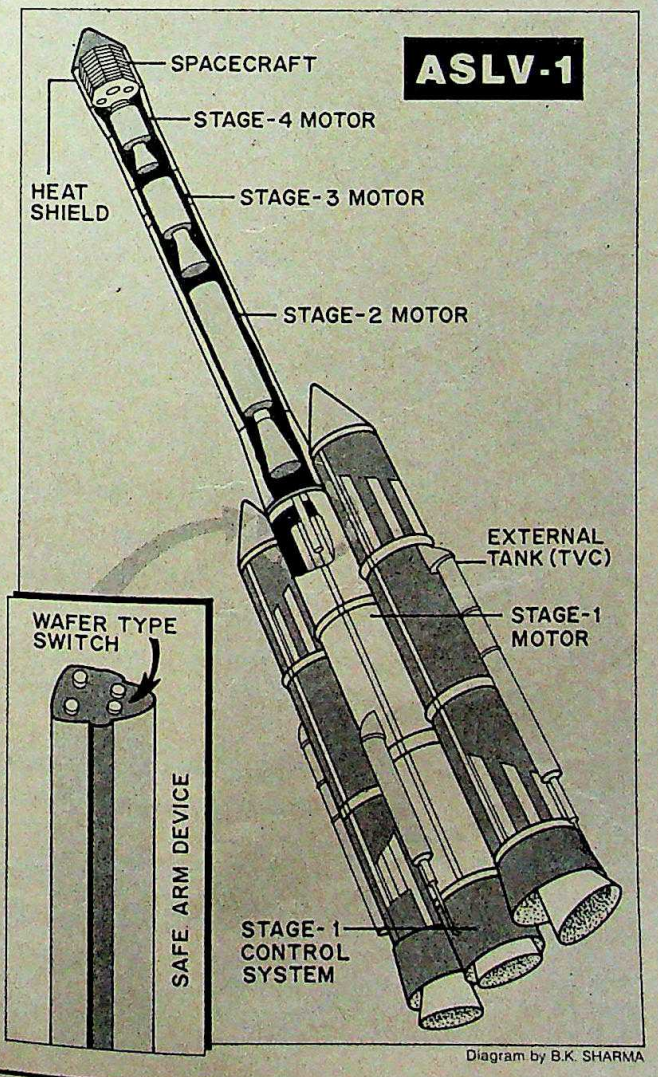

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA

Meanwhile, in partial confirmation that the switch and the safe-arm device could be the real culprits, both are to be removed from the second ASLV rocket being built—which is deadlined not earlier than April 1988. Another notable change being made is the provision of back-up systems so that any single-point failure does not result in a failure of the whole mission. Explained a scientist: "The number of single-point failure systems will be minimised so that an alternative route is open for the rocket's smooth flight; and changes in design will be made to improve reliability." Says VSSC's Gupta: "In a trade-off between reliability and schedule, we will give priority to reliability."

Meanwhile, a post-flight analysis of the 58 major sub-systems, done by nine separate committees, has shown that quite a few things went wrong simultaneously during the ASLV-1's brief flight. It revealed that one of the range safety radars at Sriharikota did not work. Also, the heat shield protecting the satellite opened as early as 73.9 seconds into the flight, instead of the expected 151.8 seconds. However, the telemetry data showed the ASLV-1 did not suffer any abnormal vibrations.

Meanwhile, engineers and technicians who were on staggered leave after the ASLV-1 failure, and are now returning to their posts to assemble the new rocket, are understandably demoralised. Said one: "Our confidence level had dropped but it will improve as work picks up and we decide on changes in the sub-systems for the next flight."

Certainly, the shock and confusion will be forgotten when work on the ASLV-2 mission gathers momentum next month. But the ASLV-2 will take longer than the targeted one year after ASLV-1 to reach the launch pad at Sriharikota. That delay will, however, be easily condoned if the augmented rocket does finally manage a flawless launch.

—AMARNATH K. MENON
in Trivandrum

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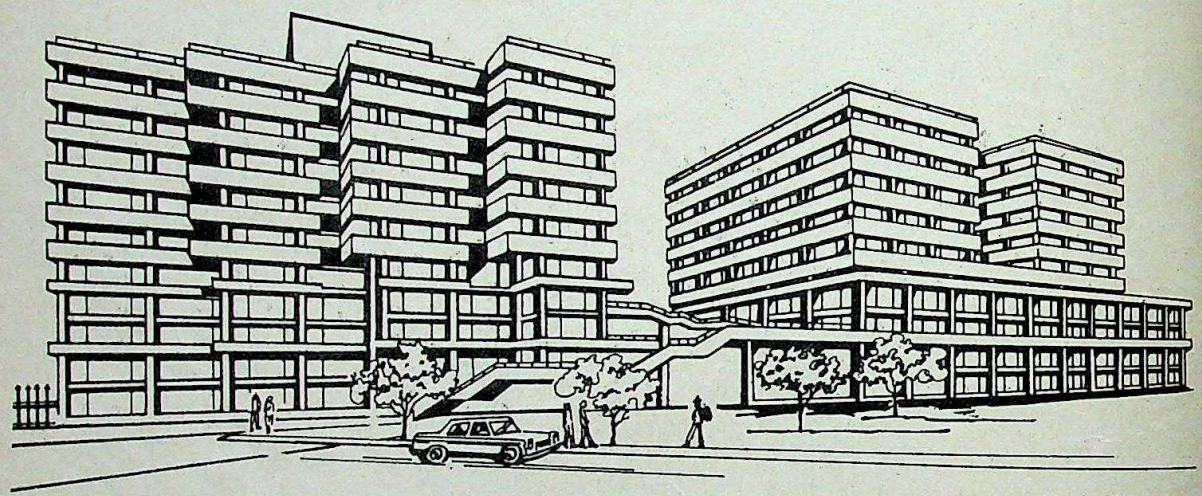

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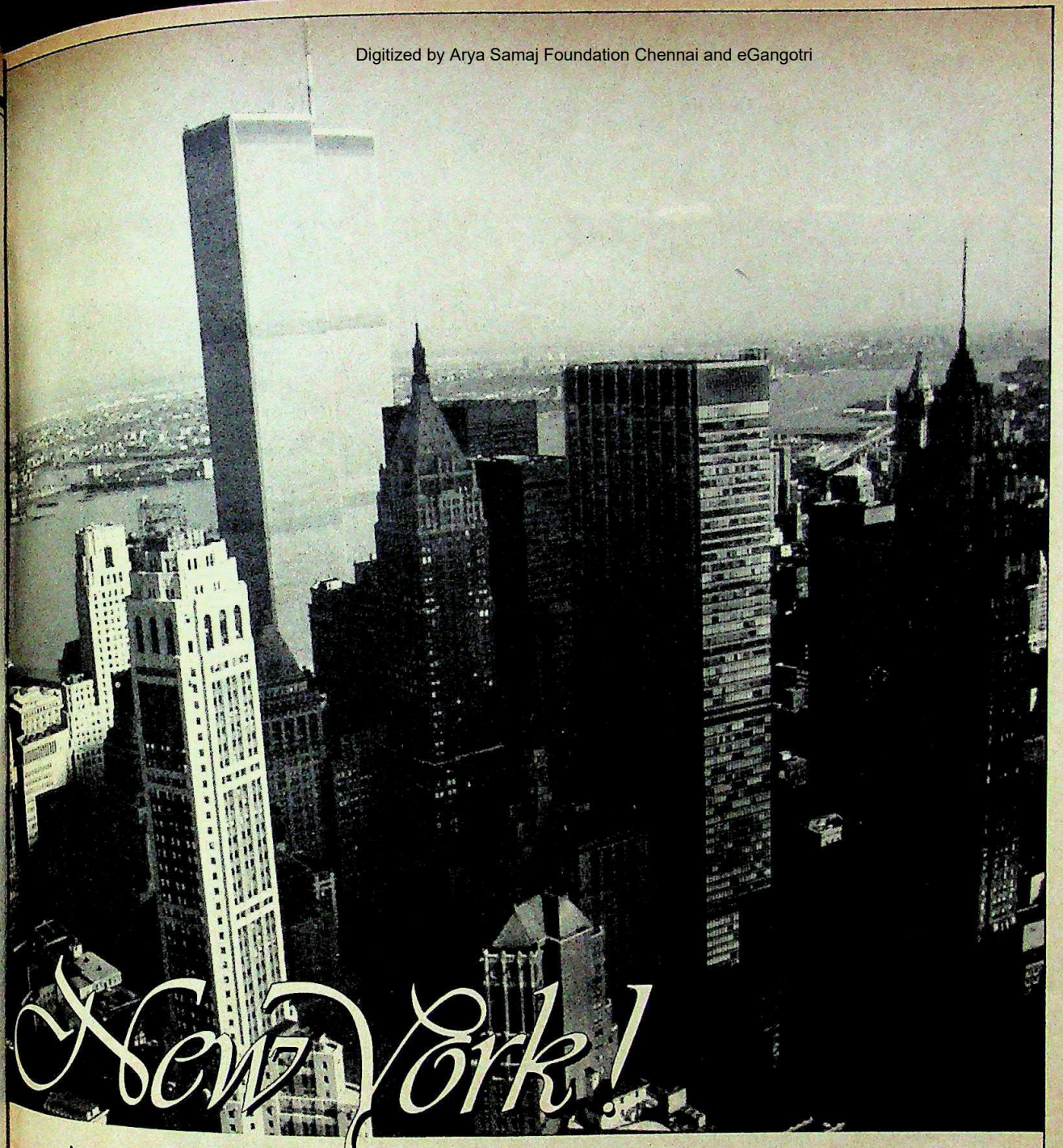

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VINOD KHANNA

A Star Return

IT must have been dizzy up there. And lonely. For several years, Amitabh Bachchan has looked down from the heavens, the little heroes miles below him, specks struggling, striving to climb up. And the Bachchan smiled.

And then the winds began to blow from Oregon. Vinod Khanna reappeared in India in the cold mists of a November morning in 1985, driving his fallen god Bhagwan Rajneesh in a Mercedes to Delhi's Hyatt Regency Hotel. He was back, the only hero who anyone dared compare with the great one. Would he stay, could he make it? He did and he did. With the super success of Khanna's freshly released films *Insaaf* and *Satyamev Jayate*, the strumpet industry is shaking with excitement. Vinod Khanna is back and Amitabh is no longer so sure of his place in the sun.

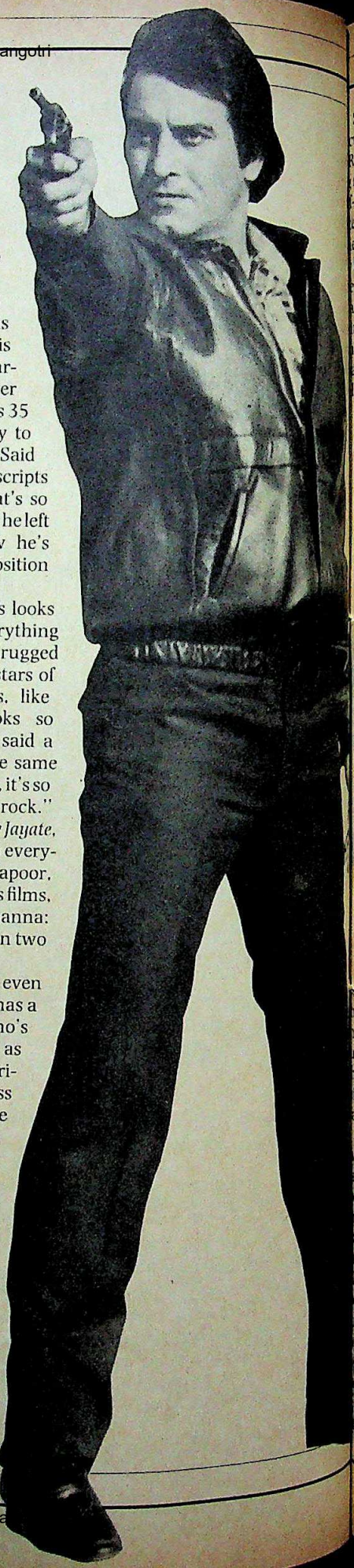
No one expected such a welcome, certainly not Khanna himself. The day *Insaaf*, his first film was released, he was driven by anxiety. "I was going from house to house to be with someone," he says. "I was confident that the film would do well but I didn't want to be somewhere where I'd feel insecure." But the queues outside the booking counters had started building up with a fury that has not been seen in the last few years, tickets were being sold in black and when Vinod Khanna came on the screen after a six-year absence, the audience burst into hysterical applause. "Till now there was no one near Amitabh," said film magnate S.C. Nahata. "Now a parallel force is moving in."

Clearly, Khanna is a best seller. Both *Insaaf* and *Satyamev Jayate* touched 100 per cent collections in the first few weeks over most of India and are still running strong. Industry estimates put returns from both at an impressive Rs 10 crore. Tolu Bajaj, film distributor from Nizam, a conservative territory, reports: "I recovered 80 per cent of the cost of the films in the very first week alone." Outside Khanna's door the producers are queuing up. He has been inhaling offer after offer and today has over 20 films on hand with directors that range from Prakash Mehra to Gulzar to Muzzaffar Ali. Manmohan Desai, an out and out Amitabh man, is keen to work with him. "There's a burning desire in Khanna to prove to himself that he is a good actor, not only a star," says Mahesh Bhatt, who is also directing him in two films. "That gives him the extra sparkle that he has today."

He is the hero most in demand right now. Every time you blink his price has jumped by Rs 5 lakh. He is reported to have re-entered the market at Rs 12 lakh and two films later is said to be getting Rs 30 lakh-Rs 35 lakh a film, a figure second only to Bachchan's reported Rs 80 lakh. Said film writer Salim Khan, who scripts most of Bachchan's films: "What's so amazing about Vinod is that when he left he was number two. And now he's walked straight back into that position again."

So, what makes him tick? His looks for one; physically, he has everything going for him. His face is all-male, rugged terrain that makes the younger stars of today look pretty and frivolous, like chewing-gum heroes. "He looks so strong, so rugged and craggy," said a Delhi housewife. "And yet, at the same time, he looks so gentle. His profile, it's so perfect it looks as if it's carved from rock." Anita Raaj, his co-star in *Satyamev Jayate*, says: "He's a great looker. There's everything in that smile." And Shakti Kapoor, who has acted with him in both his films, compares Bachchan and Khanna: "They're like two gods. Two gods in two temples."

But Vinod Khanna the man is even more appealing than the star. He has a mystique around him, a man who's had a secret experience, returned as he is from Rajneesh's world of spiritual sex. There was always a reckless quality about him, the way he walked out of films when he was right there on the frontline with Bachchan. He simply gave it all up one morning. "Death does things to people," said J.P. Dutta, film director and close friend of Khanna. "Money, success, fame look so futile when confronted with death." That was the time Khanna had lost his mother and a young niece. He put it simply: "I knew I could die the next moment, so I went to Bhagwan. To me, he is the ultimate in conciousness."



Khanna: walking tall

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Six years later the show failed, the rus collapsed. The total disintegration Rajneeshpuram with the accompany- media build-up snowballed the god of indulgence and his lavender cult into rnational headlines. Whenever any- thought of Rajneesh, Vinod was there fbside, slandered by all those stories of ver, dazzling millions and easy nir- ana. "It's his personal life that makes m so interesting. He has been through rmail agony. His god died. He's come ack from Auschwitz," said Bhatt, who is a close friend. "It was the same thing

Amitabh is still there, head and shoulders above everyone else, but even producers traditionally considered to belong to the Amitabh "camp" can feel the new challenger closing in.

Khanna with Bachchan: new challenge

at made Rajiv Gandhi the darling of the anes as he stood above his mother's neral pyre trying to come to grips with ings." The experience has also made m emotionally rich. "It is my strength," s Khanna. "I draw from it."

If Khanna has come back from Ausch- z, Bachchan is going through it now. It almost as if the fates were controlling rk their destinies. Khanna's rising film mes coincide with Bachchan's falling dical ones. Amitabh is still there, head shoulders above everyone else but e is a different Amitabh, tainted by his litics, stalked by the deadly mysthenia ravis disease and unsure of how his films ll do. His last release *Aakhri Raasta* pped and the Delhi distributor is re- rted to have lost over Rs 20 lakh. Still, there has never been a phenome- n like Amitabh Bachchan perhaps any- where in the world. "He is a bearer- cheque of a crore rupees under produc- tion," said one film man while Salim Khan said: "He has a flair for everything: comedy, drama, tragedy, dialogue delivery and a fantastic screen presence. And he's a very disciplined man. That's a rare combination. There is almost nothing I can say against him." He has crystallised his persona over the years into the funny, lonely, tough man, a versatile actor visible in all his shades in a Manmohan Desai or a Prakash Mehra film. "When you think of Vinod none of his films come back to you, the way they do with Amitabh," says Bhatt. He moves his hand and the world loves it.

No one wants to lose this god and most film people feel politics won't affect him as long as he can perform on the screen, a fate which will be decided by *Shehenshah*, his latest film which has been held up indefinitely. But even producers traditionally considered from the Amitabh "camp" can feel the new challenger closing in. Amitabh has signed 11 films together, something he's never done in his professional career before. It's like film titan Prakash Mehra said: "Muhammad Ali thought he was the greatest. And then one day Joe Frazier came."

Khanna retains all the talent that once made him a threat to Bachchan. If anything, he has matured and has whetted his acting skills. "I think these six years he must have been performing somewhere in that camp, he is so good before the camera," said Raj Sippy, who directed him in *Satyamev Jayate*. Khanna is at his best in the film, playing as he does a bitter policeman, lonely, tough with a leashed impulse toward high-threshold violence. It is a difficult film with no visual backdrops that succeeds on a straight, hard-hitting performance by Khanna. "Today Amitabh is at a peak," said Sippy. "You've given him those many years. Give Vinod those many years and he'll be at par if not above. The feedback the man is getting is unbelievable."

The Sippys got Khanna at his best. *Insaaf*, his first release, has traces of a man battling to return to normalcy, in certain scenes his eyes are not those of a sane man. And at other times, he is said to have got so emotionally involved in the film as in the scene where Dimple Kapadia dies that he had real tears in his eyes—and the camera was not even on him. Khanna was a torn man during that period, changing everyday. At the start of the film he would sit quietly in a corner, get nervous if anyone saw him act, he'd wish everyone politely both when he came and when he left. It was a special, intimate time for the unit of *Insaaf*, the regeneration of Vinod Khanna. By the nine months it took to complete the film, he was

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Khanna with Dimple in *Insaaf*: crowd-pullers

punching people on the back and flirting with his co-stars. "He was so normal we wondered what was wrong with him," said Mukul Anand, the young director of the film.

At one point, the unit almost lost Khanna to his Bhagwan again. That was the second time Rajneesh came back. For over a month, Khanna kept an expensive set—worth Rs 8 lakh—waiting. He said he didn't want to act anymore, that they should get someone else. The film almost collapsed. "It took him almost a month to realise he wasn't going back to Rajneesh," said Anand.

But the real acceptance came only a few months later when the film industry went on strike. Khanna walked 14 km in a morcha, from Shivaji Park to town. All along the way, people cheered him, mobbed him and hugged him. "That clinched it," said Anand. And Vinod Khanna knew he was back to stay.

He might have left the industry a villain but the sexy sanyasi is back as a hero. He's older, greying at the temples, but has all that sex appeal still packed in. "He gives me butterflies in my stomach the way no other actor can, it's his colour that is so attractive, it's a perfect sun-kissed brown. He really is the only man who can look sexy even in a saffron robe," says Anita Mehta, 28, a young secretary and Keva Nath, 37, a housewife, says: "He looks so dependable. You want him to hold you, to protect you. He's the kind of man you want your husband to be." He has that rare all-in-all appeal that few other heroes have. Said Rajiv Mehra, who is directing him in *Aakhri Adalat*: "The girls like his looks, the guys find him tough. Older people like him because he's the saviour of the sister and the mother."

Yet this superstar who sees the world opening up at his feet, is ultimately a man alone, unattached. He has a broken marriage and a lost paradise behind him. Home is a room in a rundown club where he lives more like a schoolboy in a dorm, with red rexine chairs, a small cassette player by his bedside and packets of

INTERVIEW

"My search is complete"

There has always been a mystique around Vinod Khanna, the way he quit films and glory when he was right up front. Today, he is a super success, with over 20 films on hand, but has had to work out a deep emotional catharsis. Senior Correspondent SIMRAN BHARGAVA *spoke to the industry's fastest rising superstar in Bombay:*

Q. *How does it feel to be back?*

A. I never thought I'd work in films again. But I was through with the ashram life. You wake up and find you're not sleeping. But it was difficult. It takes a lot to leave God.

Q. *Why did you leave him?*

A. I don't have any more questions. So I'm not looking for answers now. I live moment to moment.

Q. *How do you feel being compared to Amitabh Bachchan?*

A. That competition has always been created. Amitabh has never been compared to anyone but me. But we're two individuals with different styles of acting. There are certain areas where he excels and certain areas where I do.

Q. *Do you look forward to be number one?*

A. I don't want to be number o don't want to be that at all.

Q. *Why is your price rising rapidly?*

A. Nobody gives you more m than they can make out of you.

Q. *What did you do when you h* Insaaf *was a success?*

A. I locked myself in my room, cl my eyes and prayed.

Q. *Ideally, how would you lik to be?*

A. I've stopped dreaming now. I h no goals. I take life as it comes. I'm aiming for a secure life. I want to be to life as much, whether it gives happiness, pain, pleasure.

Q. *What was life like in Oreg*

A. We'd work from 7.30 in morning to 7.30 at night. I was pla trees, it was hard work. We were b ing a city. We wanted to be with the You were there for the love of this To me he is the ultimate in consc ness. I never met another human b

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Still from *Satyamev Jayate*: hard-hitting act

biscuits stacked in a corner. A homeless millionaire waiting for his sons to come back from school so he can play badminton with them, a father who went through every contact in town to get his son just the BMX bike that he wanted for his birthday. So why does he continue to live here when he could stay in the ritziest hotel in town? He puts it simply: "It's because my kids live next door."

There is also a reckless generosity in his friendships with people. He charges an astronomical sum from his producers and then quietly gives money to his friends when they need it. Bhatt recalls a time when the wolves were at his door. "He gave me money for buying a flat. He didn't want to humiliate me with monetary handouts so he took my younger brother as a secretary. He crosses the line in friendship." After *Insaaf* was completed, Khanna went up to the producer and asked him to cut all delayed production costs from his fee. Shakti Kapoor remembers when he was new and alone in the industry, Khanna gave him a home to stay in for three years. "He's a great actor," says Raj Sippy. "But he's an even better person."

Today he is sadder and wiser. At 40, he's done more than a 100 films and been through emotional holocausts most people cannot even begin to fathom or comprehend. When compared to Bachchan, the most amazing answer comes from Khanna himself: "I don't want to be number one. I don't want to be that at all. I just want to live from moment to moment and do my work well." Whatever he might say, Vinod Khanna has begun to move in the same direction as Amitabh Bachchan. The industry is now talking about two superstars ruling the firmament. It is as Bhatt puts it: "There is a need in people to make and break heroes. Number one is unfortunately a sitting duck. It is the number two guy who generates the excitement. There's going to be a pitched battle up there." And why not?

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA in Bombay

...his was so complete. I still hold him in ...al esteem. It was a search I had to ...plete. My questions had to be an...wered or not answered.

Q. Would you rather be doing anything else today?

A. No, as an actor, a person who

> I have stopped dreaming now. I want to be open to life as much, whether it gives me happiness, pain, pleasure.

...eives for creative satisfaction, to be in ...ies is best. But you're also playing to ...e gallery so it has its limitations.

Q. Have things changed much in the industry?

A. There is an attitude to film making ...ich is rebellious, people want to ques...o ethics. And there is so much politics. ...ery few people have the time to really ...ate what they want to.

Q. Won't you get tired doing the same kind of roles again and again?

A. I won't do any film I don't want to.

Q. How involved do you get with your roles?

A. If you cannot be total with the moment, you're dissatisfied. I'm not content till I'm convinced. Sometimes, that's taken as interference.

Q. What do you think of the younger heroes today?

A. They remind me of myself a few years ago. I don't think they've been affected by my return. If anything, it is a challenge to give a better performance. Healthy competition inspires.

Q. Are you very professional?

A. No, I'm very lazy, I'm normally late. I wish I could be punctual, but somehow I can't manage it.

Q. How can you survive in this industry without being linked to a heroine?

A. Lucky, I guess.

Q. Do you think you're overworked?

A. Work doesn't tire me at all. What tires me is mediocrity.

Q. How do you feel being a star?

A. I do enjoy being given attention. I accept it, I enjoy it, I respect it. I live for myself. Only then can I live for others.

Q. You make the heroine completely unimportant in your films.

A. God is male, so what can I do?

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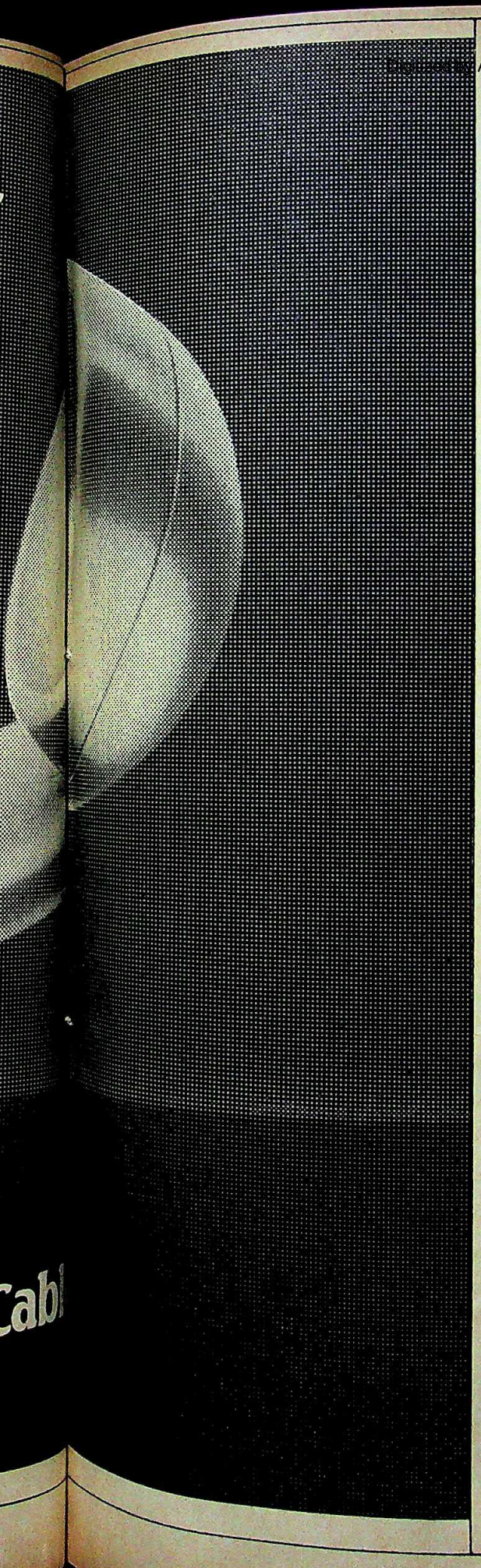

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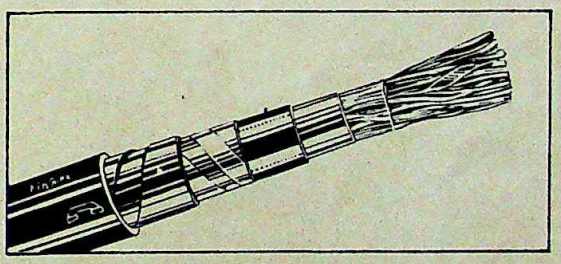

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THE MONSOON

The Long Wait

EL Nino. That may sound Mexican but it is the cause of India's current monsoon woes. In a still inadequately explained phenomenon, a persistent rise in the surface temperature off the Peruvian coast called the El Nino or Little Christ prevents the monsoon clouds from moving swiftly over India. This year, as a result of the El Nino factor, India is experiencing its weakest monsoon in five years.

The poor rains are already affecting kharif crops across the country. Rice crops in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, which account for a quarter of the country's total rice production of 62 million tonnes, have been badly affected. Worse, Gujarat, which produces a quarter of the country's groundnut yield, is facing a devastating dry. And even if the rains come in the second half of the monsoon, groundnut output is likely to fall 10 per cent to 15 per cent short of targeted production. Other crops that may suffer are bajra in Gujarat and Rajasthan, soyabean in Madhya Pradesh and ragi in Karnataka.

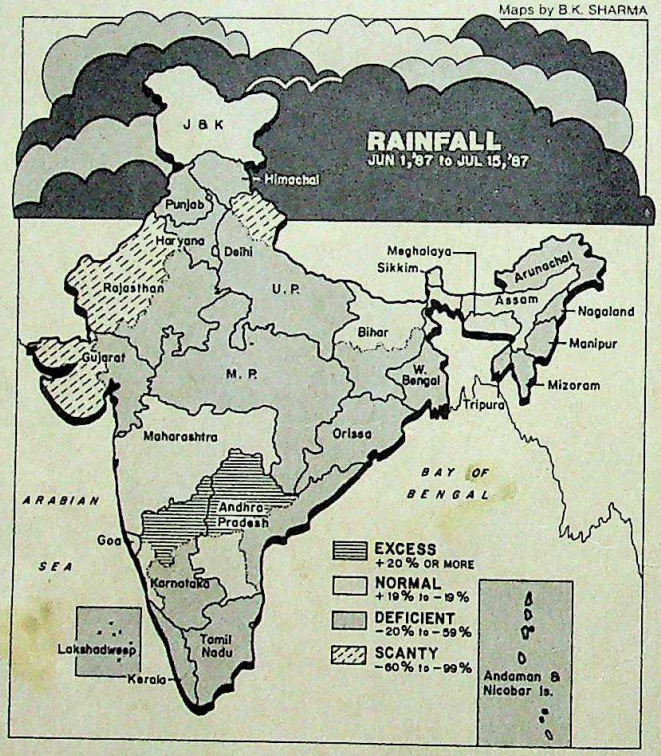
Monsoon rains are crucial for Indian agriculture because 60 per cent of its foodgrain production of 150 million tonnes comes during this season. And despite massive irrigation projects, 72 per cent of the crops are still rain fed.

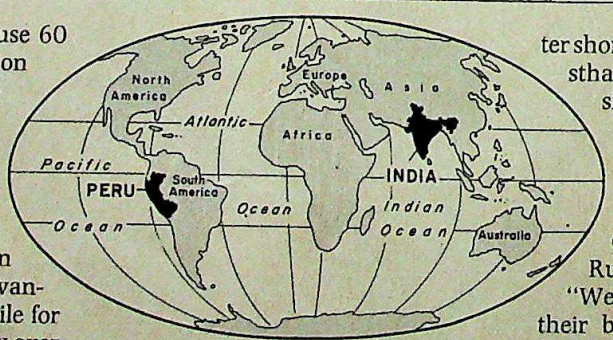
Meteorologists first got wind that something was wrong when the monsoon clouds came to Trivandrum on June 2—a day late. While for the next fortnight it rained heavily over the southern peninsula, it flattered only to deceive. It moved sluggishly over the Vindhyas and condescended to rain over the parched Bihar plains. It then suddenly lost momentum on June 23 and, for the next 11 days, refused to move north-westward.

Just when meteorologists were giving up hope, the clouds started moving lazily towards Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and a little over Jammu and Kashmir. A sweltering Delhi waited in vain. On July 20, when it still didn't cross the capital, it made dubious history by becoming the first time in 80 years that it hadn't done so. And it was not Delhi that was causing concern. Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat were still waiting with parched lips for the deluge.

Last week in Delhi as meteorologists sat down to make a mid-monsoon review, the bright sunshine outside only darkened their gloomy countenances.

Maps by B.K. SHARMA





Out of the 35 meteorological subdivisions in the country, only 13 received excess or normal rainfall, as compared to 25 last year. As many as 20 subdivisions had extremely deficient rainfall, varying from below 20 per cent to 50 per cent of normal.

Almost every state was hit. In the south, while Kerala suffered for the second year in succession, in interior Karnataka and Tamil Nadu the situation was equally dismal. Most of Mad... Pradesh was affected while the ... plateau, and the Gangetic region... West Bengal also reported deficient ... fall. Only three days of good rain fell ... parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and ... machal Pradesh. But it was the grou... nut belts of Saurashtra, the rice-grow... hills of west Uttar Pradesh and ... Rajasthan that were seriously affect...

While meteorologists are waiting ... a late revival of the monsoon, the Un... Agriculture Ministry has been advis... the states to go in for cont... gent crops. In Orissa, for ... stance, after the delayed ra... prevented sowing of ri... shorter maturing varie... have been introduced. In G... jarat, farmers have been ... vised to sow the more re... ient sunflower instead ... groundnut.

Meanwhile, the Ut... Pradesh Government ... stepped up daily power su... ply for agricultural pum... sets from six hours to ... hours to ensure that the fie... are irrigated. Haryana a... Punjab are following su... This may help improve t... yield but will push up t... production costs. As a sen... ministry official says: "The... are going to be plenty of d... gruntled farmers this year."

It was not only droppi... food production that w... worrying. While in the rest... the country the drinking w... ter shortage had eased, in Gujarat, Raj... sthan and west Madhya Pradesh t... situation was precarious. In ma... places, handpumps have re... dry. With river levels droppin... cities dependent on reservo... face water shortages to... G. Ghosh, joint secretary, Uni... Rural Development Ministry, say... "We have asked the states to tighte... their belts and take up contingen... measures before the situation becom... alarming." Among the measures sug... gested are to prevent diversion ... groundwater for irrigation and buildi... bunds to trap rains that may fall.

Everything now depends on wh... August and September hold. If it turn... out that things are no better, belea... guered Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi w... have more problems on hand than ju... political dissidence.

—RAJ CHENGAPP

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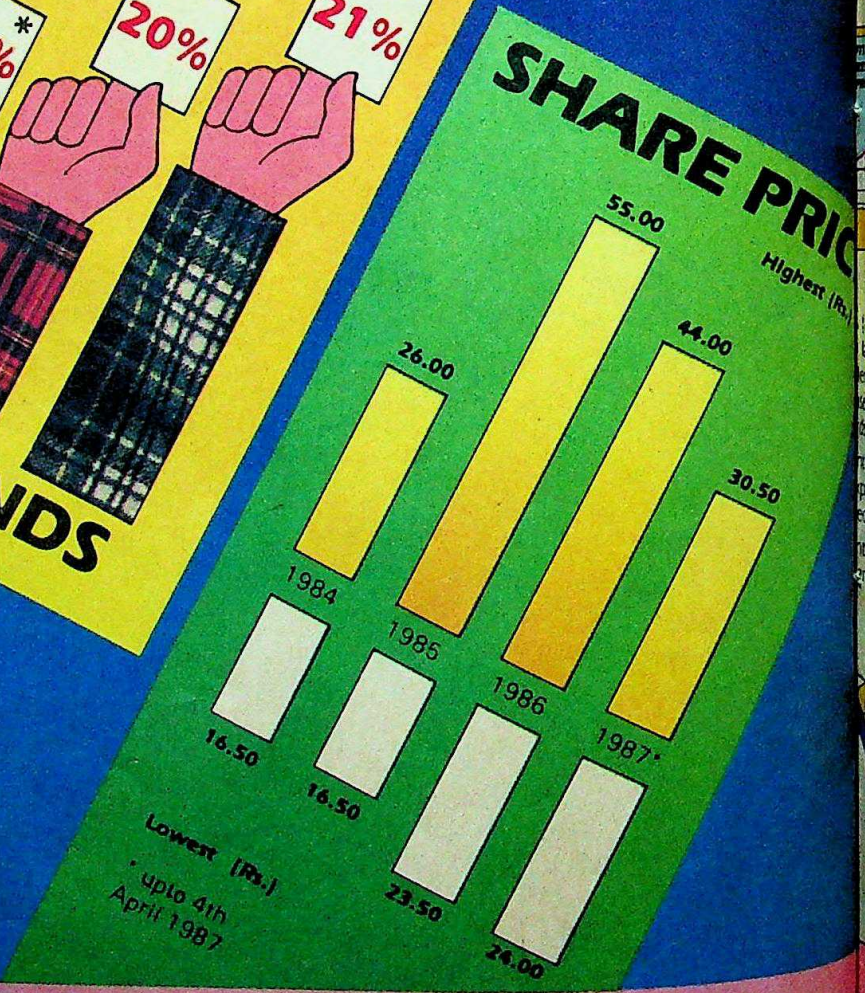

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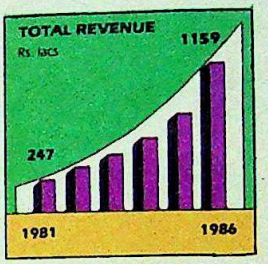

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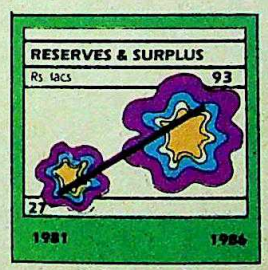

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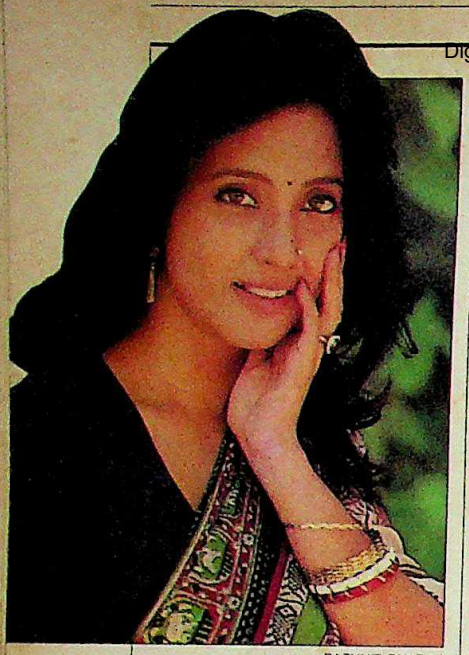


RATHIJIT GHATAK

Moon Moon: grounded

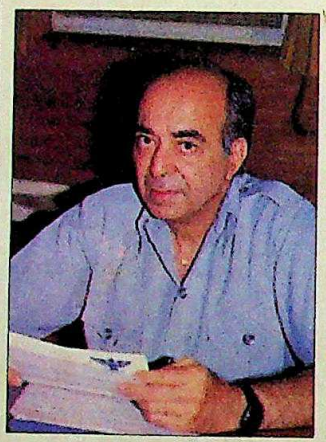
◆ Moon Moon has landed on earth—with a thud, grounded by angry plane passengers, with two journalists in the vanguard who were obviously far from **Moon Moon Sen**-struck.

Sen, who had come to Bhubaneswar for a cine function, was congratulating herself—and friend Chitra Sharma, who was with her—at having made—hop, skip, jump and trip—by the proverbial whisker, to the plane. The officials were obliging.But the media men were not amused and prevailed upon the captain to pilot Sen and Sharma off the plane. Chivalry ain't what it used to be. Says Sen: "Am I in the category A list of terrorists that the captain treated me so shabbily? I went there as a state guest and, as such, did not expect such treatment from the captain." Time waits for no moon.

◆ Television was too small for them. The Kapoor khandaan. And **Shashi** too big for it, literally too. But in his TV debut he has squeezed in—as Felu, the popular detective character created by Satyajit Ray and re-created and re-created by son Sandip for the serial, *Satyajit Ray Presents-II* to be aired shortly.

The aging and increasingly versatile Shashi seems to have suddenly indulged in a spurt of cinematic activity. He will don the director's cap for the mammoth Indo-Soviet venture: *Ajube* in Hindi, *The Black Prince* (Amitabh Bachchan in the title role) in Russian. He has just returned from location-hunting in Yalta. Meanwhile, the British film *Sami and Rosie* in which he co-stars opposite Claire Bloom is also readying for release. The Kapoor is obviously still in full bloom.

◆ Tiny Rowland did it. Ram Nath Goenka keeps doing it. The Birlas made a habit of it.



Singh: spiked

And now industrialist Vijaypat Singhania has joined the breed of fire-breathing, editor-eating press dragons.

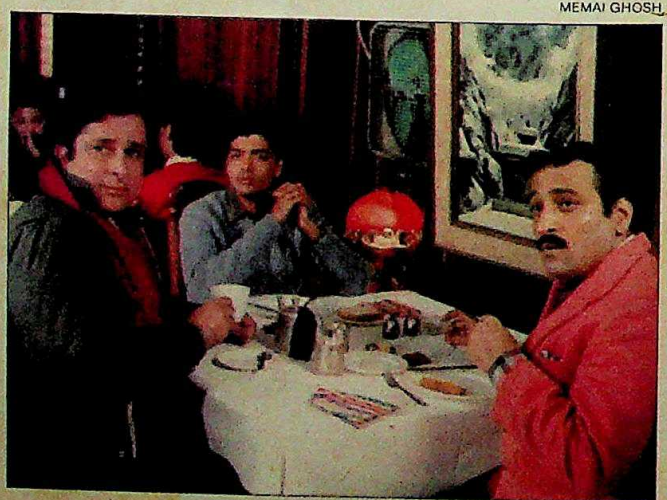
S. Nihal Singh of *The Indian Post* is the latest editor to be spiked. Last fortnight, the elegant *Post*man stamped out of the news office that he had so tenderly set up a few months ago: "I am sad that I am leaving. It was my baby. We started from scratch and made it into what it is now....The paper was too highbrow for them." The management wanted to go the low road to instant success, cash on delivery. Only, now Singhania's left holding Singh's baby.

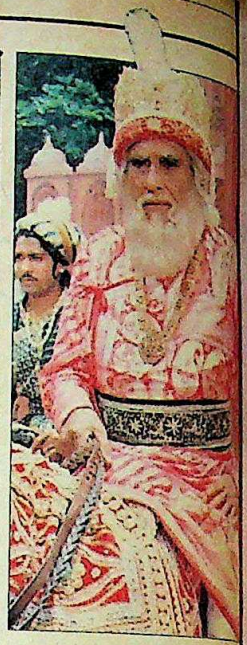
◆ It was only fitting that the old turk should play the last Moghul. Veteran actor **Ashok Kumar** is a dead ringer for the role of Bahadur Shah Zafar—the poet-emperor who was the last one to sit on the throne of Delhi—in B.R. Chopra's *Aakhri Mughal*, reportedly slated for a bow in the Doordarshan durbar on August 20. *Hum Log* to Mughal Log—via the Ramayan—from being just a commentator after the acting, the thespian has now jumped centre-screen.

Director Chopra is happy with his choice: "Ashok Kumar is a competent actor and we will not have to use too much make-up on him. He is the right age." Obviously, *Buniyaad*'s mainstay was not verite—the black showed through the grey. Watch out, Alok Nath, this old man, he might take all.

Kapoor: TV debut

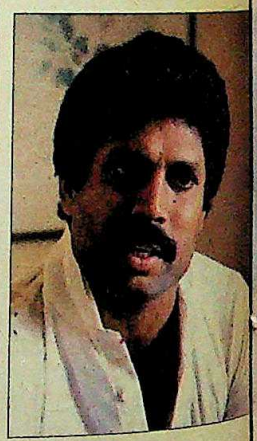
MEMAI GHOSH





Kumar: last Moghul

◆ Once there was a syn cated sports column Sunny's. Now there's a other—**Kapil Dev** Featur And it's not just cricket. He like to step off the beaten pit



Kapil: catching up

Sprint queen P.T. Usha h joined in the relay of co ments, straight from the tra Says Kapil: "So many spo are neglected by the media. like to cover tennis, athletics

But the sight fixed rig now in Kapil's field is the co ing World Cup. Striking o abroad, he has caught Te Lewis and a prominent Pa stani player for expert co ments on the Cup. The pric No comments. "I'd like to ke that to myself," says he.

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Battered Victor

A nation-wide opinion poll reveals whether Rajiv Gandhi can win a mid-term election, and how many Lok Sabha seats the Congress(I) will get. It also surveys opinion on several current controversies, including V.P. Singh's expulsion and the Bofors scandal.

COVER STORY 22

Mysterious Swiss Deals

Even as the controversial figure of Ajitabh Bachchan mysteriously disappeared from Switzerland, investigations revealed that his business transactions involved payments of several crore rupees. The source of the money, though, continues to be in question.

CURRENT EVENTS 32

Cautious Optimism

A complex mix of factors will influence the fate of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene will have to navigate the rapids of local feeling carefully if he is to pull the accord through. An analysis of the problems he has to face.

NEIGHBOURS 60

A Spreading Malady

Suddenly, backaches have become the great leveller. They are striking the young and old, and afflicting people from all walks of life. The strains of modern living seem to tell more on the back. And curing a backache is a problem. A report.

HEALTH 126

The Luck of the Draw

The Churhat Children Welfare Society, run by Union Minister Arjun Singh's relatives, continues to draw flak for its controversial fund-raising lottery scheme. A report on how, in spite of the criticism, the organisation continues to be favoured.

INVESTIGATION 82

Heading for Calamity

The failure of the monsoons over two-thirds of the country, signalled the worst drought of the century. Though the Government has initiated many measures to tackle the situation, there is little doubt that the crisis will deepen over the coming months.

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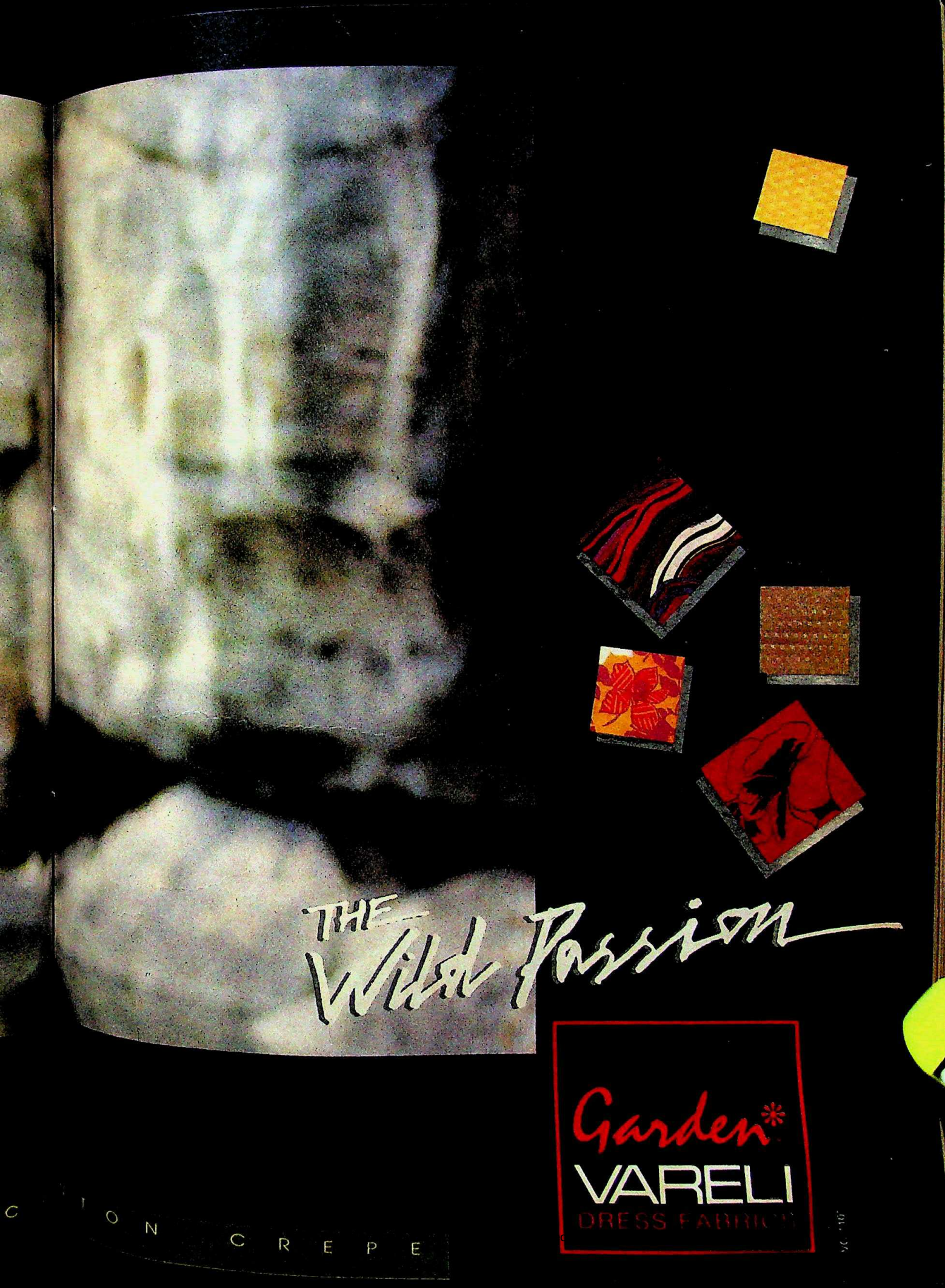
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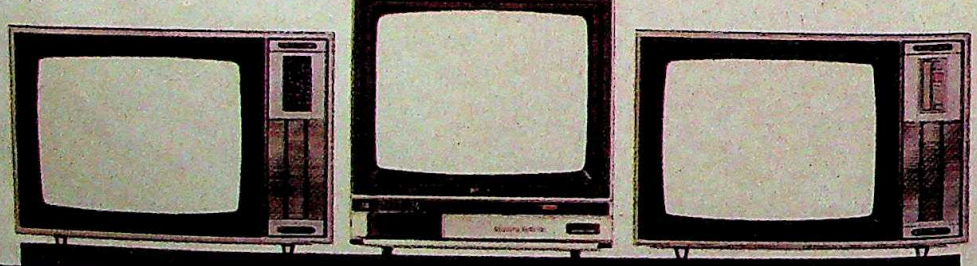

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PUBLIC opinion is very much like gravity, a quiet unseen force, which keeps a democracy, especially a continental one like India's, on the ground. Although public opinion often finds expression in demonstrations, newspaper editorials and, more rarely, in mass movements, it is usually a silent force which any politician worth his salt will ignore at his own peril.

But this kind of evaluation of public opinion is, by its very nature, subjective. Therefore, it is little wonder that opinion polls have become an integral part of elections in every democracy in the world. In the West, these are taken so seriously that the result is treated as a foregone conclusion even before polling starts.

India hasn't reached that stage as yet. But opinion polls have found increasing acceptance, especially in the last five years. They have become as much a part of the election scenario as hiring advertising agencies for election campaigns. There are now polls at the drop of a news event, but almost all of them represent opinions in the metro cities which are sometimes projected as the opinion of the nation. The main reason for this is probably the considerable expenditure involved in undertaking a nation-wide poll in a large, diverse and predominantly rural country with poor communications, like India, where a representative sample would have to be in excess of 10,000, as against 1,000 to 1,500 in countries such as the UK or the US.

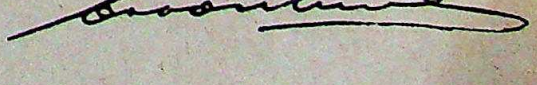
SINCE its election forecast of 1979, INDIA TODAY *has been a firm believer in opinion polls as a scientific method of gauging public opinion. Other than the election forecasts,* INDIA TODAY *had also experimented, for over a year, with quarterly polls in state capitals, but discontinued them because they were not truly representative of the whole country.*

INDIA TODAY *has now decided to commission a truly national opinion poll every six months, to be conducted by psephologist Prannoy Roy and* MARG *(Marketing and Research Group), on the well-proven election model used by the magazine for the 1980 and 1984 general elections. The uniqueness of this model is that it translates voting intention into Lok Sabha seats, which is really what determines who will rule.*

Besides the key question of voting, other topical questions will also be asked. This inaugural poll's questions were caught in the political maelstrom which broke soon after the presidential election. The poll was planned for the Independence day issue, and the 100-odd interviewers of MARG *were scheduled to fan out to over 30 representative, parliamentary constituencies all over the country when the expulsion of three MPs and V.P. Singh from the Congress(I) took place. A major logistical feat was involved in adding new questions, in all the various languages, to gauge opinion on the expulsion of V.P. Singh.*

An opinion poll of this kind assumes special significance as the silent, illiterate majority which inhabits over five lakh villages has few channels of expressing its opinion between elections. The result is that the close-circuited, incestuous world of urban India, with its vociferous press, believes that whatever it thinks is what the nation wants. In fact, the present INDIA TODAY-MARG *poll clearly demonstrates the existence of a wide urban-rural divide on many issues which currently agonise the city populace.*

An opinion poll provides a snapshot at a particular moment of time. Undoubtedly, there will be some who agree with the findings of this poll, and some who don't. Some will find the Congress(I)'s Lok Sabha score too high, and others may find it too low. But as psephologist Roy says: "In an opinion poll, there is no place for preconceived notions."



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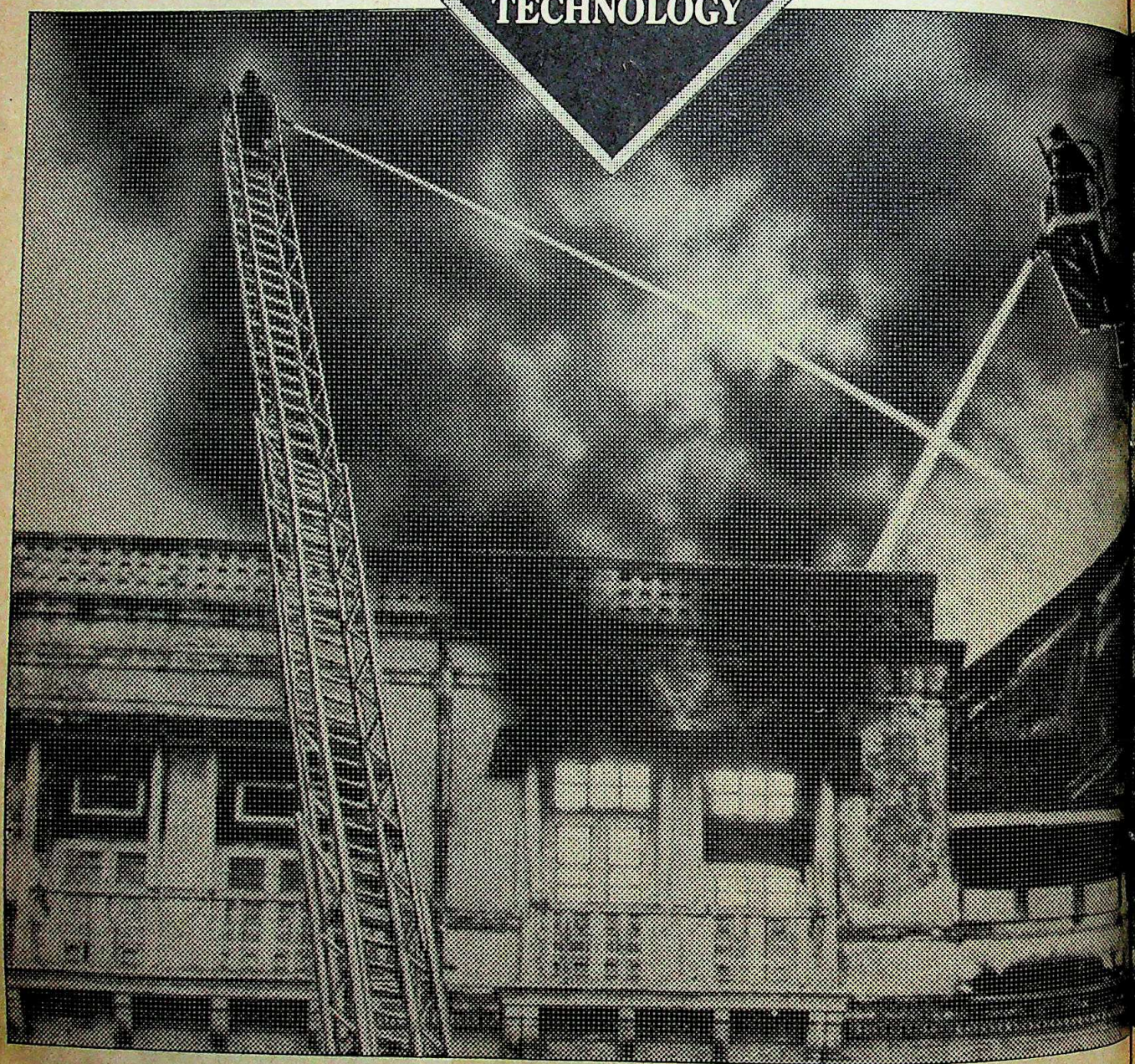

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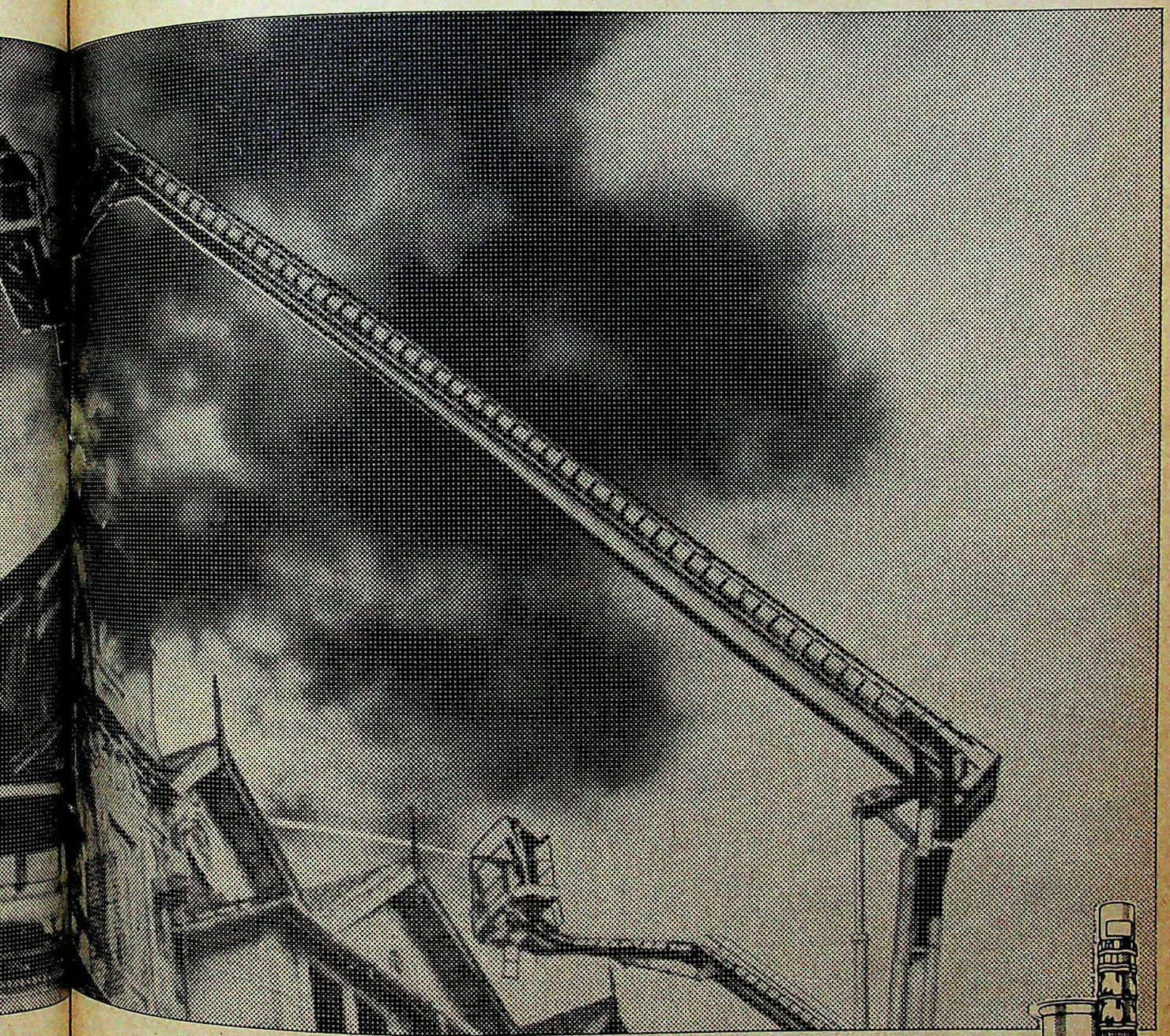

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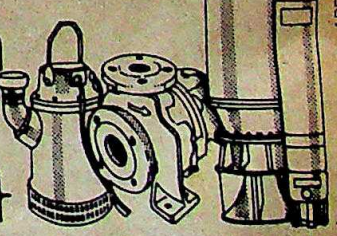

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POOR LEADERSHIP

Your thought-provoking and comprehensive cover story ("The Challengers", August 15) made interesting reading. It is Rajiv and only Rajiv who is responsible for the crisis that Congress(I) is facing today. He is surrounded by men who have given him wrong advice. Yet, if Rajiv wants to stay in power he must get rid of them and rely more on his own independent judgement.

Ahmedabad — ASHA SINGH

■ It is really unfortunate that in our country efficient, talented, honest and dynamic men always get the boot. V.P. Singh was perhaps the most honest finance minister that we have had for years. Yet he was kicked out of the Cabinet and the party without any valid reason. Such is the fate of good and truthful leaders in this country.

Jamshedpur — BHUPEN BOSE

■ It is really tragic that the one-time favourite of the Indian electorate is now losing his popularity. Yet this may prove to be more a case of hasty judgement than rational thinking. Rajiv should be given another chance to prove his worth. His success on the economic front cannot be ignored.

Calcutta — DILIP ROY

DAMAGING ROLE

Your editorial comment ("The Credibility Question", August 15) was timely. You have rightly pointed out that motivated campaigns by the newspapers will only serve to damage the bedrock of a free and fearless press. The primary duty of a responsible newspaper is to mould public opinion in the right direction. But the abuse of freedom is certainly reprehensible.

Kottayam — V.K. SATHYAVAN NAIR

INDIFFERENT ATTITUDE

Your report ("Taking on a Titan", August 15) is an eye-opener for millions of lift-users. It sounds the bell of consumerism. The story establishes the fact that high-profile companies like OTIS skilfully avoid their responsibility of paying compensation.

Calcutta — J. RAM

IDENTITY QUESTION

Your report ("Criminals in Congress", May 31) says that Manohar Chansoria is my brother. In fact, he is my cousin. You have also committed a *faux pas* by publishing somebody else's photograph as mine.

Jabalpur — ALOK CHANSORIA

The errors are regretted. —Editor

BLEAK SCENARIO

Your cover story ("The Spectre of Terrorism", July 31) exposes the lack of intellect and imagination that Rajiv and company have shown in handling the extremely delicate situation in Punjab. No amount of administrative reforms can curb terrorism. Unless the common people are won over and taken into confidence, the fight against terrorism will amount to mere shadow-boxing. Something has to be done quickly.

Sorbhog — BIBEK DAS

■ The killing of 72 persons by terrorists within 24 hours is a clear pointer to the fact that there is nothing resembling law and order in Punjab and its neighbouring states any longer. Yet Home Minister Buta Singh claims that terrorism has been nearly wiped out and these attacks are only stray incidents, committed by some desperate groups. The truth is different.

Chandigarh — GURCHARAN KAPOOR

ALARMING STATE

Your special feature on Tamil Nadu ("Decade of Decay", July 31) was long overdue. In fact, the seeds of this trend were sown in the early '70s when corruption started being institutionalised and when a reign of terror was unleashed in the state. Under the rule of the Kazhagams, all moral values and standards in politics and public administration have gone to the dogs. The time when things are set right may be too late.

Hyderabad — G. VENKATESH

TARNISHED IMAGE

It has been rightly pointed out in your special report ("A Disillusioned State", July 31) that Hegde is no longer seen as the Mr Clean of the South. The Janata Party's image has been greatly tarnished by the chief minister. It is time that something darstic is done.

Dibrugarh — PUNIT KESMANI

SERVILITY TEST

It seems that Congress(I) candidates for the presidential elections have to pass a test in servility before they are deemed fit by the high command ("President has no Powers", July 31). Thus, we had Zail Singh's famous sweeping-the-floor statement and now Venkataraman has followed suit by saying that the President has no powers. He has ensured his fitness for, what he has himself described as, an impotent post.

Mhow — DEV KUMAR VASUDEVAN

DAMAGING STRIFE

In the context of the confusion created by the controversy between Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi, your comment ("A Moral Authority", July 31) was appropriate. The differences between the two highest personages of the country have hurt the dignity of both. It is imperative that the Constitution define the President's authority in the clearest terms possible. Otherwise such conflicts will continue to occur again.

Bombay — S.E. MEERZA

DRASTIC ACTION

Apropos your guest column ("People vs Party", July 31) it seems that until Rajiv Gandhi is able to take some drastic action to revamp his image, he might well find himself on his way out. He has only one choice—improve his image and that of his party or go into oblivion. It is now for rajiv to chose.

Balangir — SANTOSH KUMAR BALANGIR

NO APPLICATION

In your article ("Terrorism's Human Tragedy", July 15) you have referred to the killing of Subhash Chander, lineman of the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB). None of his dependents have asked for a transfer from their present posting. Therefore, the question of refusing a transfer does not arise.

Patiala — LT-COLONEL B.S. CHAHAL

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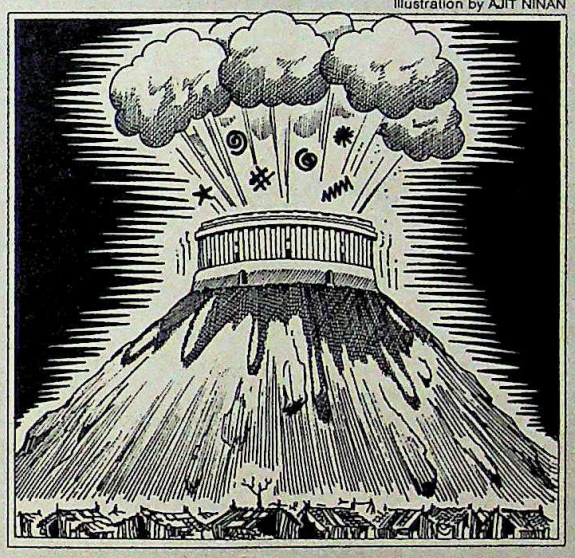
Dangerous Decline

EVEN in the tumultuous history of India's Parliament, there has hardly ever been a period as turbulent as has been witnessed in recent weeks: papers being snatched from a minister, the culprit being expelled for the entire session, accusations made about opposition stalwarts being agents of foreign intelligence outfits, a member of the ruling party being asked to leave the Lok Sabha, a prolonged boycott of the Rajya Sabha by virtually the entire opposition, charges of partiality being hurled against the chair, and a great deal else—including a member, who was not allowed to speak in a major debate, being forced to say his piece outside the House.

Most of these incidents are without precedent in a country where several other unfortunate parliamentary events do have precedents. So, though parliaments tend to be noisy and uproarious when major debates are on or when a government is under intense attack, last fortnight's events were quite extraordinary. Even after making allowances for the traditional unruly behaviour of Indian legislators, there can be no questioning the fact that Parliament has brought no credit to itself by the manner in which it has been conducting its affairs. When there is more shouting than speaking, when a frustrated opposition forgets all decorum in the effort to drive home a point, and when treasury benches are usually unresponsive and do not make sufficient efforts to accommodate even a numerically insignificant opposition, parliamentarians themselves must ponder over their conduct before nationwide disillusionment sets in.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Indeed, the Opposition's decision to boycott the parliamentary committee that is supposed to go into the Bofors issue, despite several government concessions on the scope of the inquiry, marks a breakdown of the basic spirit of cooperation that is essential if a parliamentary system is to function at all. If all this weren't enough, there are cracks showing in several state assemblies too (as in Bihar, at the moment), while assembly speakers become controversial personalities (as in Tamil Nadu and Bihar) in a manner that was unknown in the past.

If frayed tempers are serving to show up the ragged edges of the system of parliamentary governance itself, there are more serious problems of a long-term nature as well. These involve the poor handling of the question hour (how much real information is actually made available?), the continuing chaos of zero hour (which can quite easily be set right by giving members a set time to say their piece in an orderly fashion), the ineffective scrutiny of several ministries' budgets (because the guillotine is applied on the budget debate), and the plain problem of attendance (several major debates have been conducted without even a quorum in the House).

Poor drafting of legislation passes unchecked despite detailed clause-by-clause consideration by the full House, and the dramatic drop in the time devoted in each session to legislative work tells its own tale about both the quality of parliamentary membership and the amount of Parliament time that is devoted to chaos—at a cost, to the country, of Rs 50,000 per minute. Even the three powerful finance committees (which scrutinise public accounts, estimates and public sector companies) only do post-mortem work, long after the event, and often long after the Government or the concerned undertaking has ceased to care.

All this has occurred at a time when Parliament has been losing ground steadily to an ever more powerful executive, which often treats both Houses with scant respect. Overwhelming majorities, after successive general elections, have virtually guaranteed the passing of government resolutions and bills. Also, there are critics who charge that parliamentary sessions are becoming shorter than they used to be. But this is now a far more serious problem in the states, where assemblies meet for just a couple of weeks, at times, and the business of legislation is done by executive fiat, by misusing the constitutional provision for issuing ordinances, often reissuing ordinances ad infinitum.

A variety of reforms have been suggested on several of these counts, ranging from a more active committee system (so that detailed consideration of legislative clauses is not done in the main House) to providing legislators with some basic training. But smug legislatures have not even cared to codify their privileges, so that the press and the public at large do not get penalised on charges that, by their very nature, cannot be very clear.

Meanwhile, the immediate concern last fortnight was the restoration of a minimum of cooperation between the Government and the Opposition. Early in Rajiv Gandhi's career as prime minister, opposition stalwarts were fulsome in their praise of how the young head of government had a much better attitude to the Opposition than Mrs Gandhi. And indeed, Rajiv did make it a point to consult the Opposition on several key issues. If things have moved so far from then, so that basic trust and cooperation have broken down, it is time for everyone to pause awhile and look for ways of getting on with the business of Parliament.

What everyone concerned needs to remember is that the essence of parliamentary functioning is to thrash out issues through debate, to show a spirit of accommodation, and to do it all with a sense of fair play. Without these, issues will inevitably be settled on the streets, and that is no alternative.

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Audit Tangle

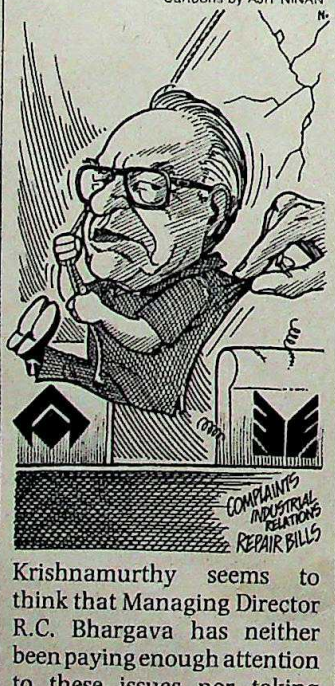
● The truth about Bofors is often not what it appears to be. Take the case of T.N. Chaturvedi, the comptroller and auditor general. Chaturvedi was reluctant to be mentioned in the terms of reference for the parliamentary committee that is to go into the Bofors issue, as someone who would assist the committee in its work. Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar tried but failed, and Defence Minister K.C. Pant had to request Chaturvedi twice before he finally consented.

The auditor general was reluctant because he did not want to be asked by parliamentarians to commit himself on aspects of the deal that his office had not yet audited. And behind this lay the fact that Chaturvedi (whose powers of audit flow directly from the Constitution) has been asking for the papers relating to the Bofors deal, so that his office can do a full audit of the decision-making process. So far, the reply from the Defence Ministry has been that the papers are with the prime minister, and that when the papers do become available they can be shown to Chaturvedi's officials—if they come to the Defence Ministry. Chaturvedi has replied that the auditors are entitled to get the papers (not just be shown them), and to specify when and where they want the papers, and that under the Defence Ministry's conditions an audit cannot be done. The tussle continues. But so much for the Government wanting a full inquiry into the whole affair.

Ill Feelings

● Maruti Udyog, the public sector car manufacturing company, has come under a great deal of flak in recent months. And the cracks are finally beginning to show in the boardroom. Part-time Chairman V. Krishnamurthy—who is also chairman of the Steel Authority of India Ltd—is unhappy with the company's record on several counts: handling customer complaints, industrial relations and addressing the problem of excessive repair bills.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



Krishnamurthy seems to think that Managing Director R.C. Bhargava has neither been paying enough attention to these issues nor taking proper corrective action.

The result: a short while ago, Krishnamurthy told the Ministry of Industry that he would like to step down from the chairmanship of the company. But he was persuaded to stay on. An exit could, however, still be on the cards.

Southern Set-back

● Insiders within the country's intelligence community often refer to the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) as the AIIS—the All-Indian Iyengar and Iyer Service—because of the plethora of south Indians in their midst. But the AIIS lobby has suffered a set-back. With the impending retirement of RAW chief S.E. Joshi, two of his senior deputies, R. Govindarajan and A.K. Verma, were waiting in the wings. Govindarajan, the whispers said, had the backing of Minister of State for Internal Security P. Chidambaram. But Verma, an accomplished career administrator, has come out the winner. But the AIIS isn't quite finished. Verma's vacated post is expected to go to S. Swaminathan, who is completing a highly successful tenure as head of the Aviation Research Centre. Swaminathan in turn will be replaced by "Nat" Iyer, who is into the final months of a posting abroad.

Endless Wait

● Increasingly, the principle in the Government seems to be that those not entitled to government housing should get it, while those for whom government houses are meant wait in the queue. Ever since K.P.S. Menon flew in from Beijing in February to take charge as foreign secretary, he has had to mark time in a two-bedroom transit flat in the External Affairs hostel in New Delhi, while his two predecessors—Romesh Bhandari and A.P. Venkateswaran—continue to occupy spacious government bungalows. Venkateswaran took premature retirement last January, and Bhandari retired even earlier.

Bachchanoly

● Amitabh Bachchan is not the best-known expert on India's freedom movement or Jawaharlal Nehru's role in Indian public life. Criticism had therefore mounted against his being considered for the chairmanship of the implementation committee for commemorating the 40th anniversary of Independence (this month) as well as the Nehru centenary (in 1989). Perhaps because of this, Bachchan was eventually named only as an ordinary member of the committee, with Sheila Dixit being made chairman. But Bachchan, it seems, is no longer a very enthusiastic flag-waver. At the second meeting last month, of the overall national committee that has been formed to lay down the broad guidelines, Bachchan was a notable absentee.

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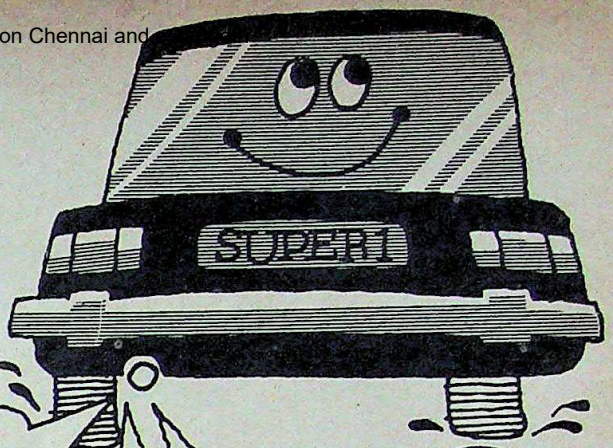

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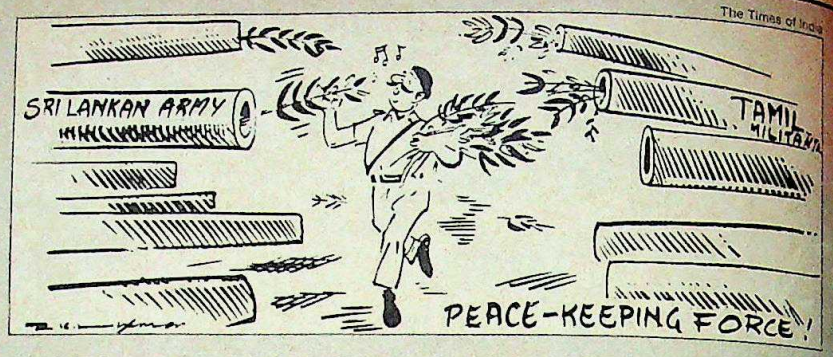

• *Rajiv's sweetness and simplicity appealed to me. He was gentle and soft-spoken. The entire nation, at that time, believed the same as I did. Like the rest of the nation, I am today disappointed, disillusioned.*

■ GIANI ZAIL SINGH in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *We say A for apple, B for bat, and C for cat. Why not we teach A for Allah, B for Buddha and D for Devi?*

■ R. VENKATARAMAN in *The Week*

• *I challenge anyone in the country or even in the world to prove that I am involved in either the Fairfax or the Bofors scandals and I am ready to quit not only politics but also films.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *Sunday Mail*

• *I believe him (the prime minister) when he says there was no middleman. He himself was there.*

■ ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN in *Sunday*

• *The message (for Sri Lankan Tamils) is: Forgive. I have forgiven them—if they lay down their arms.*

■ J.R. JAYEWARDENE, Sri Lankan President in *The Hindu*

• *I am not asking for a mid-term poll.... My asking for a mid-term poll is not going to make an impact on him, so I don't make appeals or demands which are to no avail. Rajiv Gandhi is not a person who goes by appeals or demands.*

■ CHANDRA SHEKHAR, Janata Party president, in *The Sunday Observer*

• *Where are the dissident MLAs in Uttar Pradesh? They are only in the newspapers.*

■ BIR BAHADUR SINGH in *Sunday*

• *What Mr Gandhi has sent (in the form of the reshuffle) is a signal that the nature of decision-making will change, and by doing so he has conceded a very important demand of a substantial section of his partymen.*

■ Editorial comment in *The Telegraph*

• *It was Kapil Dev who won the World Cup for us when we were not expected to even qualify for the knock-out stage.... It is invariably the defending champion who gets top seeding even though he may be in poor form. Kapil must be given the opportunity to defend the title.*

■ SUNIL GAVASKAR in his syndicated column

• *One should retire when one is good enough.... The public usually remembers you by your last performances.*

■ IMRAN KHAN in *Sportsworld*

• *My parents said I'll make a good politician. They had said that I would make a good actress and they were proved right. So I have faith in their decision.*

■ SRIDEVI in *Star and Style*

• *Today, I am able to tackle any kind of role—except that of a disco dancer. Well, perhaps, even that.*

■ DHARMENDRA in *Movie*

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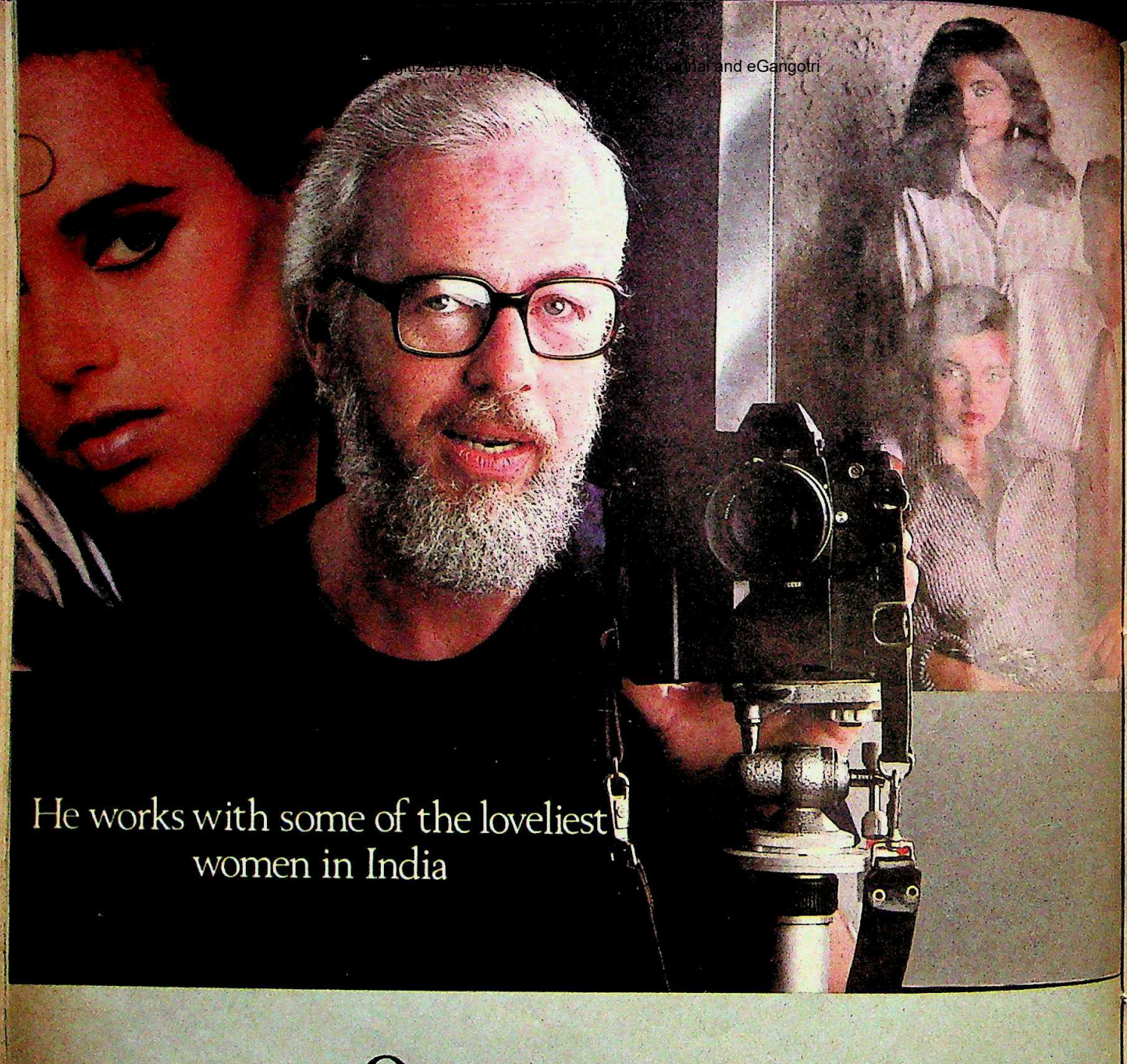

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I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica color film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film, Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

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Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

MARKED SHEETS

■ Stories of the lackadaisical manner in which examination papers are corrected are legion among all the more discerning students who take them. So, when some students of Midnapur district went to look up their results, 50 of them were not overly surprised to find no sign of their English marks.

Their irate parents, however, screamed blue murder and the higher secondary board officials hurriedly rang up the head inspector in Calcutta. Bristling at charges of his 'carelessness', the inspector pointed to his assistant examiner—who swore he had nothing to do with the mysterious disappearance. The avoidable formal inquiry became inevitable.

It turned out that the inspector was correcting the answer papers one morning, when his wife insisted that he buy the groceries instead. Stuffing the sheets under a pillow, he went off in a huff. Meanwhile, the lady of the house found she was having trouble lighting the stove. Finding some innocuous looking papers sticking out from under a pillow, she shoved them—without a thought—into the stove.

She got the fire going all right, but all the board officials landed up with was a pile of charred remains.

KEY STROKES

■ He may spend most of his time tinkering with teeth, but he can be a pretty smooth keyboard operator when the mood, and especially, the competition arises.

Dr Rajinder Singh, 43, dentist from Theog in Himachal Pradesh is keyed up to an unusual hobby—he types in his free time. So with his natural proclivity for what he calls "the rhythm of the keys", he was an obvious contestant in the world typewriting championship in Florence. And just to show that true lovers of the machine can do better than all those stenographers, Singh did a magnificent tap dance on the keys that netted him the top slot.

In this traditionally female-dominated activity—the second and third spots were won by Czechoslovakian and Hungarian women respectively—Singh zoomed to success with a record average speed of 493 key strokes a minute—at more than 99.97 per cent accuracy—in a 30-minute speed test. In comparison, a good office steno types at about 300 strokes a minute. Singh was only acting true to type. He had won the last championship in Bulgaria as well.

CRIME CAPER

■ Fools in love set out to build castles in the air. And even circumvent the restrictions of the law in doing so. But not all of them get away, as one young man called Razi from Rasoolpur in Gorakhpur district realised recently.

This paramour wanted to earn a quick fortune in order to marry his sister-in-law. Being jobless, that wasn't exactly easy. So he decided to go for it anyway—which, for him, was the wrong way. He hit upon a scheme to swindle the watch shop-owner, Prasad, by sending him a note threatening dire consequences if the man didn't pay up Rs 50 lakh. And of course, Razi signed it, not in his own name, but in that of a dangerous criminal of the area.

With time running out, Prasad panicked—straight into the arms of the police, who posted armed enforcers around him. Still, the scared shopkeeper couldn't even muster enough courage to make the money-drop. So a cop obliged in his place. When Razi saw a man placing a bag at the stipulated place, he ran forward. No sooner had he picked it up, than he was lifted aloft himself—to be lowered only in a station cell. Needless to say, his lady love has disowned him as well. Unlucky in crime, unlucky in love?

REVEALING RAID

■ He was hungry as hell, and not just for money. When a nimble-fingered patient entered a doctor's private parlour—after the consulting hours, of course—in Vavilla village in Nellore district, little did he realise that more pressing pangs would overcome him.

As the thieving intruder moved stealthily towards the main bedroom, he was waylaid by an inviting feast of rice and curds on the dining table. But that only served to whet his appetite further, and he soon emerged triumphantly from the larder with 20 mangoes—which he polished off. With his gastronomic needs satisfied, the dandy decamper turned towards the mirror, liberally doused himself with perfumed water, slicked back his hair and then spun around to inspect his surroundings.

He hit on a tape-recorder, a wrist-watch, a radio and cash—Rs 1,000 worth. Then he found a fund of recorded video cassettes. But this discriminating double-dealer revealed he had the tastes of his times—instead of picking up the lot, he made off with the cassettes of only the latest Telugu film songs. Obviously, he felt, old was not gold.

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Accord and Discord

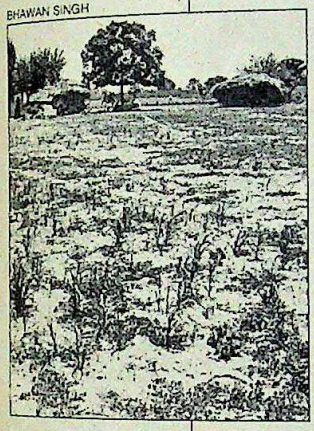
SHYAM TEKWANI

The Tigers' teeth were being painfully extracted

ACCORD and discord shared the fortunes of the fortnight in somewhat equal measure. Across the Palk Straits, the Tigers' teeth were being painfully extracted as the Tamil militants' arms surrender, under the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, got reluctantly under way. But at home, the ghost of Bofors was still kicking back as the uproar in Parliament and the Government's refusal to widen the scope of the inquiry, led to disruptions.

But the ghost of the fortnight was the demon of drought that cast its skeletal shadow over a frighteningly large area, devastating the food harvest. About 21 states were affected by the century's driest spell while, in the ultimate irony, the rest suffered floods. The results are alarming. The country's crippling power cuts are nothing compared to the coming rural economic crunch.

BHAWAN SINGH



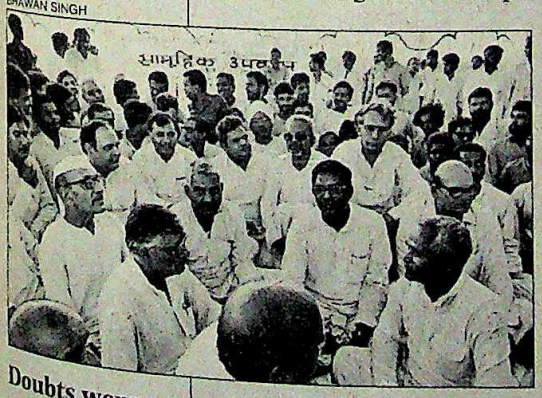
The demon of drought cast its skeletal shadow

It was, in the end, a depressing backdrop to what should have been a celebratory occasion—40 years of Indian Independence. Instead, the gang of five that project themselves as the alternate leadership were showing their independence in typically Gandhian garb—a day-long fast at the Mahatma's samadhi—as a token protest against corruption. The act only succeeded in casting fresh doubts about their hunger for power. Meanwhile, their target went one better. In tones uncomfortably reminiscent of Richard Nixon, Rajiv declared that neither he nor any member of his family was corrupt.

But in the current context, words obviously speak louder than actions. The incongruity of a man born before independence delivering stern sermons to octogenarian freedom fighters sadly escapes his speech-writers who, in any case, are working overtime with the new strategy—a verbal blitzkrieg at public meetings all over the country and repeated daily on national television.

Other leaders, however, were in ruffled retreat. In the Golden Temple, a high priest chose the low road, leaving the path open to militants. The brutal massacre preceding the retreat indicated that the opium of the militant Sikh masses is not religion but the acrid smell of cordite. The head priest's abdication from the temporal scene is a dangerous development, in the context of the total lack of political dialogue between the Centre and the ravaged state.

BHAWAN SINGH



Doubts were cast about the challengers' hunger for power

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The ghost of Bofors kicked up an uproar

On the corporate front, shades of V.P. Singh painted a plagiaristic parody as a debonair textile tycoon was arrested for saying he was Indian, not British. If that petty propagandist ploy indicated the Government's crackdown on financial freebooters, Win Chadha must be sleeping much easier at night.

But there was good news on the sporting front. The first Indian, and Asian, to win the World Junior Chess Championships was crowned king in the Philippines. In Ireland, another Indian reconfirmed the country's dominance over the international amateur billiard scene with his second world title in succession.

In the larger context, however, the high point of the fortnight was the accord in Sri Lanka and its favourable ramifications for India's status in the region. The two signatories were even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, but whether or not the accord jinx has ended is still to be seen. Watch this space.

—DILIP BOBB

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OPINION POLL
CONGRESS(I)

Battered

INDIA TODAY commissioned MARG (Marketing and Research Group) to conduct an extensive, nation-wide opinion poll, equivalent both in scale and coverage to the accurate poll that the magazine had carried out before the 1984 Lok Sabha elections (see INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1984).

MARG sent out more than 100 trained interviewers to over 200 rural and urban locations across the country. A total of 30 representative constituencies were covered, in which 10,349 registered voters were interviewed. Travelling by bus, train, jeep, bullock-cart and on foot, the interviewers completed this huge task in nine days (from July 23 to July 31), under the supervision of Jyoti Singh, MARG's New Delhi manager.

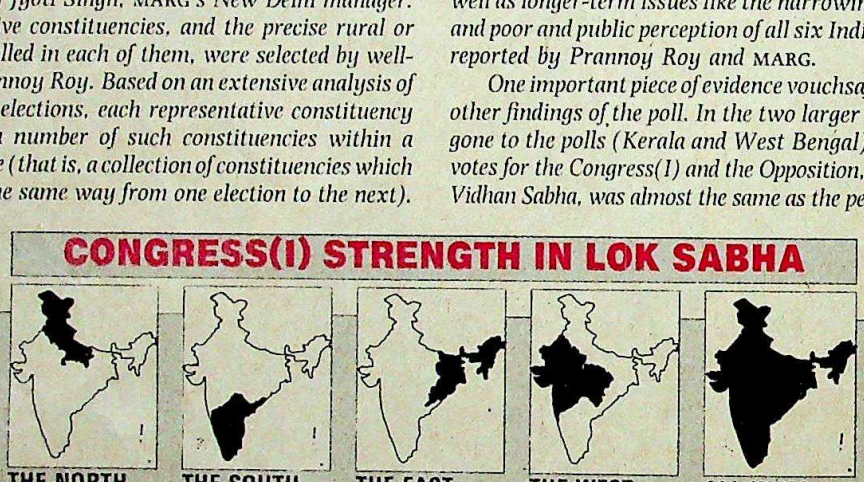
The 30 representative constituencies, and the precise rural or urban locations to be polled in each of them, were selected by well-known psephologist Prannoy Roy. Based on an extensive analysis of detailed data from past elections, each representative constituency was chosen to reflect a number of such constituencies within a homogeneous swing zone (that is, a collection of constituencies which have tended to vote in the same way from one election to the next). These 30 selected constituencies also represent a fairly exact microcosm of the Indian electoral scene in other ways, closely matching the national distribution of age, sex and past voting patterns.

The results of the MARG poll were computerised and analysed last fortnight by Prannoy Roy. The computer first calculated the swings in voting intention for each of the 30 constituencies. These swings were then projected across the respective swing zones, and the number of seats likely to be won by the Congress(I) in a mid-term poll estimated. In this involved exercise, research assistance was provided by Lolita Ghose.

The findings of the opinion poll—covering not just the question of voting in a mid-term poll, but also current controversies like the Bofors scandal and V.P.Singh's expulsion from the Congress(I), as well as longer-term issues like the narrowing of the gap between rich and poor and public perception of all six Indian prime ministers—are reported by Prannoy Roy and MARG.

One important piece of evidence vouchsafes for the accuracy of the other findings of the poll. In the two larger states that have recently gone to the polls (Kerala and West Bengal), the percentage share of votes for the Congress(I) and the Opposition, in the opinion poll for the Vidhan Sabha, was almost the same as the percentage of votes polled in the actual Vidhan Sabha elections held in March 1987.

CONGRESS(I) STRENGTH IN LOK SABHA



THE NORTH — 126 Seats

States	Seats
Haryana	10
Himachal	4
Jammu & Kashmir	6
Punjab	13
Uttar Pradesh	85
Chandigarh	1
Delhi	7

THE SOUTH — 132 Seats

States	Seats
Andhra	42
Karnataka	28
Kerala	20
Tamil Nadu	39
A.N. Island	1
Lakshadeep	1
Pondicherry	1

THE EAST — 142 Seats

States	Seats
Arunachal	2
Assam	14
Bihar	54
Manipur	2
Meghalaya	2
Mizoram	1
Nagaland	1
Orissa	21
Sikkim	1
Tripura	2
West Bengal	42

THE WEST — 142 Seats

States	Seats
Goa	2
Gujarat	26
Madhya Pradesh	40
Maharashtra	48
Rajasthan	25
Dadra & Ngr. Haveli	1

ALL INDIA — 542 Seats

	THE NORTH	THE SOUTH	THE EAST	THE WEST	Total Congress(I) Seats	Total Lok Sabha Seats	% of Seats
1987 MID TERM (23–31 JULY)	65	79	79	100	323	542	59.6
1984	114	71	96	134	415*	542	76.6
1980	80	95	60	118	353	527	67.0
1977	3	94	23	34	154	542	28.4

*Includes seats won in Punjab and Assam Lok Sabha elections held in 1985

Tables by RAJEEV MADAN

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Victor

IF Rajiv Gandhi were to call a mid-term parliamentary poll, he would win decisively. If the election had been held between July 23 and July 31, the period during which the INDIA TODAY-MARG opinion poll was conducted across the country, the Congress(I) would have won as many as 323 seats, out of the 542 in the Lok Sabha.

The poll, therefore, points to a substantial drop of 92 seats from the record level of 415 seats that Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) won in the 1984 general elections, but the party will still command a substantial majority, of more than 100 seats, over all the other political parties combined.

In fact, the INDIA TODAY poll contains certain indications that the Congress(I) might win even more than 323 seats; with its informal political allies (like the AIADMK), the party could command over 350 seats if mid-term elections were held—enough for a two-thirds majority.

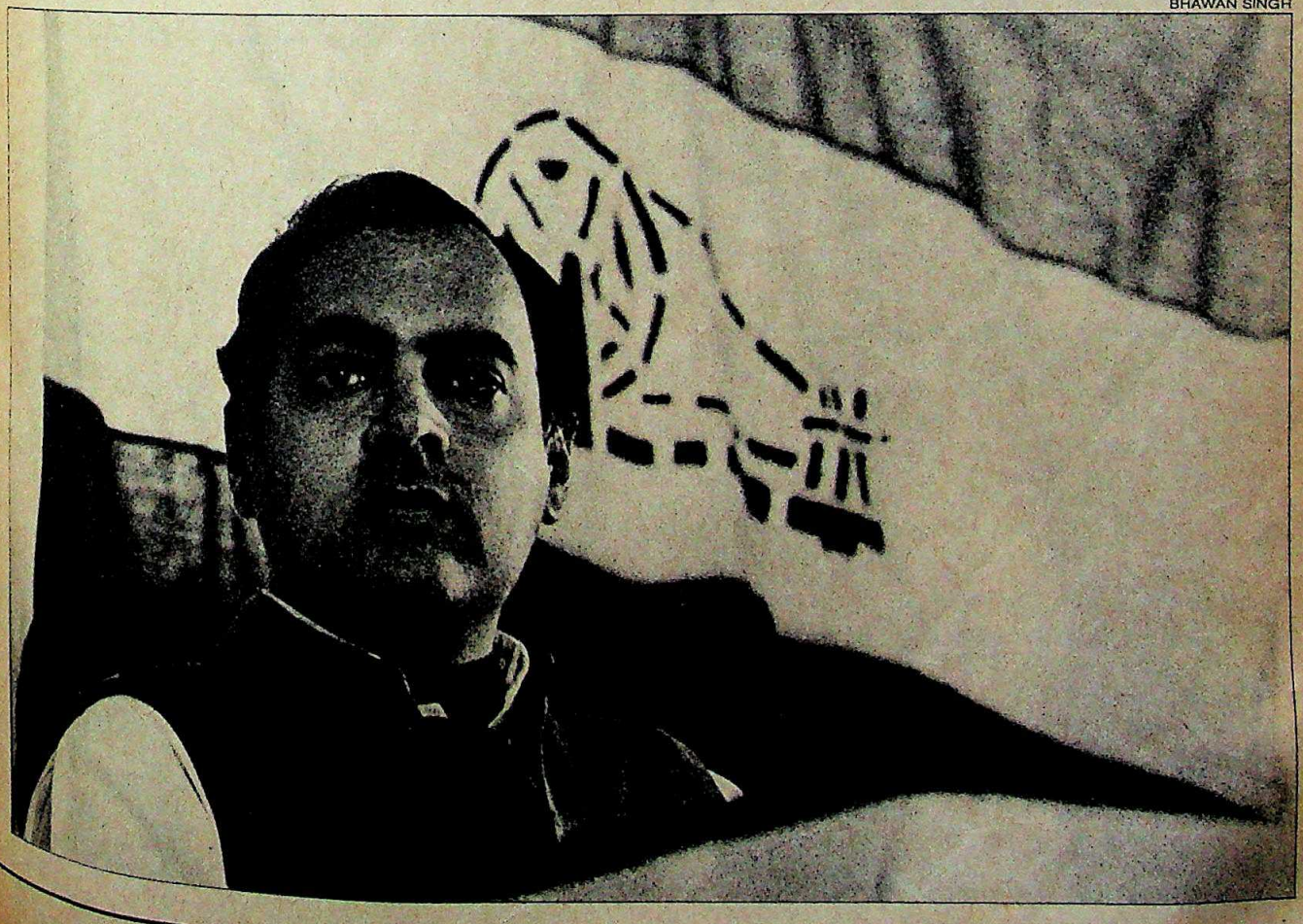
This resounding win would be surprising, because the poll also shows that there is a considerable amount of discontent in the nation over the state of the economy, the law and order situation, corruption, the prime minister's performance and the Punjab problem. Surprisingly, however, the disenchantment with the Government in the wake of the recent corruption charges remains essentially an urban phenomenon *(see box)*. Despite everything, the rural voter, comprising about 70 per cent of the total electorate in the country, continues to be strongly in favour of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the ruling Congress(I).

In the urban areas, the slide in Congress(I) popularity has been dramatic. Always the more volatile, the urban voter came out more strongly in favour of the Congress(I) in the 1984 elections than his rural counterpart. Now, with his expectations not being met, the urban voter has swung equally sharply away from the ruling party.

The poll also shows that an important reason why the widespread disenchantment is not converted into votes for the Opposition is the absence of a united, credible alternative at the Centre. Over 5 per cent of the electorate switch from voting for an opposition party for the Vidhan Sabha to voting for the Congress(I) at the all-India level for Lok Sabha elections. This 5 per cent swing in votes results in an addition of well over 50 seats to the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha. It is this crucial addition of 50 seats, however, that converts what would have otherwise been a wafer-thin majority into a reassuring tally of 323 seats.

Meanwhile, the opinion poll indicates significantly divergent trends in the political fortunes of the two major opposition leaders from the south. While Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's personal popularity remains very high, and carries the Janata Party with him in the state of Karnataka, his Andhra Pradesh counterpart, N.T. Rama Rao, is facing trouble in the popularity stakes. Both Rama Rao and his Telugu Desam party appear to be losing support all across the state of Andhra Pradesh. But Chief Minister Jyoti Basu of the CPI(M) continues to be very popular in West Bengal.

BHAWAN SINGH



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LOK SABHA vs VIDHAN SABHA

The INDIA TODAY-MARG opinion poll shows that the average Indian voter makes a clear distinction between voting for the state Assembly and voting for a general election to Parliament. Those interviewed were asked their voting preferences at both these elections. Two basic patterns of vote-switching emerged:

In states where a credible and united opposition exists, a substantial proportion of the electorate which supports the Congress(I) at the national level switches its support to the Opposition at the state level. The impact of even a 5-per cent switch (or higher) on the seats won by the Congress(I) and the Opposition is considerable. In many constituencies, this can make the vital difference between victory and defeat.

In almost every state, supporters of opposition parties for the Vidhan Sabha elections switch their vote to the Congress(I) for the Lok Sabha. At the all-India level, this has a major effect (well over 50 seats) on the strength of the Congress(I) in a general election to Parliament.

PRIME MINISTER'S PERFORMANCE

Despite widespread discontent on the economy, the law and order situation and other issues of national importance, the prime minister's own popularity remains somewhere between good and average, with only 29 per cent rating his performance as poor. In comparison, 34 per cent rate his performance as being good, while the remaining 37 per cent consider him average. Dissatisfaction with Rajiv's performance is the highest in the north, while as many as 39 per cent in the west gauge his performance in office to be 'good'.

PRIME MINISTER: PERFORMANCE VS EXPECTATIONS

Rajiv Gandhi took over as prime minister almost three years ago. Electors had certain expectations of the young prime minister and, in the poll, they were asked whether he had performed better or worse than they had expected. As many as 30 per cent of those polled applauded Rajiv for outstripping their expectations, but 40 per cent felt that his performance had belied the expectations that he had raised—and much more so in the north and the east than elsewhere. It was a general feature of the poll that the west and south tended to be relatively favourably inclined to both Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I).

WHO WOULD MAKE A BETTER PRIME MINISTER?

The poll sought to investigate the challenge that V.P. Singh and other politicians pose to the beleaguered prime minister. Voters were asked to indicate whether Rajiv Gandhi or V.P. Singh would make a better prime minister. Rajiv was rated similarly against several other national political leaders—chief ministers R.K. Hegde, Jyoti Basu and N.T. Rama Rao, former minister Arun Nehru and BJP leader L.K. Advani. The findings clearly show that Rajiv's most formidable opponent is his erstwhile comrade-in-arms—V.P. Singh.

WHO WOULD MAKE A BETTER PRIME MINISTER (ZONES)?

It may be some consolation to Rajiv Gandhi that the expelled strong man, his cousin Arun Nehru, poses virtually no challenge to him. As expected, Hegde is almost on par with the prime minister in the south, as is Jyoti Basu in the east. V.P. Singh's challenge is the most formidable in the north as well as the east, which account for 268 seats in the Lok Sabha. While Congress(I) supporters overwhelmingly back the prime minister, among the others, V.P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi are running neck and neck in the prime ministerial stakes.

LOK SABHA vs VIDHAN SABHA

STATE	Congress(I) supporters switching to opposition for state assembly elections
ANDHRA	4
KARNATAKA	14
KERALA	7
WEST BENGAL	11

(All figures in percentage)

PRIME MINISTER'S PERFORMANCE

	Good	Average	Bad
NORTH	30	33	37
SOUTH	33	43	24
EAST	31	34	35
WEST	39	36	25
ALL INDIA	34	37	29

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

PM'S PERFORMANCE vs EXPECTATIONS

	Better than expected	Worse than expected	As expected
NORTH	24	46	30
SOUTH	38	30	32
EAST	19	53	28
WEST	34	36	30
ALL INDIA	30	40	30

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

WHO WOULD MAKE A BETTER PM

	Rajiv better	'Other' better	Both equal	Rajiv's lead
Rajiv Gandhi				
vs V.P. Singh	61	34	5	+27
vs R.K. Hegde	66	30	4	+36
vs Jyoti Basu	70	27	3	+43
vs N.T. Rama Rao	73	23	4	+50
vs L.K. Advani	75	22	3	+53
vs Arun Nehru	82	12	6	+70

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

WHO WOULD MAKE A BETTER PM

	RAJIV GANDHI	V.P. SINGH
NORTH	52	45
SOUTH	67	28
EAST	50	44
WEST	68	28
ALL INDIA	61	34
CONGRESS(I) SUPPORTERS	80	17
OTHERS	48	46

('Don't knows' excluded; 'Both equal' accounts for the balance)

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THE BOFORS PAY-OFF

	YES	NO
PM's friends/associates involved?		
All India	72	28
Congress(I) supporters	59	41
Others	79	21
PM himself involved?		
All India	44	56
Congress(I) supporters	21	79
Others	57	43

(Those not aware of the Bofors deal ie 64% and 'Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

V.P. SINGH'S RESIGNATION/EXPULSION

	All India	Congress(I) Supporters	Others
As minister			
Good for the country	36	40	34
Bad for the country	64	60	66
Resignation as minister			
On his own	56	60	53
Forced by the PM	44	40	47
From the Congress(I)			
Good for the party	31	39	26
Bad for the party	69	61	74

(All figures in percentage)

EXPULSION OF ARUN NEHRU & OTHERS

	Rajiv Gandhi fair	Rajiv Gandhi not fair
All India	54	46
Congress(I) supporters	65	35
Non-Congress(I) supporters	47	53

(Those not aware of expulsions ie 59% and 'Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

RAJIV GANDHI

R.K. HEGDE

RAJIV GANDHI

JYOTI BASU

79	19	82	17
50	46	72	25
66	29	47	48
75	21	82	15
66	30	70	27
86	11	85	13
52	43	59	37

(All figures in percentage)

L'AFFAIRE BOFORS

The Bofors gun deal has been evoking a great deal of comment and coverage in the press and in Parliament. Yet, only 36 per cent of the electorate is aware of the controversy surrounding Bofors. Once again, in the more literate states of the south and the east, the awareness levels are 42 per cent to 43 per cent, compared to just 30 per cent in the north and the west.

THE BOFORS PAY-OFFS

Those aware of the Bofors deal were overwhelmingly of the opinion that the prime minister's friends and associates were involved in the huge pay-offs allegedly made by Bofors. Significantly, almost 60 per cent of even Congress(I) supporters believe that Rajiv's friends and associates have been at the receiving end of pay-offs from Bofors.

In early August, the prime minister was constrained to make a statement in the Lok Sabha stating categorically that neither he nor any member of his family had received any money from Bofors. It should, therefore, be a matter of great concern to him that almost 45 per cent of those expressing an opinion on the issue felt that he was personally a beneficiary of the Bofors' largesse. While his own supporters back him staunchly, non-Congress(I) supporters are ranged against him on this issue.

V.P. SINGH'S RESIGNATION/EXPULSION

Just before the field-work on the opinion poll began, the Congress(I) announced the expulsion of V.P. Singh from the party. Ever since Singh resigned as minister of defence, speculation has been rife about his future intentions, and this speculation has been further fuelled by his expulsion.

V.P. Singh's strength appears to be buttressed by his resignation from the Council of Ministers as well as his expulsion from the Congress(I). Around half the electorate is aware of each of these events and, among those aware, the message is unmistakable:

- V.P. Singh's resignation is bad for the country, and
- his departure from the Congress(I) is bad for the party.

This view is held not only by non-Congress(I) supporters but also by Congress(I) backers.

Moreover, as far his resignation as minister is concerned, opinion is fairly evenly divided on whether he resigned or he was 'pushed out' by Rajiv Gandhi. Ironically, V.P. Singh benefits either way—on the one hand, he is seen as a principled politician giving up the trappings of power; on the other hand, he is regarded as becoming a victim of the prime minister's machinations.

ARUN NEHRU'S EXPULSION

A total of 41 per cent of the electorate was aware of the expulsion of Arun Nehru, V.C. Shukla and Arif Mohammed Khan from the Congress(I). Once again, the level of awareness was somewhat higher in the more literate states of the south and the east. Though the departure of V.P. Singh was widely denounced by the electorate, opinion was evenly divided on whether Rajiv Gandhi was right to expel Arun Nehru and the others. While 65 per cent of Congress(I) backers supported Rajiv's action, just 47 per cent of non-Congress(I) voters believed that the prime minister was right to expel Arun Nehru and the others.

PUNJAB

On the sensitive and snow-balling Punjab issue, one-third of the country's electorate believes that the whole problem has been handled quite badly by the Central Government in the last six

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months. In a most surprising and unexpected verdict, the Central Government's handling of the whole problem in Punjab is deemed to be the least bad in the north, which has had to bear the greatest brunt on this issue and where feelings would be expected to be the most aroused, one way or another.

STEPS TO SOLVE THE PUNJAB PROBLEM

While one-third of the electorate in the country is optimistic and expects the Punjab situation to considerably improve in the next six months, another one-third of the electorate feels that the condition on the ground will only worsen, and the remaining one-third does not even foresee that change is likely to take place in the Punjab situation.

The voters' views were sought on the manner in which the dismal situation in Punjab could be improved, and a set of tangible options was presented to them to chose from. While one-third of the electorate favoured the option of sending the army in to Punjab—thereby indicating a considerable hardening of public opinion—as many as 28 per cent of the respondents were willing to open negotiations with the terrorists in the state. A sixth of the electorate pleaded for fresh elections to the Punjab Assembly (currently in suspended animation), and the remaining 23 per cent wanted the continuation of President's rule.

The vote for sending in the army was the highest in the north and the west, which are physically nearest to Punjab. Further, only 19 per cent in the north wanted any negotiation with the terrorist groups, a step favoured by around 30 per cent in the other three zones.

THE ISSUES THAT MATTER

At the personal level, respondents in the opinion poll felt that astronomically rising prices and growing unemployment are the main problems they face today, followed by an acute shortage of water and electricity. Voters in the east are more concerned about unemployment rather than any other issue, but water seems to be the main issue in the parched states of the south. Interestingly enough, in both the north and the west, prices were considered a bigger problem than unemployment.

In the wake of raids over the last couple of years on major industrial houses and the Bofors scandal, it is not surprising that the biggest chunk of voters (36 per cent) cite corruption as the

THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

In many ways, the prime minister's current problems are an urban phenomenon. According to the INDIA TODAY-MARG opinion poll, the Congress(I) gets 5 per cent higher votes in the rural areas than in the urban centres. And Rajiv's personal popularity amongst rural voters is about 10 per cent above his rating in the urban areas, where the balance of opinion is now negative on Rajiv's overall performance. While the prime minister leads his closest rival, former defence minister V.P. Singh, by a margin of 15 per cent in the urban areas, the gap between the two is a huge 40 per cent in the countryside, where V.P. Singh has clearly failed to make a comparable impact.

DEGREE OF UNAWARENESS

The low level of awareness, among the rural voters, of the major issues raised by the press today is an indication of the limited reach of the mass media. While just over half the urban population is unaware of the Bofors issue, as much as 71 per

PUNJAB: HOW WAS IT HANDLED?

	Well	Fairly well	Badly
NORTH	21	55	24
SOUTH	18	46	36
EAST	22	33	45
WEST	21	51	28
ALL INDIA	21	46	33

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

THE ISSUES THAT MATTER—PERSONAL

	Water	Unemployment	Electricity	Prices
NORTH	12	33	17	38
SOUTH	33	32	7	28
EAST	8	46	9	37
WEST	23	30	5	42
ALL INDIA	21	34	9	36

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

HOW WELL IS THE ECONOMY DOING?

	ALL INDIA
WELL	16
AVERAGE	31
BAD	53

(All figures in percentage)

HAS LAW & ORDER IMPROVED OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS?

	ALL INDIA
IMPROVED	19
WORSENED	53
SAME	28

(All figures in percentage)

RAJIV'S PERFORMANCE

	GOOD	AVERAGE	BAD	TOTAL
RURAL	39	36	25	100
URBAN	29	38	33	100
DIFFERENCE	−10	−2	−8	

(All figures in percentage)

WHO WOULD MAKE A BETTER PM?

	Rajiv Gandhi better	V.P. Singh better	Both equal	TOTAL
RURAL	68	28	4	100
URBAN	55	40	5	100
DIFFERENCE	+13	−12	−1	

(All figures in percentage)

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STEPS TO SOLVE PUNJAB PROBLEM

	Continue President rule	Fresh elections	Negotiate with terrorists	Send in army
NORTH	28	16	20	36
SOUTH	23	15	32	30
EAST	26	14	31	29
WEST	18	17	30	35
ALL INDIA	23	16	28	33

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

THE ISSUES THAT MATTER—NATIONAL

	Law and Order	Communalism/ Separatism	Prices	Corruption
NORTH	8	19	41	32
SOUTH	7	32	26	35
EAST	15	22	27	36
WEST	7	19	34	40
ALL INDIA	9	23	32	36

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

WHOSE GOVERNMENT IS MORE CORRUPT?

	Rajiv Gandhi's	Indira Gandhi's	Both equal
NORTH	62	10	28
SOUTH	33	31	36
EAST	60	15	25
WEST	44	17	39
ALL INDIA	47	19	34

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

DEGREE OF UNAWARENESS

Unaware of	Bofors	V.P. Singh's resignation	V.P. Singh's expulsion	Expulsion of Arun Nehru, and others
RURAL	71	56	59	67
URBAN	56	39	44	51
DIFFERENCE	+15	+17	+15	+16

(All figures in percentage)

HOW IS THE ECONOMY FARING?

	WELL	AVERAGE	BADLY
RURAL	20	32	48
URBAN	13	29	58
DIFFERENCE	+7	+3	−10

(All figures in percentage)

main issue facing the nation; 32 per cent perceive rising prices as the main problem, and around a quarter feel that communalism/ separatism is the main problem facing the nation. 'Prices' as the main problem was cited much more frequently in the north than elsewhere.

An interesting comparison of this poll with the 1984 poll shows that national unity was then considered the over-riding problem in the country. Corruption came in a poor third on the electorate's list of immediate concerns.

THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

There is a distinct gap between the perceptions of the Government and those of the people about the current state of the Indian economy. While the official statistics claim that the country has broken through the "Hindu rate of growth" of 3.5 per cent per annum (achieved from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies), and accelerated to a "new growth path of 5 per cent per year" coupled with a low rate of inflation, over half the electorate feels the economy is doing badly.

The voter in the northern states, particularly, is dissatisfied with the economic situation, with almost two-thirds stating that the economy is performing below average. With a disastrous monsoon this year, these negative perceptions are likely to worsen in the months ahead. This, however, is not reflected in the average person's view of the future, which remains optimistic: a significant 30 per cent feel the economy will improve over the next six months.

THE LAW AND ORDER SITUATION

The law and order situation has become an increasing cause for concern. Over half the electorate feels that it has deteriorated drastically over the last six months. However, in the southern states, the concern over the law and order situation is significantly lower, with fewer respondents perceiving a worsening of the situation over the last six months.

CORRUPTION IN THE INDIRA AND RAJIV REGIMES

The voters were asked to specify whether they considered Indira Gandhi's or Rajiv Gandhi's Government more corrupt. While one-third of the respondents believed both governments to

cent of the rural electorate has not heard of the Bofors scandal. Similarly, while almost 60 per cent of the urban voters know about V.P. Singh's resignation from the Cabinet and his subsequent expulsion from the party, about 60 per cent of the rural population remains completely unaware of these events.

HOW IS THE ECONOMY FARING ?

While the entire country feels that the economy is faring badly, the urban sector is far more negative than those in the villages. Only 48 per cent of the rural population, in contrast to 58 per cent in the urban areas, feels this way. Those in the rural areas may change their minds as the drought worsens.

LAW & ORDER SITUATION

As for the law and order situation in the country, rural opinion is once again more upbeat—48 per cent of those in the rural areas feel the situation has worsened in the last few months, compared to 59 per cent of the urban population.

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be equally corrupt, among the remainder, it was very widely believed that Rajiv's government was more corrupt than his mother's. This was particularly so in the north and the west.

Clearly, the man who started out wanting to clean up Indian public life has failed to keep his promise, at least in the public mind, and this could erode faith in him to a much greater extent.

INDIA—AFTER 40 YEARS

The opinion poll was specially timed for the 40th anniversary of Independence, and therefore covered some questions concerning long-term trends in Indian society. Among other things, voters were asked whether, after 40 years of the country's Independence, the gap between the rich and the poor had narrowed or widened, and whether the extent of untouchability had increased or decreased during this period.

Despite the steps taken by various governments to close the gap between the rich and the poor, only 29 per cent of the voters believed that the gap had actually narrowed. By contrast, almost twice as many respondents (55 per cent) felt that the gap had widened—this view being held more strongly in the north and west than in the south and east. Interestingly, it is the north and west which have aggressively moved forward in economic terms.

UNTOUCHABILITY

On the question of untouchability, however, more than three quarters of the respondents believed that the extent of untouchability had successfully been reduced over the past 40 years. This opinion was almost uniformly held all over the country, with the west being the most emphatic in its opinion.

MAHATMA GANDHI'S DREAMS

Mahatma Gandhi had many dreams for independent India. Voters were asked whether Gandhi, if he had been alive today, would have been happy or sad with the state of the nation. Showing a rare unanimity and conveying a sense of things not going well for the country, or perhaps a sense of having lost the old idealism, almost 80 per cent of the respondents felt that Gandhi would have been unhappy with the state of India today, a view held more strongly in the south and the east than in the north and west.

THE BEST PRIME MINISTER

Since 1947, India has had six prime ministers, including three from the Nehru family. Respondents were asked to nominate the best prime minister of independent India.

The biggest surprise of them all came with the national response on this question. It was Lal Bahadur Shastri who was more frequently nominated (31 per cent) than any other prime minister, although Shastri was in office as prime minister for less than two years. And he died before any of today's 20-year-olds were even born. Shastri was closely followed by Nehru (28 per cent) and his daughter Indira Gandhi (27 per cent). This was another virtually impossible feat: Indira Gandhi was scoring virtually the same as Jawaharlal Nehru.

A long way behind the best three prime ministers of India came the others: Rajiv Gandhi with 7 per cent, Morarji Desai with 6 per cent and Charan Singh bringing up the rear with just 1 per cent. There could hardly be a more unflattering response to the man who, despite everything, still gets 323 seats in the over-all Lok Sabha poll.

GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

	WIDER	NARROWER	SAME
NORTH	63	22	15
SOUTH	46	35	19
EAST	52	31	17
WEST	59	28	13
ALL INDIA	55	29	16

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

UNTOUCHABILITY

	REDUCED	INCREASED	SAME
NORTH	70	18	12
SOUTH	75	16	9
EAST	75	14	11
WEST	79	14	7
ALL INDIA	76	15	9

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

MAHATMA GANDHI'S DREAMS

	HAPPY	UNHAPPY
NORTH	24	76
SOUTH	19	81
EAST	18	82
WEST	23	77
ALL INDIA	21	79

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

BEST PRIME MINISTER

	ALL INDIA
Lal Bahadur Shastri	31
Jawaharlal Nehru	28
Indira Gandhi	27
Rajiv Gandhi	7
Morarji Desai	6
Charan Singh	1

('Don't knows' excluded) (All figures in percentage)

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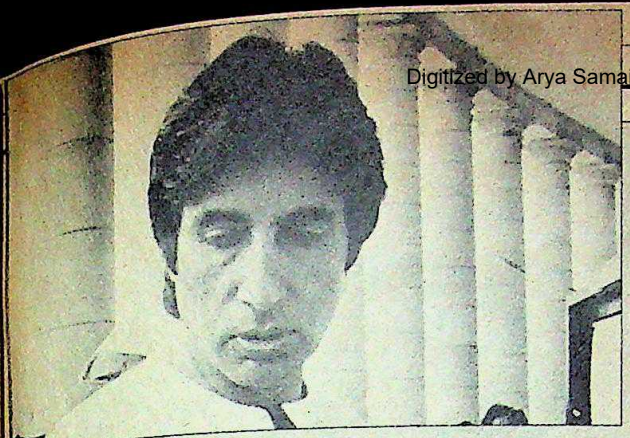

AMITABH BACHCHAN POLL

The day after the results of the presidential elections were declared, the prime minister confirmed a rumour that had been around for a couple of weeks: his close friend and superstar of the silver screen, Amitabh Bachchan, had resigned his membership of the Lok Sabha from the Allahabad constituency. Amitabh, who entered the Lok Sabha by crushing the wily and experienced H.N. Bahuguna of the Lok Dal(B), said that he had resigned to save Rajiv from further embarrassment. A day after the resignation, the *Indian Express* published a photocopy of the Land Records for Vevey (in Switzerland) which appeared to confirm Ajitabh's ownership of a flat in Montreux at a time when he was a resident in India.

To gauge the mood of the electors who had sent him triumphantly to the Lok Sabha just over 30 months ago, a special poll was done in the Allahabad parliamentary constituency where a total of 603 electors were interviewed towards the end of July in urban and rural segments.

It is some measure of the strength of the media and the power of the cinema star's image that all 603 respondents had heard of Amitabh's resignation from the Lok Sabha—an awareness level that was not matched on any other score anywhere in the country. While a third of the voters felt Bachchan should have resigned, the majority (65 per cent) wished that the screen hero had stayed on in Parliament. The findings clearly indicate that a much larger proportion of women (than men) were loath to see him resign.

Though there was an impressive majority against Amitabh's departure from Parliament, opinion was fairly evenly divided on his contribution to the welfare of his constituency in Uttar Pradesh. While the balance of opinion among men was against Amitabh, the women again came to the rescue of their beleaguered hero.

A total of 44 per cent of the electorate in Amitabh's constituency was aware of the controversy concerning the Bofors deal. However, among women, only 26 per cent said they knew about the deal. Men, on the other hand, tended to be much better informed (61 per cent were aware of the deal). The opinions of those aware of the Bofors deal were sought on the involvement of the Bachchan brothers in the pay-offs that have been confirmed by the Swedish national audit bureau. A significant 40 per cent declined any comment, but among those who volunteered an opinion, the tide ran clearly against the brothers—among both men and women.

However, despite the divided opinion about Amitabh's contribution to his constituency and his alleged involvement in the Bofors deal, he would still emerge victorious (60 per cent of the votes) against his old adversary H.N. Bahuguna (40 per cent), if Lok Sabha elections for the Allahabad constituency were to be held again and the two candidates contested. Men and women would contribute equally to his victory, though the proportion of women (33 per cent) who withheld comment was larger and Bahuguna is likely to get a bigger share of male votes (41 per cent) than female votes (36 per cent).

In contrast, Amitabh's towering image would not be able to withstand the pro-V.P. Singh winds blowing across Uttar Pradesh and other states, mostly in north India. A larger proportion would vote the raja in (57 per cent) as compared to the votes for the screen hero (43 per cent). While Amitabh, surprisingly, would not gain much sympathy from women, V.P. Singh's support would be stronger amongst men.

WHO WOULD WIN FROM ALLAHABAD

	Allahabad	Men	Women
Amitabh Bachchan	60	59	64
H.N. Bahuguna	40	41	36
Lead	+20	+18	+28
Amitabh Bachchan	43	43	45
V.P. Singh	57	57	55
Lead	−14	−14	−10

(Don't knows excluded) (All figures in percentage)

AMITABH'S PERFORMANCE

	All India	Men	Women
Should Amitabh have resigned?			
Yes	35	43	27
No	65	57	73
Amitabh's contribution to Allahabad			
Done a lot	48	42	54
Not done much	52	58	46
Aware of the Bofors deal			
Yes	44	61	26
No	56	39	74
Whether the Bachchans are involved*			
Yes	38	41	31
No	22	23	18
Can't say	40	36	51

*Was asked to those aware of the deal

(All figures in percentage)

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RAJIV GANDHI

A Warning

So the Opposition is barking up the wrong tree after all. In repeatedly demanding a mid-term parliamentary poll, opposition leaders obviously think that they can unseat a government which they would like to believe has lost its mandate to rule.

Rajiv Gandhi has said just as firmly that he will not call a mid-term poll, that there is no need to do so. But his most effective way to silence an increasingly vociferous opposition might well be to give them the mid-term poll they want. Because, as the INDIA TODAY-MARG nation-wide opinion poll shows, Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress(I) will fare very well in an election just now.

They will get a very comfortable majority of 323 seats, in a House of 542. The combined opposition will get less than 200. Indeed, with the help of its electoral allies, the Congress(I) could even expect to control two-thirds of the seats in the Lok Sabha. In the context of a government that has been on the defensive for months together, this is a remarkable showing.

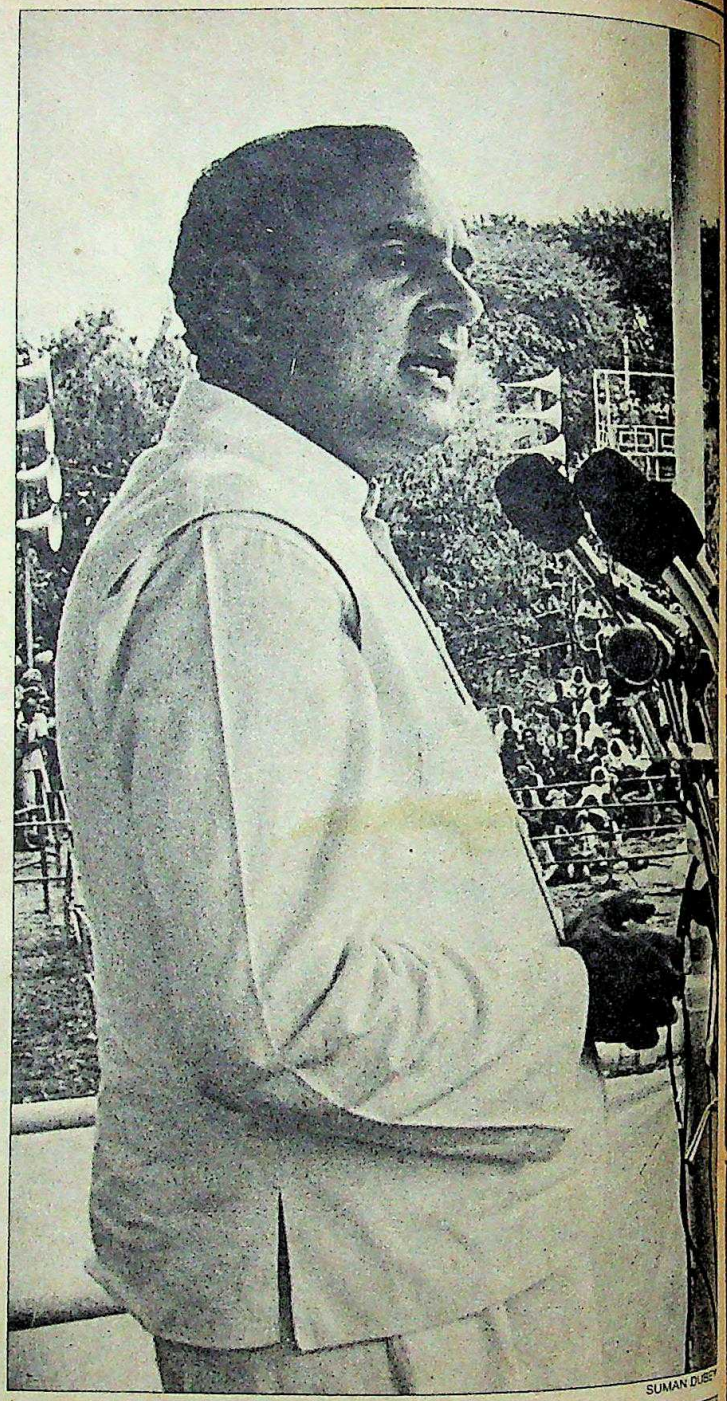
Bofors, German submarines, V.P. Singh and his cohorts, controversial prime ministerial friends, party dissidence, a sense of problems not being grappled with (like Punjab), a fundamental credibility question: all this and more have consumed the nation's attention since January this year. But nothing, it seems, will deter the voter from voting once again for the Congress(I).

Nevertheless, the poll result may only flatter to deceive. Because, it shows very starkly that people think pretty poorly of Rajiv, consider his government hopelessly corrupt (Mr Clean, it now turns out, is considered far more corrupt than his mother), feel his friends have their hands in the till, and are convinced that things are going badly on key issues like Punjab and the economy.

Mrs Gandhi used to have the extraordinary capacity to be untouched by problems: several polls showed her personal standing in the public eye as being affected very little by a sea of problems all around her. But her son has clearly lost the teflon coating that once seemed to protect him very well, as should be obvious by the thoroughly unflattering score he gets in the ranking of India's six prime ministers.

If, despite this, the Congress(I) does very well in the elections, the explanation is obvious: there is no national alternative to the party, which continues to enjoy a bedrock of support across a wide swathe of the country. The opposition parties are able to do far better in assembly polling, but their fractured state comes in the way of their being a credible focus of voters' hopes, even when the Congress(I) leadership is found wanting.

The Congress(I) has also done well in the countryside because large numbers have still not heard of Bofors, or Swiss bank accounts. If rural awareness were at the same level as in the cities and towns, the result would have been quite different. But consciousness does filter down, especially when men like V.P. Singh are on a mass mobilisation drive and are thinking well ahead. Awareness may come slowly, but it will come surely. And then a patient, tolerant electorate can respond in



SUMAN DUBEY

Rajiv's problem is not so much to win a mid-term election as to rebuild his credibility. Yesterday, a credulous country accepted his promise of the moon for the 21st century. Today, they might doubt him even if he says the sun will rise at dawn.

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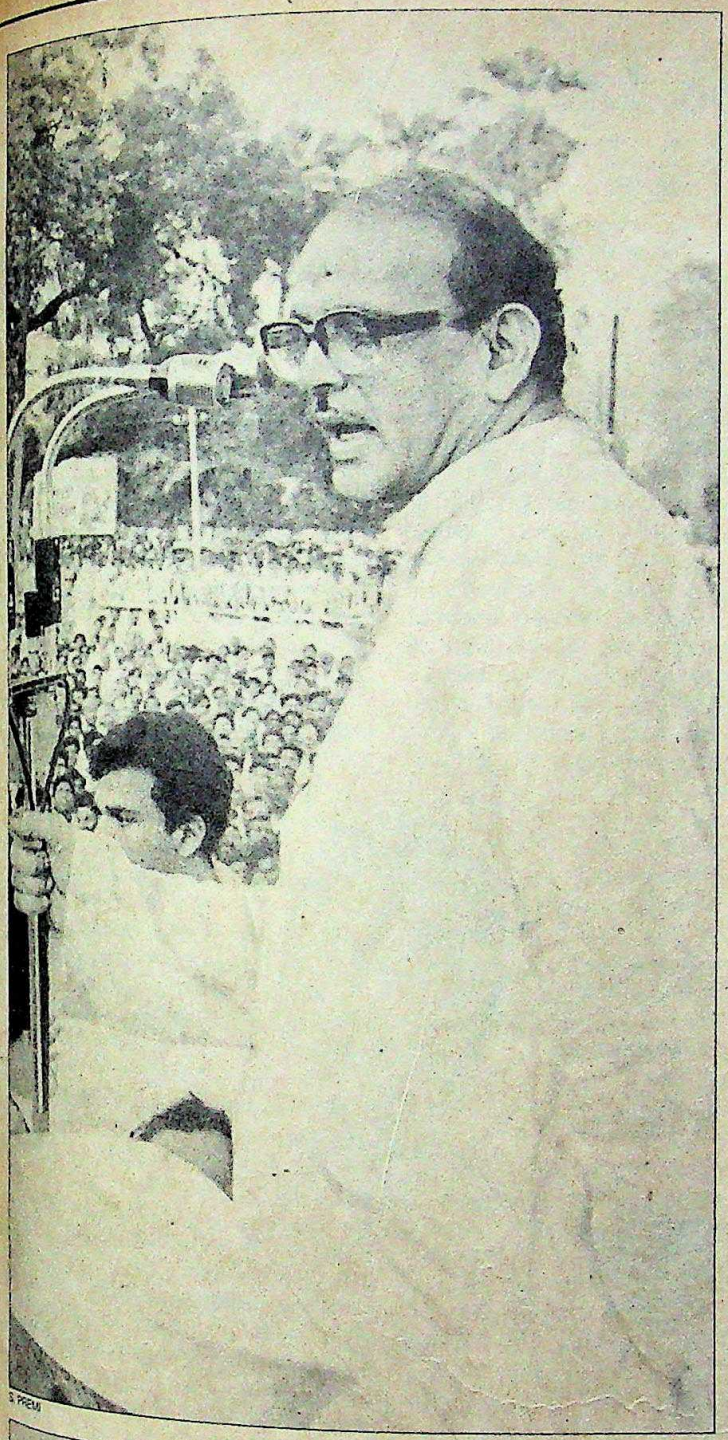

the same manner as it did in 1977 and 1980, with a decisive swing against the party or men in power.

Rajiv, therefore, would be well advised to treat even 323 seats as a mid-term warning, and make good use of the time that he still has to recover lost ground, before his term runs out in December 1989. A total of 323 seats is, after all, some way down from the 415 of 31 months ago. And it would be the lowest Congress(I) tally in Indian electoral history, barring 1967 and 1977. Also, the polling last month was done when V.P. Singh was in a flux, within days of his being expelled from the Congress(I). In a real mid-term election, his role could result in permutations and combinations that considerably damage the already battered Congress(I) juggernaut.

Indeed, as the V.P. Singh bandwagon rolls on, the poll confirms that the real challenge is brewing in the north. Singh himself does not come off too badly in a popularity contest with Rajiv Gandhi (despite the inherent disadvantages of being rated against an incumbent prime minister). He is seen as a political asset that the Government and the Congress(I) have lost, and perhaps as a man who has been wronged. And though the poll shows that he could pick his comrades in arms with greater care (Arun Nehru, as should have been expected, is not a man with a high popularity count), Singh's public image seems to remain unsullied.

It is also a tribute to Singh that corruption should emerge as the most important public issue. This has almost never happened before. Despite several instances of public malfeasance and prolonged controversies over some celebrated cases, the Indian public has never concluded that corruption is a central, national concern. Now, in contrast, it does. Thus, in the 1984 poll done by INDIA TODAY-MARG, the unity of the country was seen as the most important issue, followed by inflation, and only then by corruption, which got an 18 per cent score. Now that score is up to 36 per cent, and it is the prime public concern.

Quite obviously, it is also a subject on which the prime minister does not score well. Among those conscious of the Bofors scandal, a staggering 44 per cent think that Rajiv Gandhi has personally accepted a bribe. There can be little doubt that Rajiv cannot regain credibility without getting on top of the Bofors issue; and to get over the hump on this, he still has a lot of ground to cover.

Perhaps the prime minister did need to make that saddening statement in the Lok Sabha, that neither he nor his family had taken any money. The still sadder question is whether the country believes him. Yesterday, a credulous country accepted his promise of the moon for the 21st century. Today, they might doubt him even if he says the sun will rise at dawn.

What is also notable is the confirmation that the euphoria of 1985 has completely evaporated. Things are not going well for the country, and the people know it. The real challenge before Rajiv Gandhi is not so much to win a mid-term election as to rebuild his own credibility and to give the country a sense of being on the move again. Otherwise, when the real poll comes around a little more than two years from today, the people will not be as charitable as they are inclined to be just now.

—T.N.NINAN

As the V.P. Singh bandwagon rolls on, the poll confirms that the real challenge is brewing in the north. He is seen as a man who was wronged and it is a tribute to him that corruption has emerged as the most important public issue.

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AJITABH BACHCHAN

Mysterious Swiss Deals

But where did so much money come from?

THE Bachchan case gets more and more curious. Chased by controversy, film star Amitabh Bachchan's brother Ajitabh has disappeared from Switzerland, where he had been seeking a work permit for several months. No one answers the telephone at his controversial Montreux flat. And he is presumed to be somewhere in Belgium, where he claims to be a domicile. Swiss authorities are yet to decide whether to give Ajitabh his work permit, pending inquiries into his financial dealings and possible involvement in various scandals in India.

Meanwhile, company registry documents obtained by INDIA TODAY in Switzerland, and information available on Ajitabh's application for a Swiss work permit, reveal that he is already launching into substantial business dealings in Switzerland, involving money running into crores of rupees. These include:

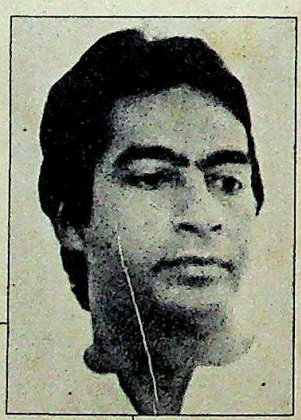
► the formation of Arcolab, the company that he helped launch in June 1987—with his 50 per cent stake in the share capital of one million Swiss francs (Rs 85 lakh) being paid into Credit Suisse bank in Geneva;

► Arcolab's ambitious plans to take over all the assets of an older company, Arcopharma (formed in October 1980), for a maximum price of 3.2 million Swiss francs (Rs 2.72 crore);

► the acquisition of the flat in Montreux itself, with a down payment of Rs 22.5 lakh, last year, and the balance Rs 22.5 lakh arranged through a mortgage.

All three transactions mean that the total sum now paid out by Ajitabh, by his company or by others on his behalf, amounts to a substantial Rs 3.37 crore. And the key questions are: where has the money come from and whose money is it?

The money for Arcolab's share capital (Ajitabh's share being Rs 42.5 lakh) is deposited with the main Geneva office of Credit Suisse (which, coincidentally, has been named as having been used in the Bofors pay-offs as well). And the purchase of Arcopharma's assets by Arcolab was, in fact, due to be completed before July 1, but may have been delayed due to uncertainties regarding the granting of resident status to Ajitabh—without which he cannot work in Switzerland.



Ajitabh: business machinations

Ajitabh's name does not figure in any of the company documents themselves, but disclosures that he and others have made with regard to his work permit application help piece the picture together. Ajitabh could not be traced for his comments and brother Amitabh could not be contacted in New Delhi either.

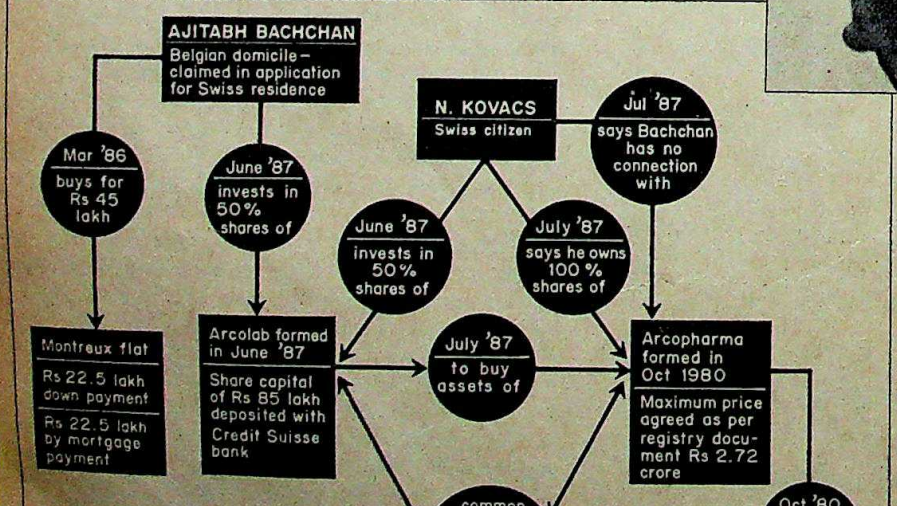
While all of Ajitabh's financial and other activities in Switzerland are perfectly legal under Swiss law, the question remains whether the money he used was brought into Switzerland from India or Belgium. Both countries have rigorous foreign exchange curbs, and if he has violated them he could be in deep trouble. While Ajitabh, as a non-resident Indian, can legitimately carry on whatever businesses and financial transactions he chooses to abroad, he can be questioned by Indian authorities under the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act if there is any sudden acquisition of wealth abroad.

Meanwhile, probes into the various firms involved in Ajitabh's dealings showed interesting findings. In July, Nandor Kovacs, who claimed to be the sole shareholder of Arcopharma, declared stoutly in a telephonic interview that Bachchan had "no connection at all with Arcopharma". Yet, records now show that both Arcopharma and Ajitabh's firm Arcolab, have the same address (111, Chemin du Pont-du-Centenaire, Plan-les-Ouates).

Also, it turned out that there was now a third "Arco" company involved, called ICN Arco, also located at Plan-les-Ouates. In October 1980, Arcopharma had taken over all the assets and liabilities of ICN Arco, without any money being paid.

Arcopharma's shareholding structure also may not be quite what it has been made out to be. Kovacs told INDIA TODAY that he was "the sole proprietor and shareholder" of Arcopharma. Yet, records show that, at least when the company was launched, Kovacs owned only 75 per cent of the authorised capital of 500,000 Swiss francs (Rs 42.5 lakh).

Other investigations show that Ajitabh's path to Switzerland was cleared by Geneva's second largest firm of lawyers: Pirenne, Python, Schifferli and Peter. One of the firm's lawyers, the son of a Belgian count, is listed as administrator and prin-



Intricate Transactions

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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cipal shareholder of Arcolab, the company which Ajitabh says is his employer.

According to a document registered by Jean-Paul Dubois, a notary public of the district of Nyon, 35 km from Geneva, Arcolab was created by Yves Pirenne, Philip Dow (both of Geneva) and Karin Erne of Zurich. Pirenne was named the sole administrator by the company's first assembly.

A certificate dated May 29, 1987, by Credit Suisse, Geneva, states that the total capital of a million francs was fully paid-up at that date and held in an account by the bank, awaiting the firm's registration. But, in the context of Ajitabh's application for a work permit, a federal government spokesman confirmed that Arcolab is half-owned by Ajitabh and half by Nandor Kovacs (of Arcopharma).

Clearly, Pirenne is acting as a fiduciary for Bachchan and Kovacs. The existence of such a fiduciary agreement cannot be confirmed as it is protected by professional secrecy laws covering lawyers, and its terms cannot be revealed under any circumstances. But such arrangements are common practice in Switzerland and Europe.

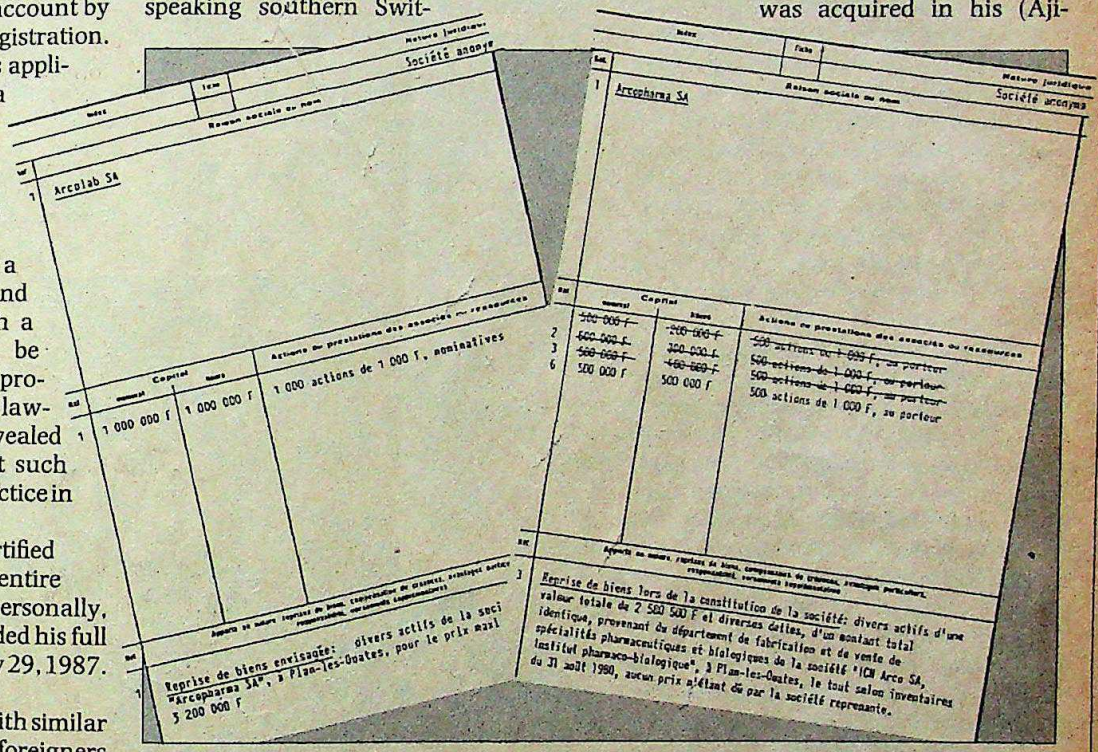
Since Credit Suisse has certified that it already has Arcolab's entire capital, it's clear that Ajitabh personally, or through other parties, provided his full share of Rs 42.5 lakh before May 29, 1987. The firm was formed in June.

A Geneva lawyer familiar with similar deals, usually made by rich foreigners keen to live in Switzerland to escape heavy taxes at home, said: "The possibility that Bachchan might have had to pay the entire capital of Arcolab and the entire cost of buying out Arcopharma as the price of his annual residence permit in Geneva cannot be ruled out. Such deals are not uncommon."

While this was in the realm of speculation, it is true that rich foreigners wishing to live in Geneva or anywhere else in Switzerland can do so only on two grounds. First, by bringing in a very large investment that creates jobs for Swiss citizens. The size of the investment must be negotiated with the cantonal government and fiscal authorities. There is no minimum figure. And second, by bringing in a very large sum of cash and assets, on which tax is paid annually to the canton of residence. The amount of tax is negotiated before permission to stay is granted.

Ajitabh may have done either or both, or (if his own accounts of being an employee-cum-businessman in Switzerland are to be believed) neither. But, by one scenario, Ajitabh may have had to provide or arrange for over Rs 3 crore as the price of his permit to stay in Geneva.

A reliable source, who did not wish to be named, said in a telephone interview that Ajitabh is a person of modest means whose pharmaceuticals and chemicals products company in India, IPCA, attracted the interest of a small group of Swiss companies making similar product lines. Those firms located in French-speaking southern Switzerland, felt that inviting Ajitabh and his family to live in Switzerland and become director of a new company here would benefit them and the Swiss economy. They felt that Ajitabh has sufficient business contacts in India, the Middle East and the Far East to help them produce and export more to those regions.



Registry documents of Arcolab and Arcopharma, showing share capital and company acquisitions: complex affair

The source refused to confirm that Ajitabh is a major shareholder of Arcolab. Instead, he said that Ajitabh is to be employed as a director of the company at an appropriate, but so far undisclosed, salary, after he gets the work permit.

Between 20 and 25 people are already working for the company and the production of pharmaceutical and chemical products is currently under way, he said. If Ajitabh is not granted a work permit, the company may have to close down, throwing those people out of jobs in an industrial sector which is already weak and depressed in the French-speaking part of this country, he added.

The remarks about the ongoing operation of Arcolab were puzzling because the company is not yet listed as having even a telephone. Still, it remains possible that it has already acquired Arcopharma.

Meanwhile, the mystery continues of how Ajitabh acquired his Montreux flat. Asked about the flat's purchase, Pirenne agreed to be quoted as replying: "The flat was acquired in his (Ajitabh's) sole name. The financing did not, to my knowledge, come from his personal funds."

In fact, this complex soap opera starring Ajitabh in Switzerland need not have been so dramatic. By Swiss standards, the sums of money involved are peanuts and Ajitabh's helpers in Geneva cannot, rightly, be expected to take into account the failures of law enforcement authorities in India before accepting him and his money in a business collaboration.

The fault is in Ajitabh's awkward handling of a change of residence, which should have been a routine affair quickly forgotten. His clumsiness has been mainly in not disclosing sufficiently accurate information. And he now runs the risk of not being able to settle in Switzerland. If that happens, India may not see him as a non-resident Indian, making him answerable for his financial affairs to increasingly suspicious Indian investigators.

—BRIJ KHINDARIA in Geneva

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CONGRESS(I)

Selling the Leader

Rajiv tries to woo the public and partymen

DURING the last two weeks, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has travelled to five states—from Uttar Pradesh in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south—addressed over half a dozen public meetings, and attended several conclaves of selected Congress(I) workers and prominent citizens. At the same time, he has met over 150 groups from various parts of the country and invited over 100 MPs for individual discussions to his Parliament office. He has also found time to hold four meetings with his party general secretaries and given directions to various state party presidents and the Youth Congress(I) leaders to organise mass contact programmes.

The proclaimed aim of the exercise: to sell the prime minister to the people. Said G.K. Moopanar, a general secretary of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I): "We have to be in touch with the people either through our party set-up or by taking the prime minister to them." But there was dissenting opinion in political circles. The prime minister's rather sudden desire to get in touch with the voters and party functionaries was largely being seen as the ruling party's effort to counter Vishwanath Pratap Singh's Jana Jagaran campaign launched last month.

The signing of the Sri Lanka accord was an unexpected windfall in the process and Rajiv immediately seized on it to gain full advantage. The Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress(I) was directed to organise a public meeting in Madras and the Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, who was supposed to leave for the United States, was roped in. The meeting was a great success with Rajiv's speech, translated in Tamil by Union Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram, drawing repeated cheers.

Rajiv then took a leaf out of his mother's book. From the police academy in Andhra Pradesh, he winged his way to Vijayawada and then drove in his bullet-proof jonga with wife Sonia, Union Industry Minister Vengala Rao and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao to Neerukonda, a village in Andhra Pradesh where a Harijan had been killed by upper caste Kammas in July. The visit was chiefly aimed to wean away the backward classes from the Telugu Desam.

Although Rama Rao suggested that Rajiv talk to Pushparaj, a Telugu Desam minister, who had camped at Neerukonda, the prime minister pointedly ignored him. Said an angry Pushparaj: "The same day, July 15, four Harijans were killed at Biwani in Bihar. Why did he not go there?" Vengala Rao was hard put to explain why Rajiv had not visited Karamchedu last year where a bigger carnage had taken place. His comment that he did not visit Karamchedu because the Harijans there had not accepted money from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund only drew scepticism.

In Hyderabad, however, the entire three-kilometre stretch from the airport to the venue of the rally was decorated with Congress(I) flags and illuminated with several rows of tiny bulbs on both sides of the road. The rally, attended by some 70,000 people, was the biggest that the city had seen since the public swearing-in of Rama Rao as chief minister in 1983. Rajiv spoke for about half-an-hour. But the choice of subjects—the accord with Sri Lanka, NAM, SAARC and Group of 77—was disappointing and seemed to raise a yawn. Said one Congress(I) activist: "The crowd was massive, but Rajiv was passive."

In a change of style, he shrugged off his security to mix directly with the crowd. Unusually, he also decided to meet the

Rajiv collecting soil in Porbandar

PIB

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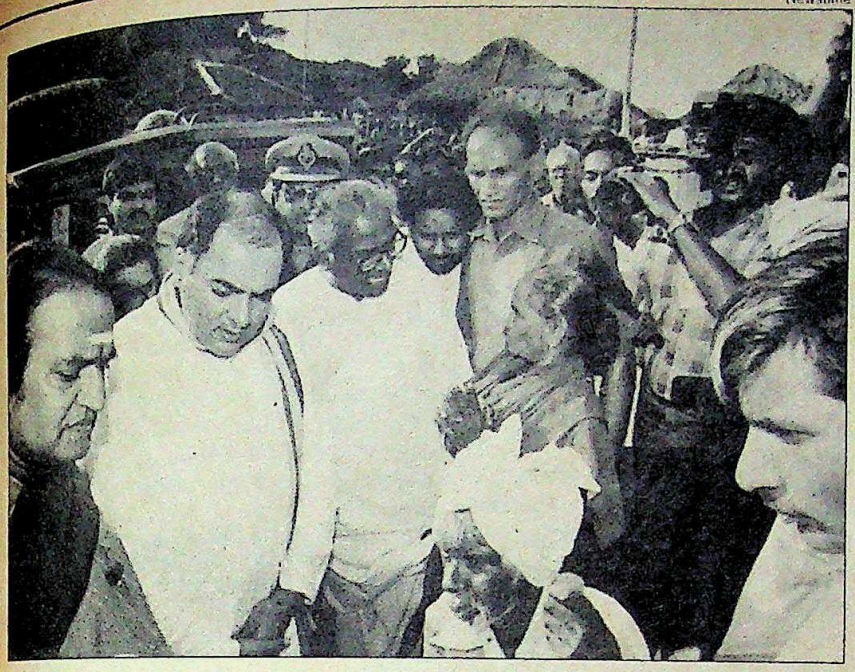
Newstime



Rajiv at Neerukonda

Rajiv's entire public relations exercise seems directed towards countering the message that V.P. Singh has been spreading through mass meetings across the country.

press on arrival and before his departure. When a journalist suggested that he speak to them at the end of the day, an eager Rajiv wanted to know: "Why don't you have anything to ask now?" It was a refreshing change from the Rajiv of six months ago who was virtually inaccessible.

The response in Gujarat was at best lukewarm. The main thrust of the prime minister's campaign there was to prick the bubble created by V.P. Singh's visit. Soon after landing at Porbandar, the prime minister and Sonia drove to Kirti Mandir, Mahatma Gandhi's birthplace. There, in a major exercise of showmanship, sacred soil was collected, to be carried to Delhi to mark the 40th anniversary of Independence.

Predictably, the official machinery was put to use to mobilise crowds. At the Porbandar cricket ground, where Rajiv addressed a public meeting, over 50,000 people were present. People had been transported not only from outlying villages but from neighbouring districts too. The rally was also attended by Youth Congress(I) workers from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

But there wasn't much enthusiasm. The Congress(I) workers' slogans when Rajiv mounted the dais with Sonia were not picked up by the crowd. The slogan itself—*Rajiv tum aage badho hum tumhare saath hain* (Rajiv you go ahead we are with you)—appeared an imitation of that raised in V.P. Singh's meetings in Ahmedabad and Baroda.

But in one way, Porbandar did gain from the prime minister's visit. The roads were done up, government buildings were given a lick of fresh paint and Kirti Mandir was spruced up. Most gratifying for the local residents was the replacement of the worn-out rope along the mandir's stairs with a nylon one.

Rajiv's visit to Bombay—to attend the 40th Independence anniversary function—was soured by the clash between the BJP and Congress(I) workers. Also, the refusal by former prime minister Morarji Desai to attend the official function struck a wrong note. Nevertheless, Rajiv met several Congress(I) workers, exhorting them to close ranks.

But it was in Allahabad, V.P. Singh's home town, that Rajiv scored over his arch-rival in terms of crowd collection, though the arrangements raised more questions about the state of the Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) than they answered. The entire show was arranged by the state administration, under the direct supervision of Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, and the party organisation was sidelined. Said a senior district official: "We have assisted politicians in the past in this kind of thing but this is the first time that we are independently organising a party rally." Bir Bahadur's refusal to trust either his ministerial colleagues or local Congress(I) functionaries was mainly rooted in the fear that many of them were perhaps V.P. Singh sympathisers.

While the rally proceeded as planned—except for a six-hour traffic jam that followed—the last-minute cancellation of a Congress(I) workers' conference that was to be addressed by the prime minister, indicated the sorry state of the party's Allahabad unit. The cancellation came about after Bir Bahadur Singh's attempt to reconcile differences between three party factions in the city—led by Ashok Bajpai, a former MLA, Satish Jaiswal and Shyam Surat Upadhyaya—did not succeed.

The leadership's distrust of its partymen was also reflected at the public meeting. Going by tradition, the city party chief, Bhanu Pratap Singh, should have presided, but since he was identified as a sympathiser of the former defence minister, no one fulfilled that role. Instead, state party President Mahavir Prasad, the chief minister and some Union ministers welcomed Rajiv before he addressed the gathering.

Nothing, however, illustrated the political situation better than the dumping of most ministers, MPs, MLAs and party office-bearers in an open enclosure at the rally—only a handful of ministers could get even close to the dais. The platform overflowed instead with district and senior police officials exhorting the crowds to maintain peace. Said an irritated minister of state, sweating in the scorching heat: "Should the credit of this turn-out go to the chief minister or to the district magistrates?"

While the majority of Rajiv's supporters hope that the change in the prime minister's approach will help the party in countering Singh's growing popularity, experienced Congressmen feel that it may help only marginally. According to them, Rajiv can regain lost ground only by taking visible and concrete action against corruption and removing inefficient and discredited politicians from office. Till he does that, no amount of public relations exercises will cut ice with the disillusioned people of the country.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with AMARNATH K. MENON, UDAY MAHURKAR and DILIP AWASTHI

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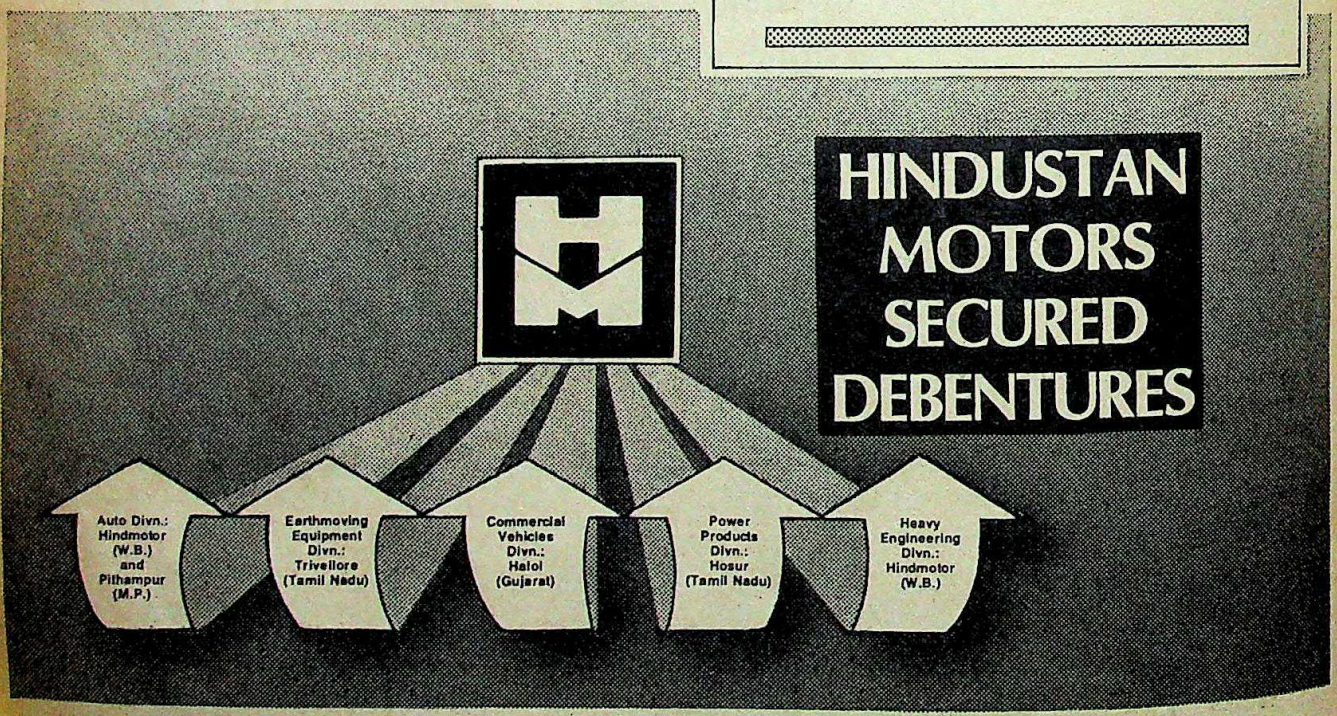

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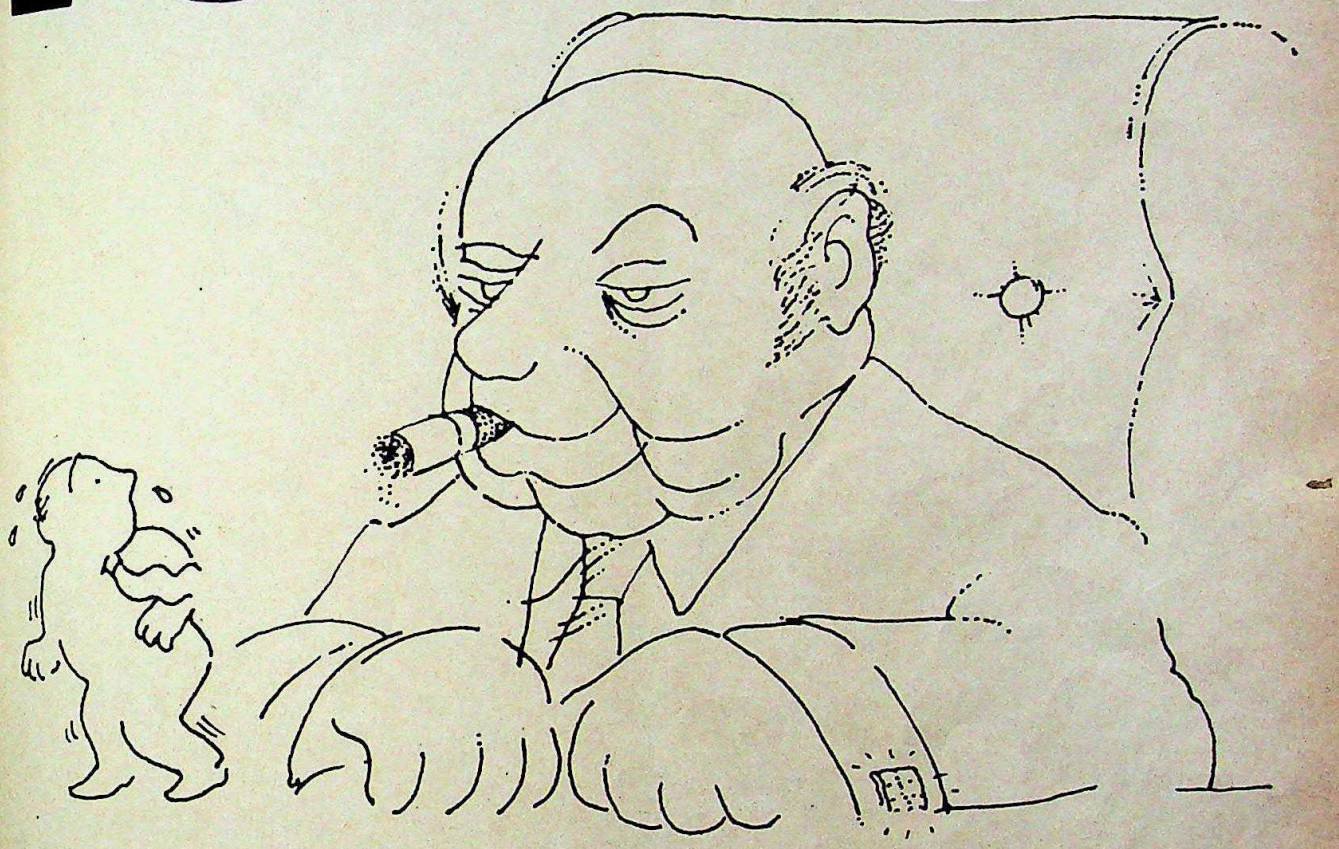

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THE ECONOMIC TIMES
MAKES YOUR BOSS THINK AHEAD OF YOU

R. KANGA/ET/3A/87

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PUNJAB

Dramatic Turn

Militants assume charge

UNTIL extremists of all hues abruptly entered the Teja Singh Samundari Hall in the Golden Temple complex, the Sikh convention of August 4 appeared to be yet another gathering of moderates aimed at redefining the Anandpur Saheb resolution as the goal of the community. But once they arrived shouting pro-Khalistan slogans on the "panthic stage", ripples of fear ran through the audience of about 500 academicians, social and political leaders.

The first casualty of the militants' onslaught was the voice of the semi-moderate leaders and their political-spiritual mentor, the acting head priest of the Akal Takht, Darshan Singh Ragi. Ragi, who was hurled to the centre-stage of Sikh politics only a few months ago by the militants themselves, announced a few days later that he would prefer to keep "aloof" to "avert a conflict" between the Akal Takht and the "angry youth". Punjab, it seemed, had taken another step away from peace.

From the oldest Babbar Khalsa to the most recent Bhindranwale Tigers Force —run by Gurbachan Singh Manochal of the breakaway Panthic Committee— the extremist organisations swore to continue the "battle of the sword" and eliminate all the "hurdles" on their way to Khalistan. Endorsement came from the five-member Panthic Committee, the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) and the Akal Federation, besides the two factions of the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF). Slogans of "Khalistan Zindabad" were raised both inside the hall and on the sprawling lawns outside, where hundreds of people listened to the fiery speeches.

Interestingly, this was the first time that the KCF and KLF had issued a joint statement since their formation after Operation Bluestar. Equally significant was the adoption of identical stands by the major groups on the question of dialogue with the Government.

Ragi had hoped to use the well-publicised convention to determine three crucial issues: what the Sikhs want, the means to achieve the community's objective and the future leadership of the community. However, his efforts to strike a compromise with the militants failed. Only Avtar Singh of the Babbar Khalsa was willing to leave the question of leadership to the Akal Takht. An anonymous envoy of Manochal said that talks with the Government could be held only with Khalistan on the agenda. "Compromise on anything less than 'Khalistan' is ruled out," added the Akal Federation's Sher Singh Sher.

The militants also declared that "those who believe in sharing power with the Government do not have a right to lead the community." The clear intention was to run down the Akal Takht-sponsored Unified Akali Dal (UAD), whose leader Amarinder Singh attended the convention but did not speak. Also notable by their absence were the organisations affiliated to the Akali Dal (Longowal) and the Congress(I).

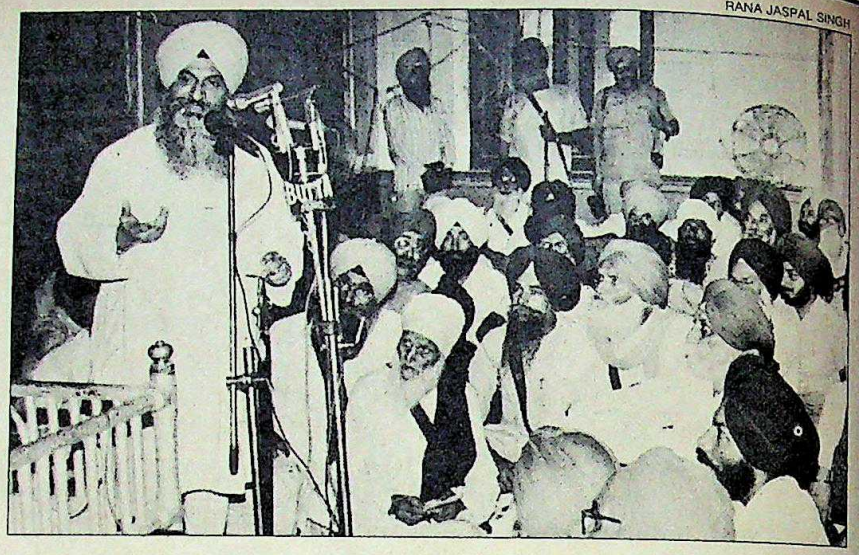
The last blow to Akal Takht's authority came with the militants' decision that only those who had made sacrifices during and after Operation Bluestar had the prerogative to lead the community. Indeed, the militants attempted to nullify the very purpose of seeking mass opinion on the question of defining the community's goals. They asserted that this objective had already been determined by the Sarbat Khalsa last January, at which the demand for Khalistan had been "endorsed by the people". And such was the impact of the extremists' words that those who did speak after them were forced to equivocate in their statements, if not go along with them.

Ragi's almost sounded like a farewell speech when he noted that the "sword is not the answer" and that "you can rule the bodies of the people with Sten guns but not their minds". Even before the convention, three of his fellow head-priests—Giani Kashmir Singh, Bhai Sawinder Singh and Bhai Jaswant Singh—had been openly challenging him on many an important issue. And the militants, who had been attracted to Ragi by the sheer force of his personality, had lost their initial admiration. The speculation in Amritsar was whether he would be able to survive.

Despite the seeming set-back, Ragi's move to keep away from Sikh politics for now could be a tactical step in a shrewd, long-term strategy aimed at regaining the initiative. The UAD threw in its lot with him by announcing its own "withdrawal" from Sikh politics. And one member of the UAD's executive council, retired Major General Narinder Singh, said the one-sentence resolution adopted at the convention was "indeterminate" and resigned his post. These developments could strengthen Ragi's hand in the long run. But there was little doubt that, for the time being, the extremists seemed totally in command inside the holy shrine.

—VIMUKH SINGH

RANA JASPAL SINGH



Ragi at the convention: in retreat

With acting Head Priest Darshan Singh Ragi retreating from the scene, the militants have moved to the forefront of the Sikh politics.

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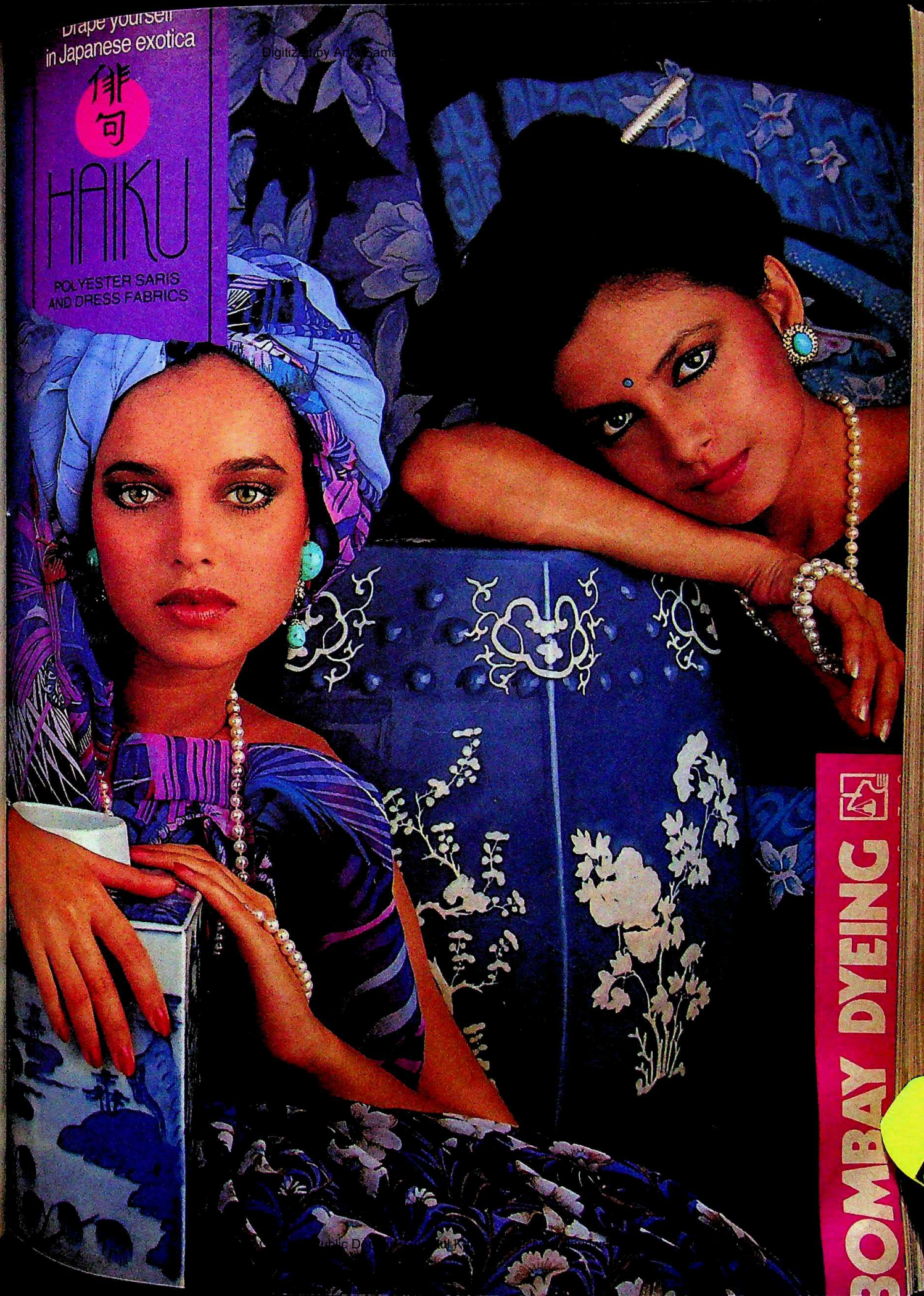

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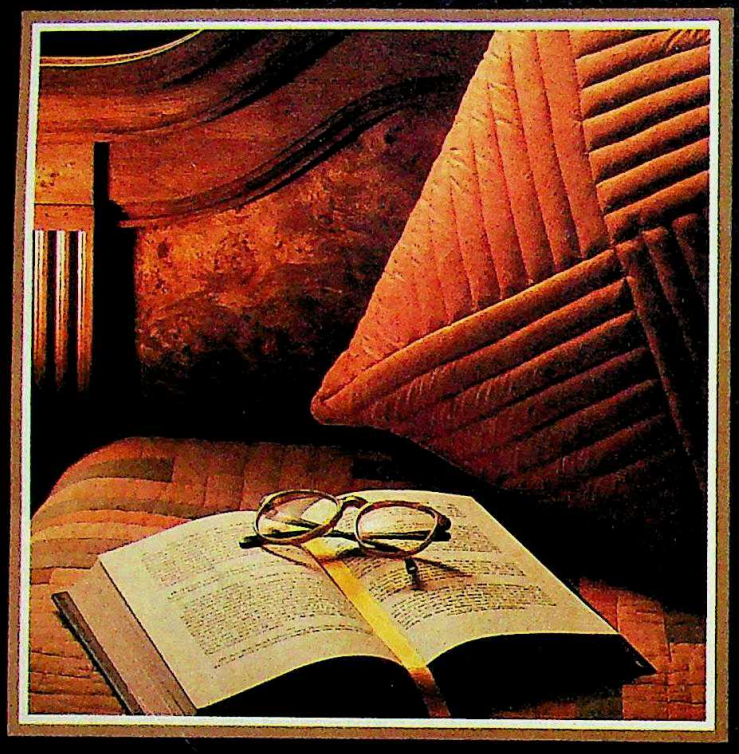

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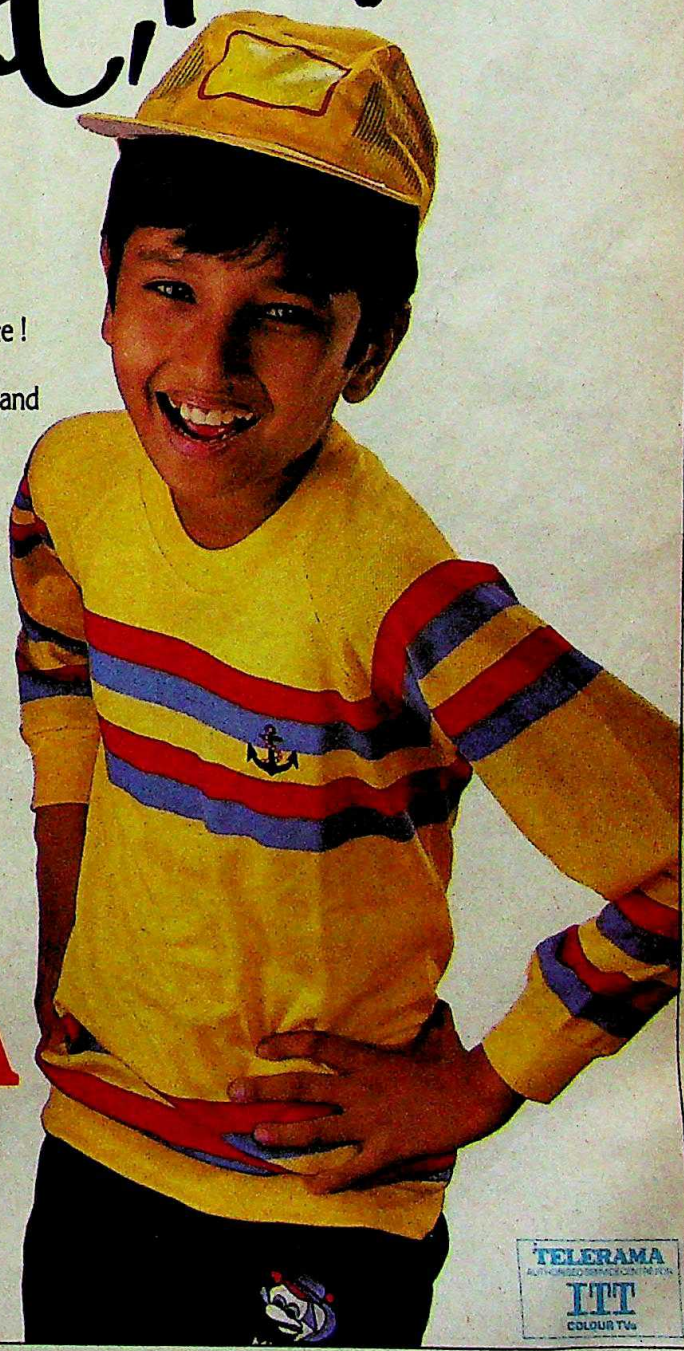

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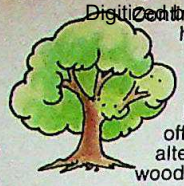

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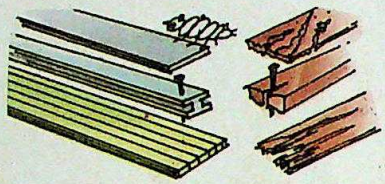

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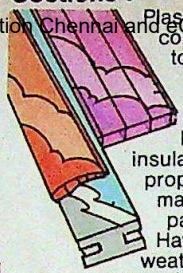

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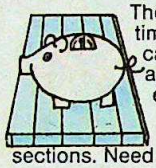

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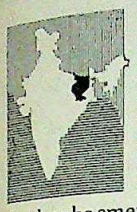
BIHAR

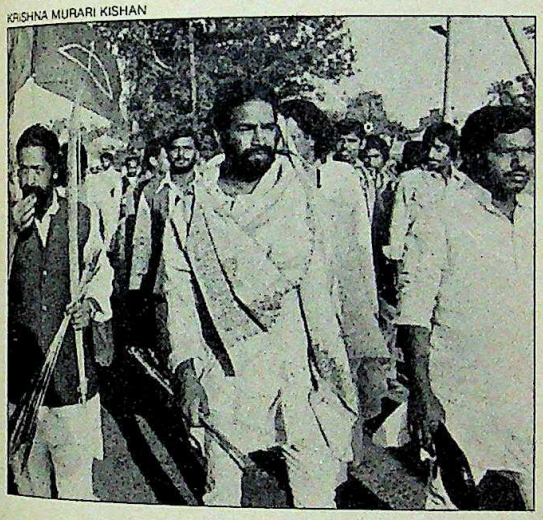
Shock Killing

Political change might result



THE killing was sudden and swift. Nirmal Mahto, 40, the powerful president of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), had no inkling that he was walking to his death as he emerged from a guest-house of the Tatas, flanked by Birendra Singh, a Congress(I) leader, and Suraj Mandal, an MLA of the JMM. But as eyewitnesses watched in horror on that hot afternoon in Jamshedpur last fortnight, three men—two of them Birendra's brothers, Pandit and Pappu and a third identified as Akhileshwar Singh—jumped out of a waiting car and ran towards Mahto screaming *"Maro, bachne na paye"* (Kill him, he should not escape).

KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN



Mahto (centre) at a rally: brutal end

Birendra, the man who had planned the killing, whipped out his revolver and fired at Mahto. The shot, however, hit Mandal, who with lightning reflex had tried to grab Singh's revolver. And as Mandal lay writhing on the ground, Mahto was shot at point blank range by the three killers. They then jumped back into the car and drove away while Birendra walked a few blocks, boarded a jeep and disappeared. Mahto, who was taken to the Tata main hospital, succumbed to his injuries.

The killing sent a shock wave through the steel city. Fights broke out between JMM activists and Congress(I) workers, both in and around Jamshedpur. A ruling party supporter was lynched and two others were seriously injured. Singhbhum district observed a spontaneous bandh, even as the police went on a round-the-clock alert. The tension was fuelled by the refusal of senior JMM leaders to lift Mahto's body till the culprits were arrested. The police, pressured by the strong reaction, arrested Akhileshwar Singh, seized the car used in the crime and attached the properties of Birendra and his brothers.

Not surprisingly, there was gloom in the Congress(I) camp. Mahto had not only been killed by a party leader but had been done in when he had gone to meet Gyan Ranjan, a former Congress(I) MLA, for a friendly meeting. Said S.R. Chabban, district Congress(I) chief: "It was a most tragic event and may tarnish the image of the party."

At the hospital the injured Mandal charged that "some Congress(I) high-ups had definitely had a hand in the killing". Added the murdered man's father, Jagbandhu Mahto: "The killing was purely political in nature and only a high-level inquiry can solve the mystery." The local police, however, ruled out the political angle. Said Jamshedpur Superintendent of Police A.C. Verma: "The incident was a retaliatory measure." According to him, the killing was in reaction to a JMM attack on Birendra in November last year, for which he held Mahto responsible.

Mahto, who had joined JMM five years ago and had been organising tribals in the Singhbhum region, had become one of the major forces in the militant movement. His killing is expected to seriously alter the character of the Morcha and its relationship with the Congress(I). This had already soured in the wake of the presidential poll, where the party was divided over supporting the Congress(I) candidate. (Mandal had even resigned from the post of deputy leader of the Morcha over the issue.)

As it is, the movement was facing a major threat from militant tribal youth who had formed a separate All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) on the lines of the All Assam Students Union because of dissatisfaction with the working of senior JMM leaders. They are now spearheading a campaign for the creation of a separate Jharkhand state, comprising tribal areas of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

The JMM, in a bid to recapture its old glory, had stepped up its activities by organising tribals at block and village levels not only in Bihar but also in tribal areas of neighbouring states. But now, with Mahto's killing, growing disaffection in the ranks and the emergence of AJSU, the JMM may find its task much more difficult to accomplish than it had earlier assumed. There is no denying that the bullets that killed Mahto could change the political contours of the strife-torn Chhotanagpur region of Bihar.

—FARZAND AHMED

KARNATAKA

Clean-up Drive

Hegde moves to redeem image

IN a bid to dispel the darkening cloud of corruption over his government, Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde last fortnight launched a major anti-corruption drive. Its targets: bureaucrats and legislators.

Orders have been issued to probe resources of senior officials. Even top bureaucrats' houses under construction are to be photographed and their value assessed. Specific public complaints—including those of taking bribes to influence transfers and postings—against legislators, and corruption charges against tribunal members will be probed.

Evidently the drive has fired the public imagination. Hegde's secretariat is receiving several letters—mostly anonymous—daily. But all tell one tale of corruption or another. Thus, the merchants of Bangarpet claim that they've been forced to pay bribes ranging from Rs 1,500 to Rs 10,000 to a commercial tax officer. A concerned Hegde is now studying the feasibility of opening a section in his secretariat to deal exclusively with such complaints.

It was mounting press criticism and opposition charges that forced Hegde to launch the drive. The corruption charges that were being aired at all forums by Congress(I) leaders had led to a sharp slump in his image. The irrepressible Congress(I) leader in the Legislative Council, T.N. Narasimha Murthy, even went to the extent of describing him

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as "corruption incarnate". The Congress(I) chief whip in the Legislative Council, K.N. Nage Gowda, was no less harsh. He charged the Janata Government of influencing the award of a sericulture contract to a Japanese firm, causing a loss of Rs 4 crore to the state exchequer in the process.

Murthy has even found holes in the much-publicised anti-corruption drive. According to him, "Hegde is only threatening helpless bureaucrats and legislators. He will not threaten ministers because his survival will be in jeopardy."

The bureaucrats are naturally unhappy with some of Hegde's measures to root out corruption. One such instance is the letter Hegde wrote to departmental secretaries, virtually upbraiding them

BHAWAN SINGH

Hegde: some scepticism persists

for being blase about corruption. Said a piqued bureaucrat: "The chief minister is well within his right to write such a letter but I don't think it was decorous to have it released to the press."

There was also the charge that the drive was netting in only junior officers. Said a Janata Party legislator: "The only way Hegde can redeem his image is by taking action against some of the high-ranking and well-known offenders." And he is not the only one who feels that Hegde is still not driving the knife deep enough. Said a senior bureaucrat: "I still get the impression that the chief minister is taking only cosmetic action."

But Hegde, who obviously believes in the maxim that it is not enough to take action—action should also be seen to be taken, says: "Everyone is making vague allegations. If a specific allegation is made against a minister, I will certainly probe it." It is a promise, which if fulfilled, could go a long way in restoring the chief minister's fading image.

—ANITA PRATAP

MAHARASHTRA

Local Grouse

Shiv Sena strikes again

THE Shiv Sena has a new target: foreign banks. When its Sthanik Lokadhikari Samiti Mahasangh (Federation of Sons of the Soil Committees) recently formed a unit in foreign banks, its first task was to demand greater reservation for Maharashtrians in the banks' lower cadre jobs. Inaugurating the Sthanik Lokadhikari Samiti (SLS) unit, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray criticised foreign banks for being "the mainstay of outsiders" with just 20 per cent Marathi-speaking people on the staff. "We are approaching the banks with our hands folded, but if we are spurned, I cannot say what the outcome will be," he warned.

The problem stems from Bombay's character of a national metro which attracts capital and labour from the rest of India. Not surprisingly, the Shiv Sena has touched a chord among the city's Maharashtrians—especially the middle class—who nurse a sense of discrimination.

The Shiv Sena first set up SLS units in banks and insurance firms but now has 170 units, with nearly 40 sprouting in the last two years, after it won in the municipal polls. Branches are now coming up in Pune, Nasik and Aurangabad. It also conducts coaching classes to prepare candidates for various jobs—from that of air hostesses to bank clerks.

Young and articulate Sudhir Joshi, Mahasangh president and former mayor explains that the SLS isn't against non-Maharashtrians getting jobs but adds that the state Government, unlike elsewhere, has failed to frame a job policy. He complains: "We demand only what is official policy in other states. Yet we are dubbed as parochial."

To make his point, Joshi narrates the case of two foreign banks which recently advertised for clerical posts but failed to do so in Marathi papers, an SLS demand. When it protested, one bank relented but the other refused. A Sena agitation finally led to the postponement of recruitment until the Marathi advertisement was published.

SLS units are a growing force in the banking industry, which employs a staff of nearly 60,000 besides 10,000 officers in Bombay. Until now, the SLS had left the foreign banks alone. All but one of India's 20 foreign banks are headquartered in Bombay, and some have been around for about 100 years. But with the Reserve Bank's restrictions, they can play only a limited—though high-profile—role, having just 3 per cent of the deposits and barely 4,000 employees. Since they are highly automated, the number of new jobs is also limited—hardly 40 every year.

So foreign bankers were taken aback by the Sena's challenge. "As a rule, we

(From left) Navalkar, Thackeray, Joshi: popular battle

don't discriminate. In fact, once merit is clear, we encourage local candidates," says a bank official. "The Sena's stir will only create ill-will, and if push comes to shove, we'll have to take the Government's help." But SLS leaders refuse to believe that if merit was the only criterion so few Maharashtrians would be taken. Says Shiv Sena legislator Pramod Navalkar: "We can compromise on the 80 per cent demand, but never on the basic principle."

The campaign also reflects a desire to reverse a process which has reduced Maharashtrians in Bombay from 56 per cent four decades ago to about 35 per cent now. "Thanks to SLS work, the earlier feeling of the Sena being a body of hooligans is being removed," says Navalkar. There is little doubt that the Shiv Sena will strive to strike even deeper roots with its sons of the soil campaign.

—M. RAHMAN

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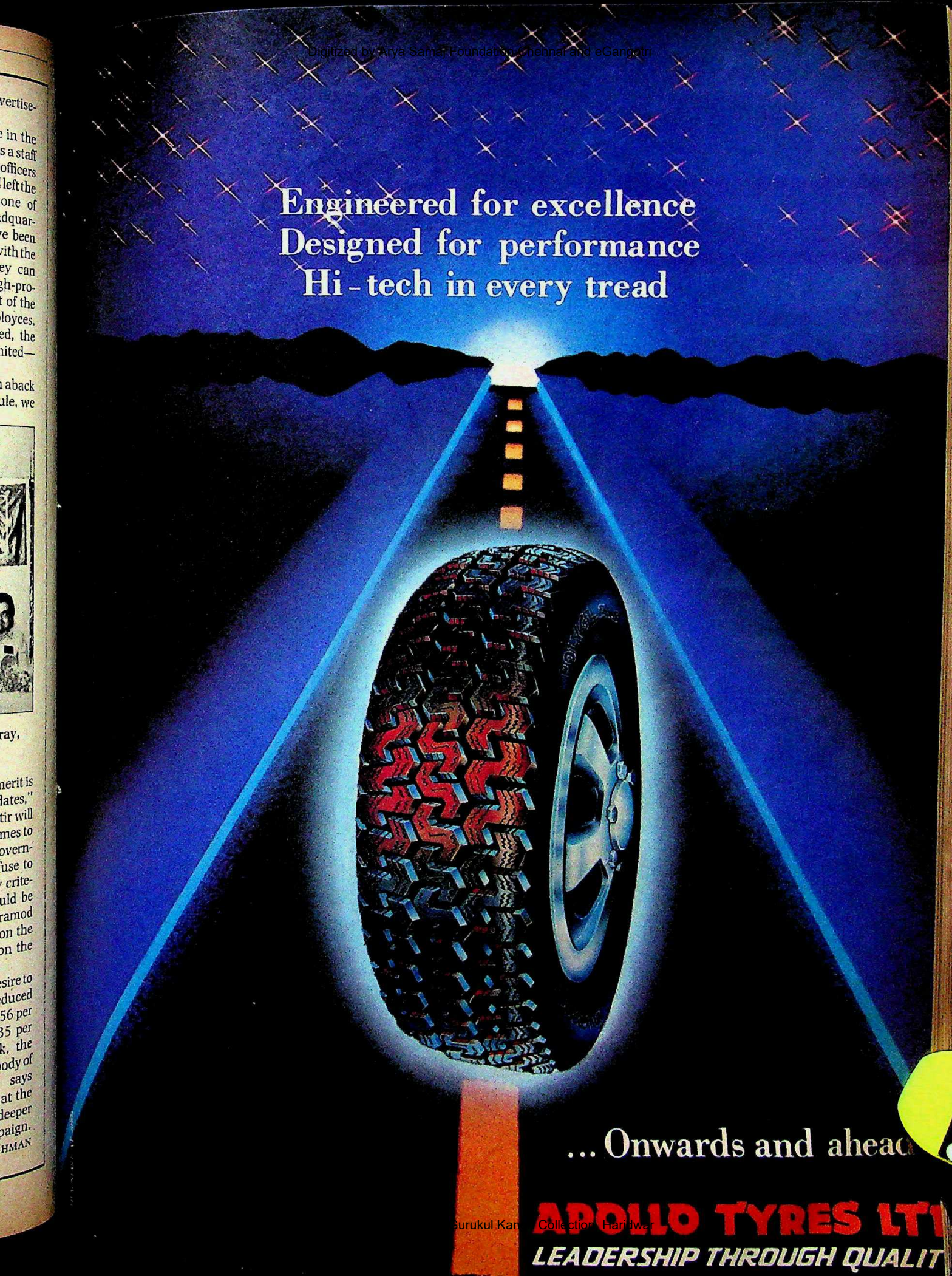

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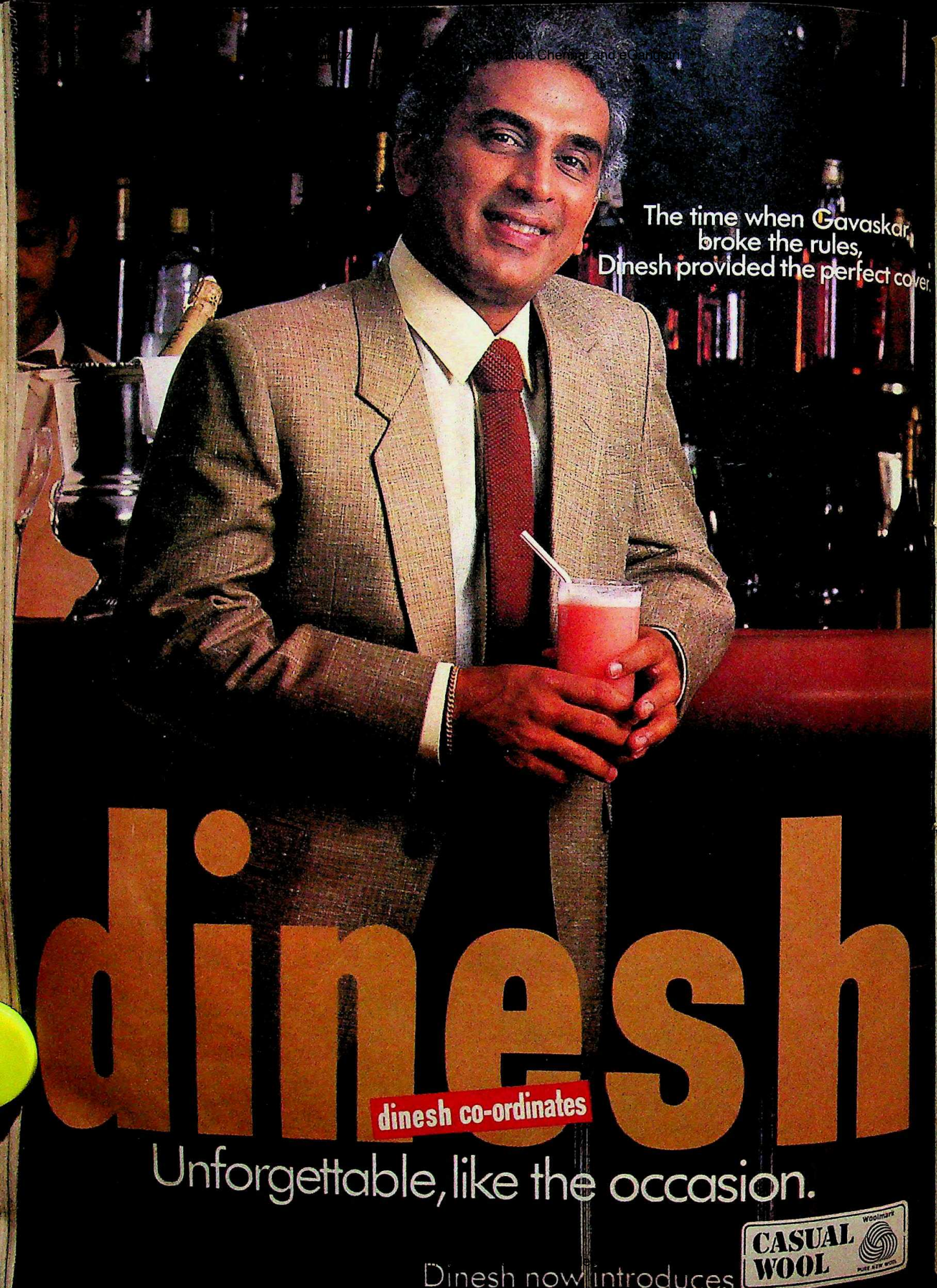

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ANDHRA PRADESH

New Offensive

Naxalite killings mount

WHEN six police constables were killed in a Naxalite ambush, on July 30, deep in the jungles of East Godavari district, near Mathambhimavaram, the Andhra Pradesh police pressed the panic button. That the killers belonged to Kondapalli Seetharamaiah's People's War Group (PWG), the most militant Naxalite faction, only made the situation more grave. Home Minister Siva Prasada Rao and Director-General of Police (DGP) P.S. Ramamohana Rao rushed to the spot to restore confidence in the ranks. Even at the peak of the Naxalite movement in the state in the '70s, so many policemen had not been killed in a single encounter.

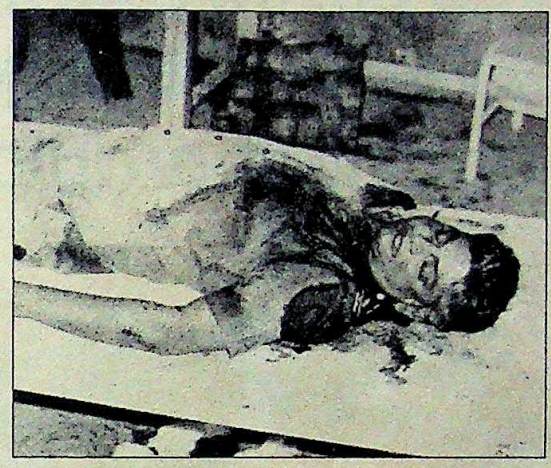
Concern was voiced in the state Assembly where 64 MLAs gave notice to discuss the increasing violence. Members alleged that the police were ineffective and their intelligence on Naxalites was poor. They said little had been done to stop extortion of money by the armed *dalams* (groups) from paper mill managers, forest and arrack contractors. BJP legislator A. Narendra accused some police officers of misutilising funds for anti-Naxalite operations.

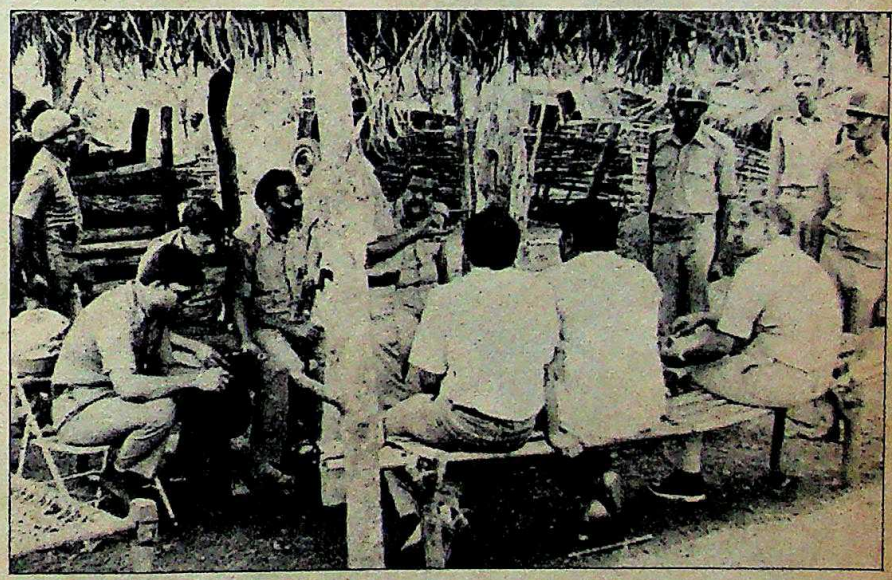
Said Siva Prasada Rao, however: "The Naxalites are intensifying their activities and indulging in violence because they feel that their existence is threatened." Concurred Ramamohana Rao: "The days of their ideological battle are over. Not more than three victims this year fit their description of so-called class enemies."

The outlaws are indeed in disarray. The splits within their ranks and the emergence of several group leaders had made many switch loyalty to the PWG. But the quarrel between Seetharamaiah and his second-in-command, K.G. Satyamurthy, on the issue of violence led to a split in the PWG's central committee and down the line to the *dalams*.

Another major set-back for the PWG, which had the most activists and sympathisers until two years ago, was the seizure made during Operation Redrose last year when the police arrested PWG Secretary Nalla Adi Reddy. They came upon a rich haul of arms and ammunition. The names and addresses of activists and sympathisers also fell into their hands from the PWG headquarters which, ironically, were then in Hyderabad. PWG *dalams* have made the police their target and already picked up 11 .303 rifles this year. But they seem to be fighting a losing battle.

Although 14 Naxalites have been killed till July this year, 19 last year and 38 in 1985, there has been no really concerted police drive. Killings by Naxalites have been greater: 30 in 1985, 24 in 1986 and 40—including 12 policemen—already this year. Said a senior police official: "Murders have gone up while dacoities and money actions have dropped significantly. This indicates their desperation."





A policeman victim (left) and senior officials at an armed outpost: increasing concern

An achievement of the Telugu Desam Ministry has been the stoppage of cash flow from contractors engaged in beedi leaf collection to the rebels. This occurred after the appointment of the state Forest Development Corporation as the only agent for collection, curing, transport and sale of beedi leaves. It began with the corporation buying leaves from 70 units last year; this year, it covered all 369 beedi leaf units. In some areas, the Naxalites set fire to stocks of beedi leaves to scuttle the corporation's collection programme and terrorise beedi leaf collectors.

However, the deaths of policemen have rattled the constabulary of the Andhra Pradesh Special Police, which mans 89 armed outposts in Naxalite areas over 11 districts. The Government plans to reorganise the outposts and provide protection to outlying villages. Police officials were initially piqued by Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's contradictory statements. He first talked of arming villagers to fight the menace and almost simultaneously mentioned the possibility of inviting Naxalite leaders for talks. But even this served a purpose. In the Assembly, members reacted adversely to the chief minister's remarks and helped the law enforcers' case since almost everyone wanted strong police action.

The lack of concrete measures has encouraged toughs to pose as Naxalites and extort money from villagers—sometimes severing limbs to create terror. If a serious drive is launched to comb the forests and catch the fast-dwindling number of hardcore activists, it could mark the end of the movement.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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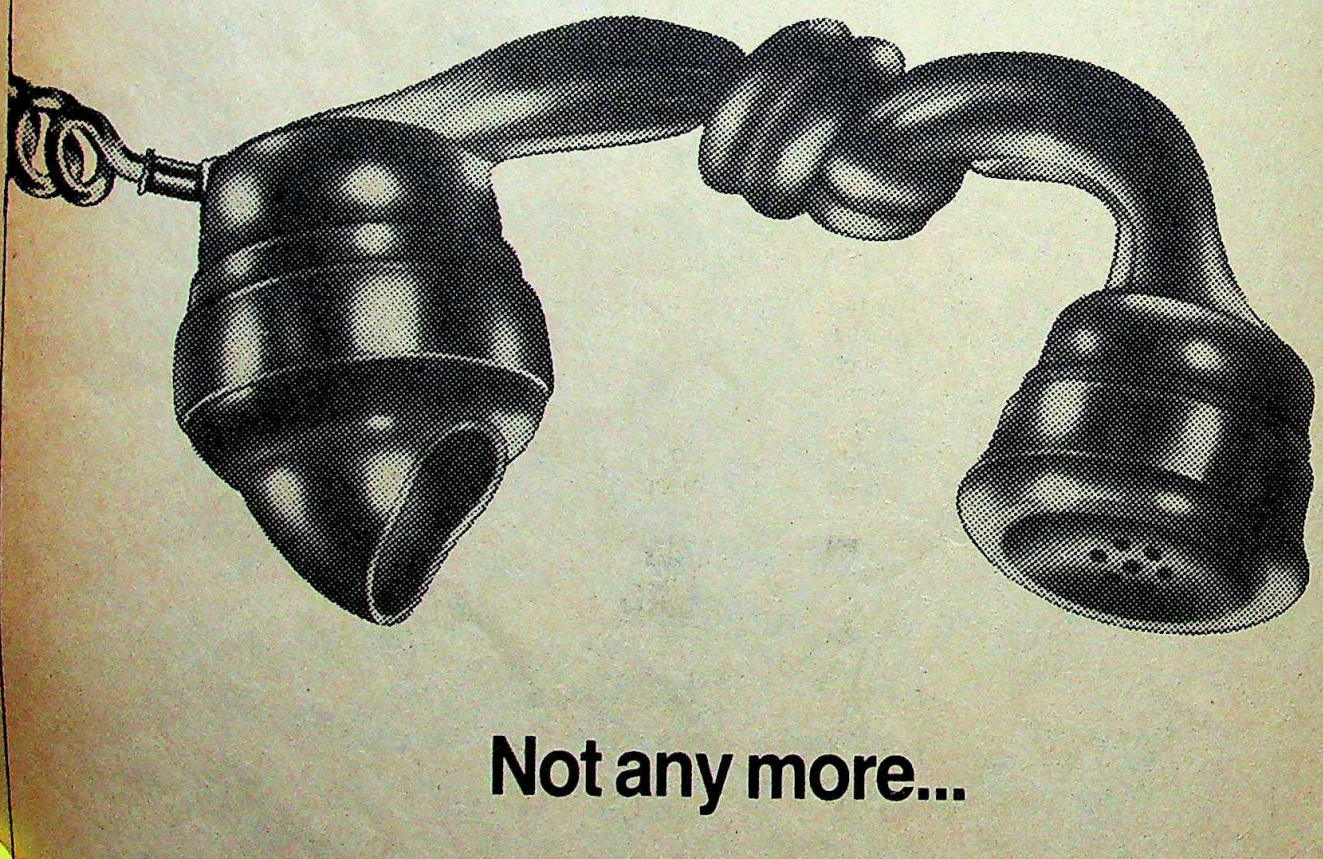

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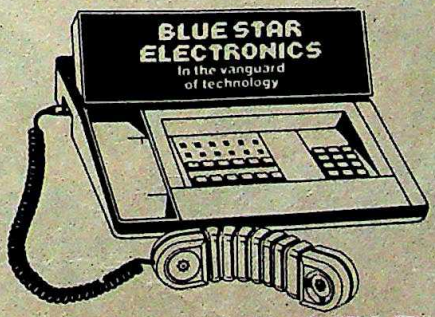

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BIHAR

Wordy Duel

An odd conflict at Jamshedpur

THE scene was more out of a political leader's itinerary than a professional manager's diary. When Russi Mody, chairman of Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), stepped out of his plane at Jamshedpur, thousands of people began shouting: "Russi Mody, don't worry, people are with you." Banners and handbills—projecting Mody as a messiah—were distributed. TISCO officials said the public outburst was spontaneous. But district officials called the event a "stage-managed show meant to bully the administration".

Whatever the truth, one thing was certain. The two-month-old war of words between Singhbhum district Deputy Commissioner Kumaresh Chandra Mishra and Mody had taken a new turn. It now involved the people of Jamshedpur, the steel city over whose fortunes Mody now presides.

The trouble between Mody and Mishra erupted in June when Mishra found the company had violated Arms Act laws on several counts, including possession of more imported and industrial guns than the law allowed. Against the provision that an individual or a company can hold only three guns, the company possessed 259 industrial guns used by its security guards. Also, the guns were unlicensed. Though Mody asserted the guns were "defunct", the administration found that the company had applied for a renewal of the licences. Mishra also discovered one licence had not been renewed since 1968, while another gun—imported in 1966—had no licence at all.

Some of these violations were "cognizable and non-bailable" offences but, in view of the status enjoyed by Mody and TISCO, Mishra referred the matter to the court instead of filing a first information report with the police, which may have meant immediate arrests.

Some other charges included:

Entry to TISCO: smeared

► Unauthorised construction of a stadium on TISCO's leased land in Jamshedpur. The land was leased by the administration but the stadium was built in the name of Tata Steel Sports Foundation.

► Irregularities in the building of the Noamundi stadium. The land on which it has been built was given to TISCO for iron ore mining and not for surface use.

► Failure of the TISCO Flying Club to pay customs duty on a plane that it imported. When the customs officials asked TISCO's Chief Industrial Relations Officer Nirup Mohanty about this, he told them that it was a toy plane and the company was not aware it needed to pay customs duty.

► Detection of 12,000 litres of unlicensed methylated spirit in TISCO's godowns and at the Tata main hospital.

K.C. MISHRA

RUSSI MODY

Singhbhum Deputy Commissioner K.C. Mishra has locked horns with TISCO chief Russi Mody in an unusual contest.

K.M. KISHAN

► Plying of several trucks inside TISCO premises without valid papers. The administration says most of the 300 trucks used by the company do not have proper papers, and are not paying road tax.

Recently, the administration had also slapped a cess of Rs 2.5 crore on the company, for road tax and other dues. TISCO challenged the cess in the high court, which referred the case to the deputy commissioner. Said Mishra: "Mody has to act within the parameters of law. He can't act like a state within a state."

Reacting angrily to the charges, Mody called a press conference and declared that Mishra's actions were "personal vendetta". He charged Mishra with once asking him for a petty favour—to get a relative admitted in the local M.G.M. Medical College on TISCO's quota—and Mody didn't oblige. This, he said, led to the campaign against him.

Mishra retaliated by threatening to sue, saying: "It seems that he (Mody) takes government policy, rules and regulations for granted." As the diatribe continued, Mody retorted: "I do not need the deputy commissioner to teach me how to behave as a citizen of this country or about my rights as a citizen."

However, there seems to be more to the wordy duel than meets the eye. At the press conference, Mody hinted, significantly, that relations between TISCO and the Dubey Government have not been entirely happy and the administration was out to harass him.

The friction between Dubey and Mody is believed by many to have been caused by the Tatas' refusal to take over the sick Rohtas Industries, though they had initially agreed to do so. Dubey had publicly announced the deal, and was unhappy about their decision. Another government grouse has apparently been that the Tatas invest in other states the surpluses they have earned in Bihar.

Even as the controversy raged last fortnight, Mishra in a surprise move was granted study leave to avail of a scholarship at Boston University. The study leave was said to have been in the offing before the controversy with TISCO erupted, and Mishra's absence provided unexpected relief to the TISCO chief. But that was not before the steel city's image of clean dealings had taken a knocking.

—FARZAND AHMED

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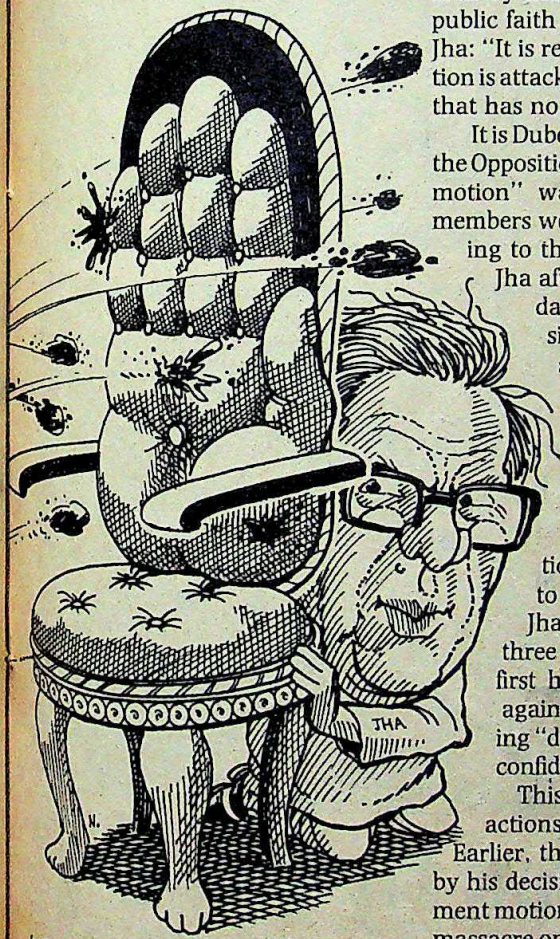
BIHAR

Under Fire

Speaker's office in turmoil

NOT even the august office of the speaker of the Assembly is left above controversy in turbulent Bihar. The Opposition's ire over Speaker Shiv Chandra Jha's recent rulings has spilled beyond the stately pillars of the Assembly into the streets. The Opposition intends to take the issue of his behaviour directly to the people, from August 17, via public meetings held at all divisional headquarters.



The current row was sparked off following a fracas in the House last month when the Opposition—with 100 seats in a 325-member House—tried to raise the issue of a lock-out at the public sector Heavy Engineering Corporation at Ranchi. Opposition members had been forcibly removed and expelled from the House for five days. In addition, an official motion, moved by Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, had been adopted condemning the Opposition for its unruly behaviour. Leader of the Opposition Karpoori Thakur described it as a "murder of democracy" and the "awarding of three punishments for a single crime".

The Opposition has already petitioned Bihar Governor P. Venkatasubbaiah, called on Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar and sent memorandums against Jha to speakers of assemblies throughout the country. Inside the House, it has moved no-confidence and "removal" motions against the speaker and repeatedly paralysed proceedings.

But the Opposition's latest decision is seen by many as one which will erode public faith in the speaker's office. Adds Jha: "It is really strange that the Opposition is attacking the institution in a forum that has no constitutional authority."

It is Dubey's motion that has incensed the Opposition most. The "condemnation motion" was moved when opposition members were not present, and, according to the records, was permitted by Jha after the listed business for the day had ended. It was also considered passed without discussion or being put to vote—opposition members argue that a minimum 10 days' notice was needed.

The curious turn of events went further. Instead of ruling on the removal motion—which he said was aimed to deliberately insult him—Jha adjourned the House sine die, three days ahead of schedule. But first he moved a privilege motion against opposition leaders for making "derogatory remarks" in the no-confidence motion.

This is not the first time that Jha's actions have come under a cloud. Earlier, the Opposition had been irked by his decision not to allow an adjournment motion on the May 29 Aurangabad massacre on the unusual ground that no such motion could be accepted during the budget session. After the Assembly was paralysed for three days, Jha called a special debate, leading to charges that he acted as a Congress(I) member rather than an impartial speaker.

His campaigning for the Congress(I) candidate, Manorama Singh, in the Banka by-election in end 1986 met with the Opposition's disapproval. Jha incurred the wrath of the former chief minister Jagannath Mishra for going on a padayatra—the Jana Jagran Abhiyan—in May 1987, which took him to Mishra's constituency, Jhanjharpur. The padayatra also embarrassed Dubey as it exposed the developmental flaws in a region dominated by Maithili Brahmins—Jha's clan. The region has produced three chief ministers and Jha's move was seen as a search for a new Maithili Brahmin constituency.

Jha, with his long legislative career—he was a member of the Upper House for 12 years before being elected to the Assembly from Bhagalpur—has been often seen as harbouring ambitions of chief ministership. He was a dissident during Mishra's reign and had accepted a cabinet post in the late Chandrashekhar Singh's cabinet after first turning down an offer to join the ministry. After Dubey made him speaker, hopes that it may put him temporarily out of action have not borne fruit. So much mud is being flung at Jha that some of it is bound to sully the office he holds.

—FARZAND AHMED

GUJARAT

Growing Rift

Sparks fly in the Congress(I)

EVIDENCE of the feuding between Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary and Congress(I) state chief Ahmed Patel continues to mount. Late last month, Patel suspended Sahadev Chaudhary, Surat district panchayat president and the chief minister's prominent ally, for disregarding a party directive.

It dealt a major blow to the chief minister in his home district, where he is opposed by strident critic Jhinabhai Darji, a tribal leader. The Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) had asked Sahadev to accommodate Darji's supporters in the panchayat committees. Sahadev not only ignored the directive but also castigated Patel for imposing his rule on the panchayat. Sahadev was also stung because under him the Surat district panchayat was adjudged the best managed in the country last year.

His defiant stand provoked Patel to serve him a show cause notice. The PCC(I) chief raised the issue during Rajiv Gandhi's June visit to Gujarat, and Chaudhary later assured Rajiv his confidant would abide by party rules. But Sahadev did not yield, forcing his suspension.

Though Sahadev accused Patel and

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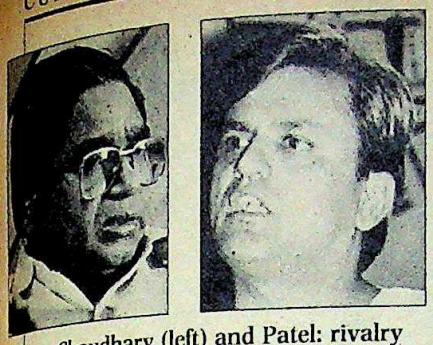


Chaudhary (left) and Patel: rivalry

Darji of conspiring, Chaudhary justified the suspension, saying "indiscipline cannot be tolerated". He has often said he leads no factions within the party, though many ruling party members feel "Sahadev speaks with the chief minister's voice". Chaudhary has himself complained of Darji's "anti-party activities" and would have found it hard to defend Sahadev's belligerence. It is true, though, that the PCC(I) has let off partymen for similar lapses in the past.

The chief minister was also forced on the defensive as, despite his complaint, Darji was recently made chairman of the National Commission on Rural Labour. It was not a happy signal for Chaudhary.

Meanwhile, in Surat, 14 Congress(I) municipal corporators threatened to withdraw support to Congress(I) Mayor Dr George Solanki, unless the suspension was revoked. A meeting, called by Sahadev, was attended by two party MLAs—both Chaudhary supporters—who criticised the PCC(I) action. Trying to appear neutral, Chaudhary directed the party whip to issue show cause notices to the legislators, even while his emissaries met the suspended leader.

Chaudhary's deliberate sidelining of the PCC(I) in making important policy decisions, has forced Patel to join hands with his political foes—Darji and former chief minister Madhavsinh Solanki. Accusing both leaders of giving Patel "biased advice", Chaudhary says: "While Solanki expects me to consult him on all matters, history shows that Darji has not got along with any chief minister."

The divide has affected the party too. While nearly a third of the 149 Congress(I) MLAs are against Chaudhary, a dozen MPs have come out against Patel and his tie-up with Solanki. Two MPs—Irshad Mirza and Sagar Raika—have complained to New Delhi about Patel's favouritism in dealing with party workers though Patel says "the larger interest of the party" governs his actions. There are few signs that truce will be called.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Fact And Fiction

EVER since the Bofors and submarine deals exploded in the national press, a spate of sensational stories continues to dog the capital. Some of the stories are correct, others false. Both continue to make the rounds. The problem is, which story is correct and which is rumour? Our team of investigative reporters went to work and sifted fact from fiction. We can authoritatively state that the following stories which continue to make the rounds of the cocktail circuit in Delhi are all totally incorrect.

Rajiv Gandhi wanted to remind people of their grandmothers because he had forgotten his own. Till Priyanka corrected him, Rajiv had always assumed that the picture of Mona Lisa hanging in Sonia's room was a portrait of his grandmother.

There is a revolt in the national executive of the Rashtriya Sanjay Manch because Menaka Gandhi wants to induct stray dogs and cats as its members.

Since Bahuguna has criticised V.P. Singh, therefore Amitabh has joined hands with him.

Hegde has praised V.P.Singh. Chandra Shekhar has fallen out with him.

Amitabh has signed up with Warner Brothers to play the title role in a new block-buster titled *The Godbrother*.

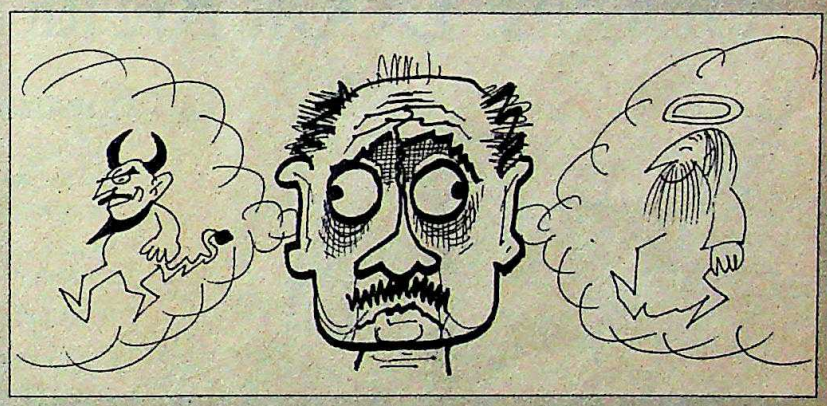
Ajitabh has signed up to play the title role in its sequel, *The Godbrother-II*.

To keep alive the great literary tradition of the Nehrus, Arun Nehru is putting the finishing touches to his forthcoming 800-page book, *The Discovery of Rajiv*.

Sonia has flatly refused to undergo a lie detector test at Red Fort as requested by Rajiv.

Doordarshan is starting a new serial titled the *The Odd Couple*. V.P. Singh and Arun Nehru have been approached to play the lead roles.

In recognition of his amazing literary talents displayed through letter-writing, Kamalapati Tripathi is being made the editor of the *National Herald*, which is being converted into a glossy fortnightly titled *India Yesterday*.



In his new house after retirement, Giani Zail Singh has written letters to the domestic staff stating that he has the legal right to dismiss any of them. However, the Giani has also assured them that he does not intend to dismiss anyone.

Ram Jethmalani and George Fernandes are shifting permanently to Switzerland to pursue their research into Swiss bank accounts.

Gorbachev offered Rajiv admission in a Moscow school to allow him to study with his children, but Sonia did not give permission.

Ram Nath Goenka has hired Michael Hershman as the Washington correspondent of *Indian Express* at a fabulous salary of Rs 5 lakh a month.

Doon School is going to close down next summer because not enough students are enrolling.

Secretly, Rajiv Gandhi has started taking flying lessons again, just in case....

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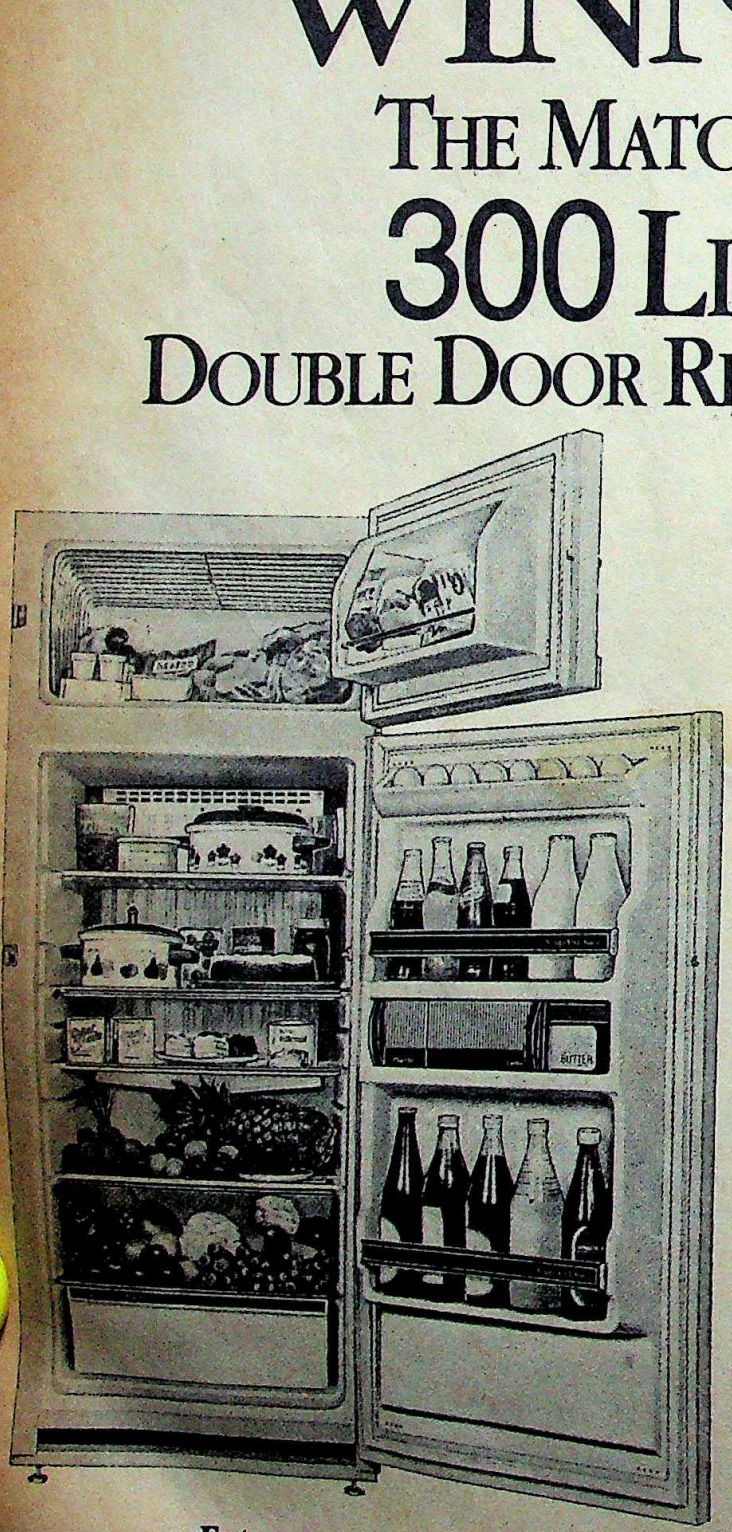

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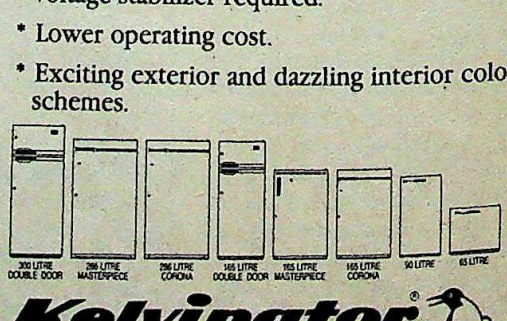

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V.P. SINGH

Moving Out

But the response is mixed

LAST fortnight the V.P. Singh brigade took its battle against Rajiv Gandhi and corruption to the south and the west. In a whirlwind tour, the former defence minister addressed a series of public meetings in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Baroda, Ahmedabad and Ganganagar (Rajasthan). And though his speeches lacked fervour—he continued to harp on the same weather-beaten nexus of corruption theme—and drew moderate audiences, he left behind a new set of followers, mainly university students and lawyers.

Said R.V. Ramana Murthy, a student of economics at the Central University of Hyderabad: "It was a dull lecture, the usual political nonsense, but Singh has built an image and reputation that three out of every four collegians will support, actively or passively." And the university student union's president, Subbaiah Choudhury, who had invited Singh remarked: "From his speech he seemed confused. He gave few clear-cut answers but he raised hopes of being someone who will do something different in Indian politics."

In Osmania University, a group of students, mostly Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) activists, formed the Andhra Pradesh Vidyarthi Sangharshana Samithi to fight corruption in high places. Said G.R. Karunaker, an activist: "We will take the movement to the districts and educate the rural people about the rulers' misdeeds."

But there was no doubt that the response in the south was lukewarm. The rally, organised under the banner of the Hyderabad Citizens Committee, was a damper. Even the one in Bangalore, where he shared the platform with Karnataka's Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, Singh drew only a modest crowd. While some came out of curiosity, others just drifted in casually. There were some exceptions, of course, like Mansoor Naghnoor, a young businessman, and his pretty wife Kalpana, who drove more than 10 km to hear Singh speak. Said Naghnoor: "I think he is the only decent politician around, one who is not in it for either money or power." Added his thoughtful wife: "We must give V.P Singh a chance."

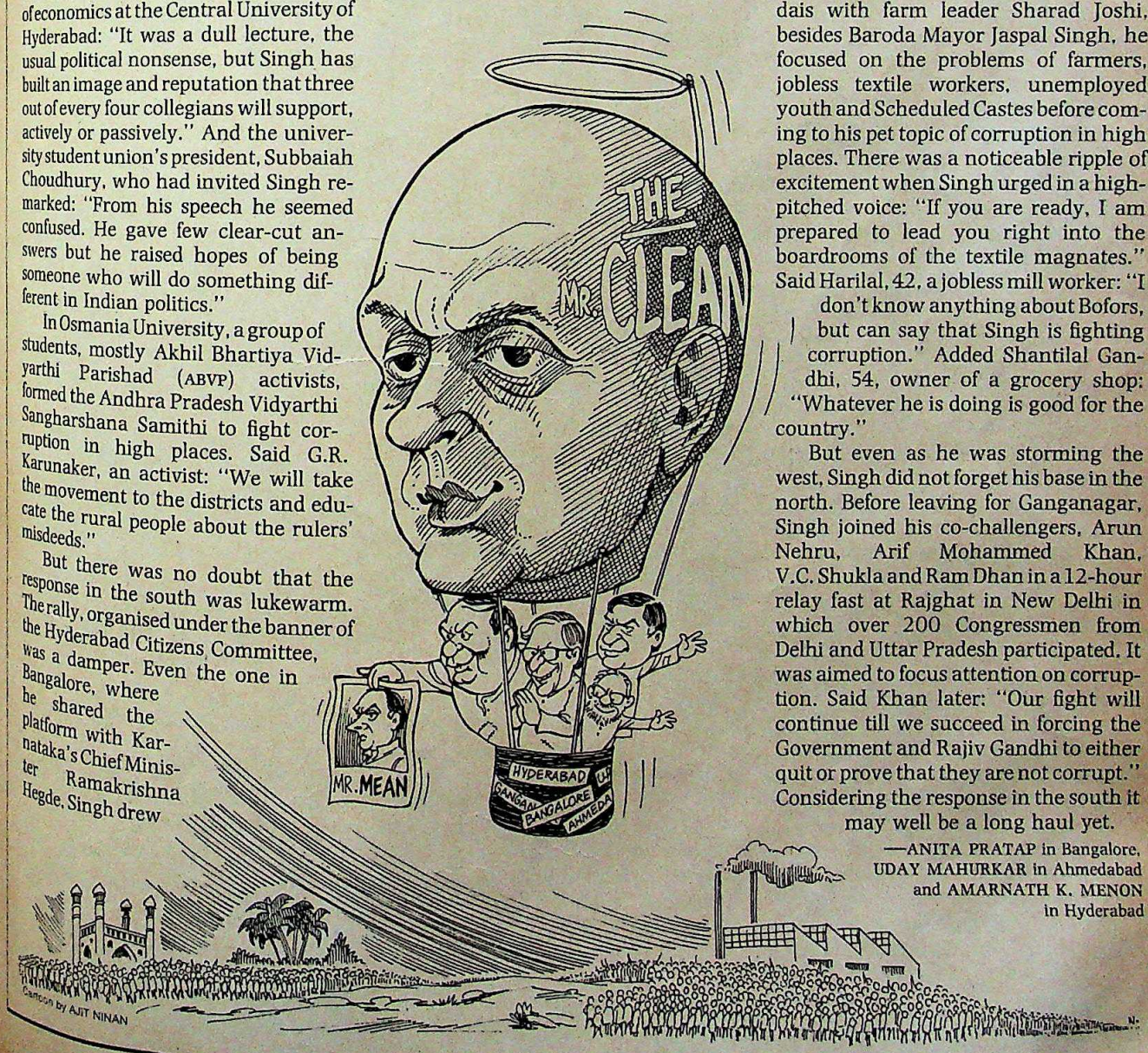
A touch of drama was added when both Singh and Hegde went out of their way to say that they were not interested in the leadership of the movement. Said Hegde with touching humility: "In the national movement that you have launched against corruption, I am prepared to be a *swayamsevak* (volunteer)." And Singh commented with equal elan: "I don't see myself in the forefront, but as one along with the others."

However, Gujarat gave Singh reason to celebrate. Wherever he went—Baroda, Anand and Ahmedabad—surging crowds followed him raising slogans like *VP tum aage badho hum tumhare saath hain* (VP you go ahead, we are with you). At Baroda, more than 7,000 people received him at the station. This number swelled to 75,000 at the open meeting he addressed. Significantly, most of the crowd was made up of middle and the lower classes.

In Ahmedabad too, it was Singh all the way. At his opening function organised by Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal, a body which follows Vinoba Bhave, Singh declared: "I had lost track somewhere along the way but now I am back in my original home." But it was his Kankaria football ground meeting that drew the loudest response. Sharing the dais with farm leader Sharad Joshi, besides Baroda Mayor Jaspal Singh, he focused on the problems of farmers, jobless textile workers, unemployed youth and Scheduled Castes before coming to his pet topic of corruption in high places. There was a noticeable ripple of excitement when Singh urged in a high-pitched voice: "If you are ready, I am prepared to lead you right into the boardrooms of the textile magnates." Said Harilal, 42, a jobless mill worker: "I don't know anything about Bofors, but can say that Singh is fighting corruption." Added Shantilal Gandhi, 54, owner of a grocery shop: "Whatever he is doing is good for the country."

But even as he was storming the west, Singh did not forget his base in the north. Before leaving for Ganganagar, Singh joined his co-challengers, Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammed Khan, V.C. Shukla and Ram Dhan in a 12-hour relay fast at Rajghat in New Delhi in which over 200 Congressmen from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh participated. It was aimed to focus attention on corruption. Said Khan later: "Our fight will continue till we succeed in forcing the Government and Rajiv Gandhi to either quit or prove that they are not corrupt." Considering the response in the south it may well be a long haul yet.

—ANITA PRATAP in Bangalore, UDAY MAHURKAR in Ahmedabad and AMARNATH K. MENON in Hyderabad



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

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DELHI RIOTS

A Reluctant Inquiry

A farcical investigation continues

"WE are still paying the price for the 1984 riots," Delhi's Police Commissioner Ved Marwah bluntly said at a press conference last fortnight, soon after terrorists had struck again in the capital. He pointed out that the regular rioting which now erupted in Delhi and tied up his force was a legacy of the anti-Sikh riots which swept Delhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984 and left more than 2,200 dead. Marwah's assessment was that Sikh killers were normally motivated by revenge and the only solution lay in "healing the wounds".

However, the hopes that the rioters would be booked have already been belied by the Ranganathan Misra Commission report. The commission, which was belatedly set up on April 26, 1985, and submitted its report in February 1987, was expected to name the guilty in the post-assassination violence.

But Misra, a Supreme Court judge, vaguely blamed the police for the riots in his report and passed the buck on by recommending the formation of two committees to finish the task he had begun. One was to go into whether the criminal cases registered during the riots were properly investigated and to ensure that the guilty were booked. The second was to identify the conduct of specific members of the police force. Under pressure from the then Punjab chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala, the two-member committees were quickly formed in February but have since been bogged down due to a series of problems.

Though the commission had been set up specifically to inquire into the rioting, it desisted "from making any assessment of the allegations implicating individuals...." on the plea that the perpetrators of the crimes would number several thousand. And yet, ironically, the two committees are being expected to complete this "impossible" task in six months.

Besides, though the tenure of the committees ends later this month, they have still to be allotted the requisite staff. They are still waiting for two superintendents, five deputy superintendents and six inspectors of police who will form the investigating teams. Justice Dilip Kapoor, a retired high court judge, who is probing the police role, has not even been allotted office space.

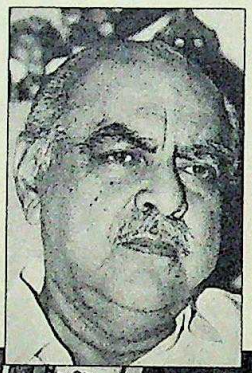
Also, the Government's instructions to the committees not to use the original records and documents of the Misra Commission as prima facie evidence have proved confusing. The two committees have now to work from scratch to build up evidence. Says Kusum Lata Mittal, a member of the committee probing police conduct: "We have been given to understand that we can use the contents of the original documents as information, not as evidence."

The Ministry of Home Affairs offers feeble excuses for its instructions. A senior Home Ministry official, who did not wish to be identified, said: "If the records are scrutinised again, the committees will actually be probing the Misra Commission report. That will not be fair to the Supreme Court judge." But as H.S. Phoolka, convenor of the Citizen's Justice Committee, which represented hundreds of riot victims but later boycotted the commission's proceedings, points out: "This proves that the Government suspects the judiciousness of the Misra report; hence the hesitation."

The Home Ministry's contention that the committees can ask the people who deposed before the commission to file fresh affidavits obviously does not work. Mittal admits that a "credibility gap" exists which, coupled with fear of the police, has held back complainants. Figures prove this. In spite of repeated notifications—and extension of the period for filing complaints—only about 300 affidavits have been received by each of the committees. More revealing is the fact that about three-fourths of these relate to financial claims, which the committees are not empowered to deal with. Says a disgusted Phoolka: "I talked to some members of our organisation but after the farcical commission report, everyone felt it was futile to make another representation. The Government is not serious about punishing the guilty."

As files continue to shuttle between the committees' offices in Vikas Minar and the Home Ministry in North Block, justice takes reluctant steps forward. And as long as the guilty rioters stalk the capital's streets, so too will the terrorists.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI



Post assassination riots; (top left) Kapoor and Mittal: buck-passing

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SRI LANKA

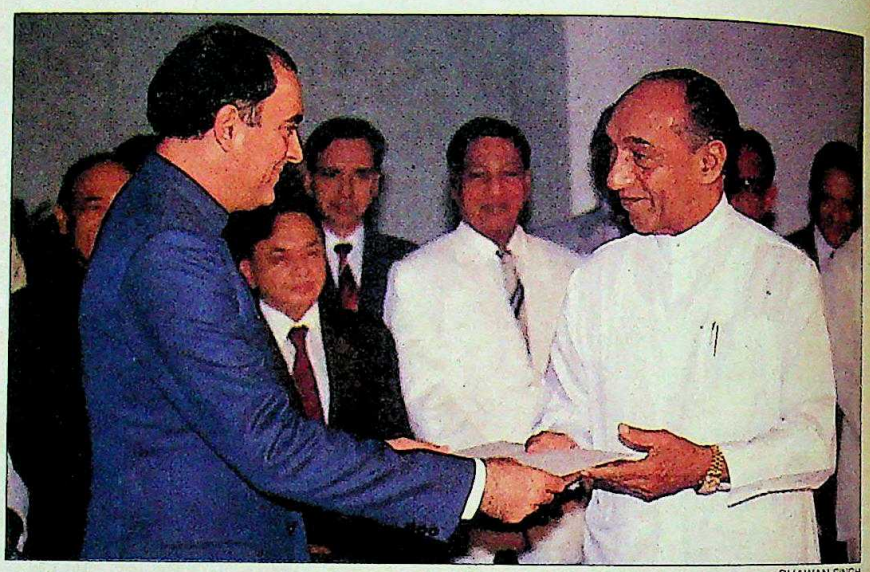
Cautious Optimism

The post-accord scene offers hope as Jayewardene outfoxes opponents

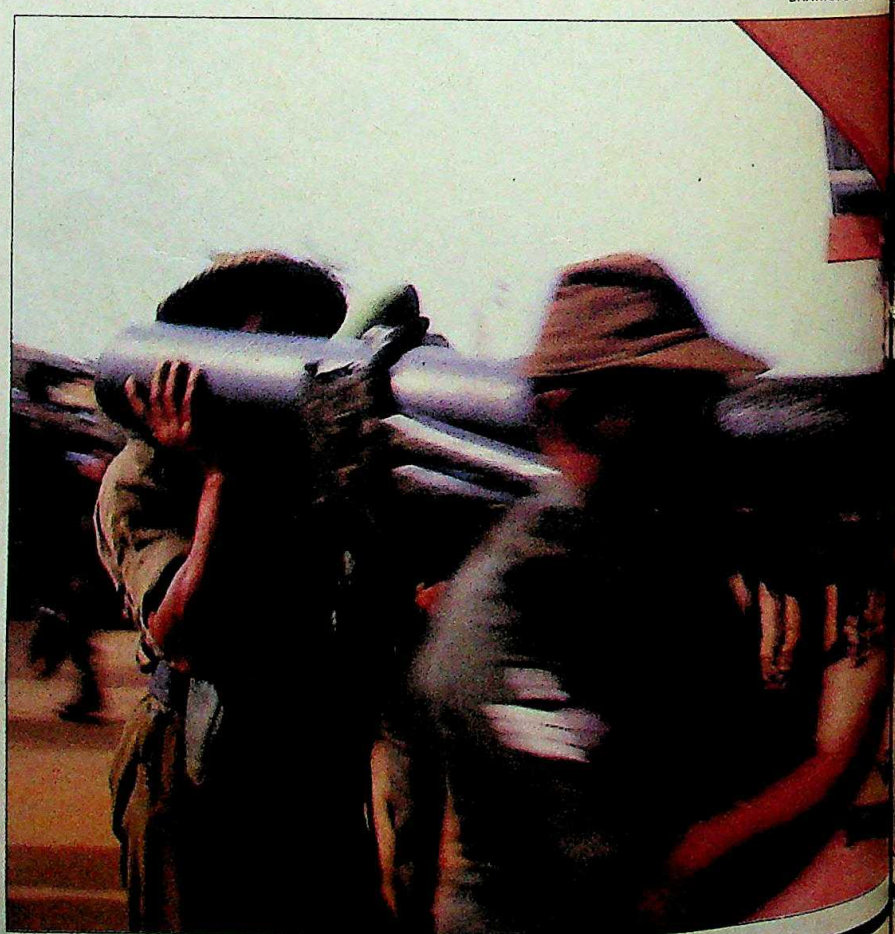
THE walls of the arrival lounge at Colombo's plush international airport are plastered with alluring advertisements for the myriad casinos that dot the city, symbols of the gambling blood that surges through the capital's social veins. But the one Sinhalese who has taken the biggest gamble of all time is the country's ascetic-looking President Junius Richard Jayewardene. Now 81 and in the dusk of his protracted political life, JR as he is popularly known, has, in the face of daunting odds, staked everything on the one throw of the dice—the historic and unique accord he signed late last month with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In gaming terms, Jayewardene's move would have been considered suicidal. The three-day riots that erupted in Colombo before the signing of the agreement were a violent expression of the widespread opposition to the accord by the majority Sinhalese population. But not for nothing do the Sinhalese call Jayewardene 'The Old Fox'. In just one week, he has seemingly succeeded in outmanoeuvring the two men who posed the greatest immediate challenge to the accord—his hardline anti-Indian Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, and the powerful Minister for National Security, Lalith Athulathmudali.

Premadasa, who telegraphed his opposition to the accord by absenting himself from the official receptions during Rajiv's visit, made his first public speech last week where he carefully avoided criticism of the deal and cautioned the people against using violence to voice their objections. Athulathmudali initially tried desperately to sink the accord. At the six-hour emergency Cabinet meeting which Indian High Commissioner J.N. Dixit was invited to address, Athulathmudali produced what he claimed were transcripts of wireless intercepts between the militants saying they would not surrender their arms. Dixit, convinced the Cabinet that the intercepts were forgeries and that the Indian Government would guarantee the arms surrender.



BHAWAN SINGH



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Since then, the minister for national security, usually the one man in the Sri Lankan Cabinet most accessible to the press, has suddenly become unavailable. But significantly, in a televised broadcast after the accord he said that any opposition to the accord "should be through democratic means".

He has also been rattled by Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel's demands for his resignation. By indicating that the post of national security minister has been made redundant by the peace accord, Jayewardene, in an ironic twist of the knife, has hinted that Athulathmudali would be made minister for national reconstruction—a subtle reminder that the Old Fox has the undated resignation letters of all his ministers in his possession.

Obviously, the wily President has managed to neutralise them in a surprisingly short period. At the first Cabinet meeting after the signing of the accord, on August 5, Premadasa, to everybody's surprise, arrived in Jayewardene's car. The meeting itself was, in the words of de Mel, "objective and extremely cordial". Says de Mel: "We were expecting some fireworks. But the only fireworks took place when I demanded the resignation of the national security minister for the total breakdown of national security during the riots. The rest of the meeting passed without any harsh words. There has been a subtle change in dissenting opinion."

HOW Jayewardene achieved that breakthrough, particularly with Premadasa, resides at the moment in the realm of speculation. Knowledgeable circles speak of the incriminating dossiers the leader has on his cabinet ministers. Whatever the reason, a major hurdle in the path to peace appears to have been removed. In a private conversation with a senior Indian official, the President reportedly said: "I am the captain of the ship and I am steering in a certain direction. If anybody wants to go in a different direction, they can take to the lifeboats."

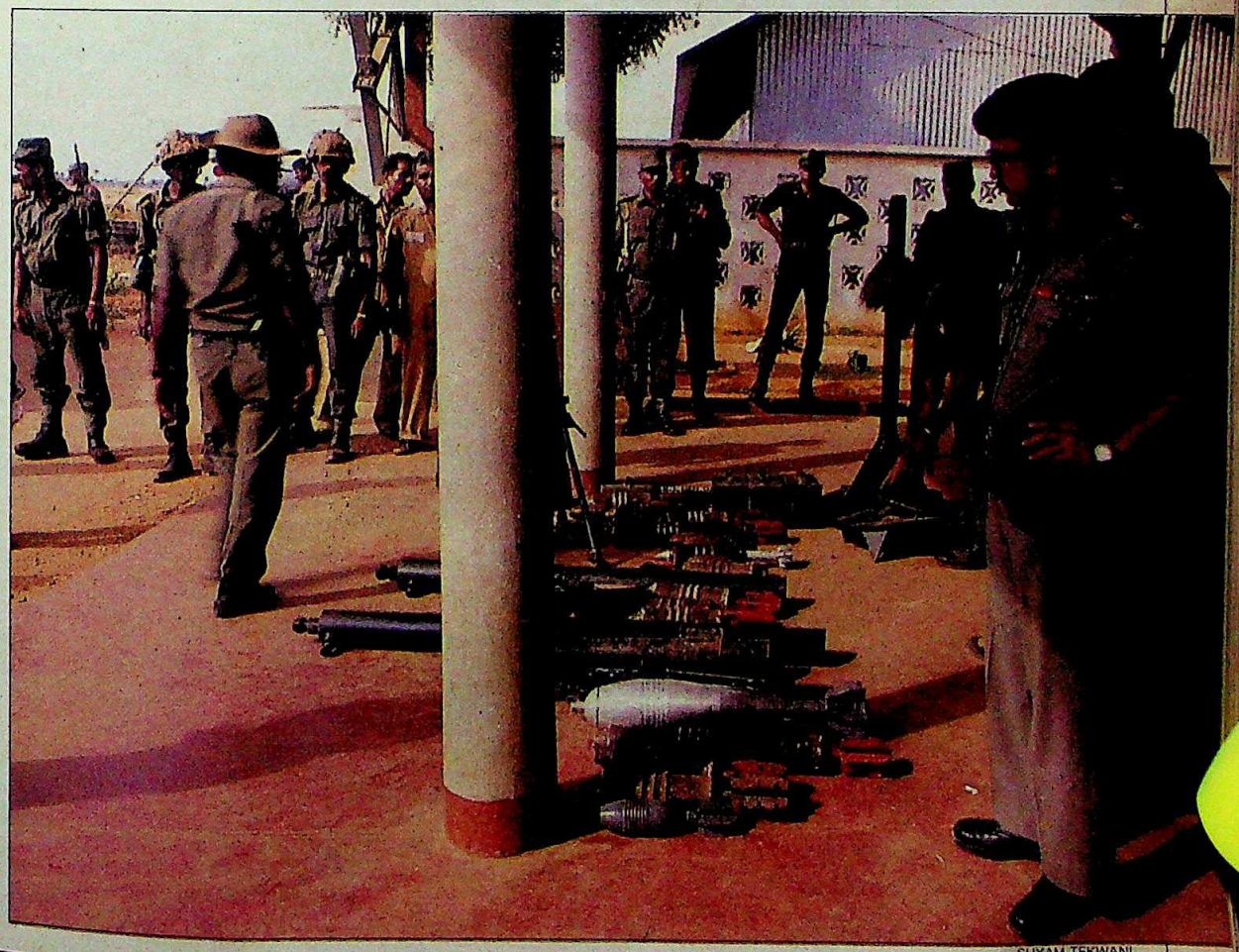
But Jayewardene still has a tougher task ahead—to convince the Sinhalese population, smarting at what they perceive as a betrayal of their country's sovereignty. It is symbolised visibly by the presence of the 6,000 armed Indian troops in the northern province and the two Indian naval frigates—bristling with weapons and radars—anchored opposite Colombo's Galle Face, the social meeting place for many of the capital's citizens. He has to persuade them that the accord will ultimately benefit the war-ravaged country and the Sri Lankan people.

Admits Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayake, one of the key figures in the pre-accord negotiations: "The task now is to get through to the hardcore. There is a national psychosis that cannot be ignored. You can't expect to do that overnight. But already there are signs that the public is starting to realise the benefits." Jayewardene himself has appeared on national television on two successive days to point out that the choice now lies between stability and prosperity on one side and chaos and economic ruin on the other.

Even the threat from Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which had come out strongly against the agreement, has suddenly dissipated into Colombo's monsoon air. Bandaranaike has refused to talk to the press or issue any anti-accord statements after her initial

BHAWAN SINGH

SHYAM TEKWANI



SHYAM TEKWANI

(Anticlockwise from left) Rajiv and Jayewardene after signing the accord; a LTTE mortar; surrendered arms at Jaffna

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outbursts, most notably in a strongly-worded letter to Rajiv in which she criticised the accord and the manner in which it was achieved. Says Dissanayake: "The SLFP has been left in the lurch."

Senior Sri Lankan cabinet ministers claim that opposition leaders have withdrawn from the anti-accord movement because of the changing public mood. "The average Sinhalese has accepted that it is now a fait accompli. They have seen that the Tamil militants are surrendering their arms and no killings have taken place. Once they realise that peace means prosperity, they will come around," says a senior official in Colombo. Adds Neelan Tiruchelvam, one of the most respected moderate TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) MPs: "After the surrender of arms, there has been a definite change in public opinion."

On the surface, it is logical to agree with de Mel when he says that "the worst is over". Jayewardene has clamped extended curfews in areas of potential trouble. Colombo's hyper-active social night life has come to an abrupt halt with a nine to six night curfew when army patrols have the streets to themselves. "The Government is on top of the situation," asserts Dissanayake. The press censorship currently in force is another inevitable step keeping in mind the more rabid Sinhalese newspapers that are capable of whipping up chauvinist sentiments.

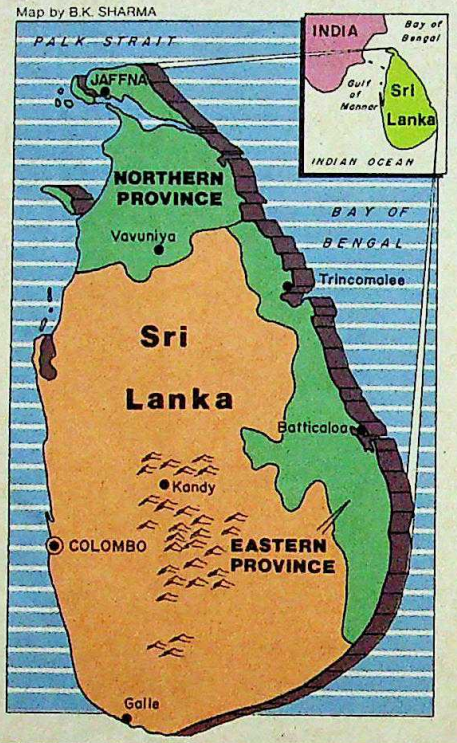
Control of the press has also ensured that extensive coverage was given to the arms surrender by the militants—considered a key factor in influencing Sinhalese opinion—and to statements by world leaders and governments in hailing the accord and its long-term benefits. A major element in all this is the positive statements being publicised by solitary members of the Buddhist clergy. This community, because of the high esteem it enjoys among the Sinhalese, poses the greatest non-political threat to the accord.

"There is nobody in the armed forces—totally Sinhalese at the moment—who would dare fire at a Buddhist monk. They could certainly pose problems if they decided to mobilise and take to the streets like they did after the air-drop and during the pre-accord riots," says a top Sri Lankan official.

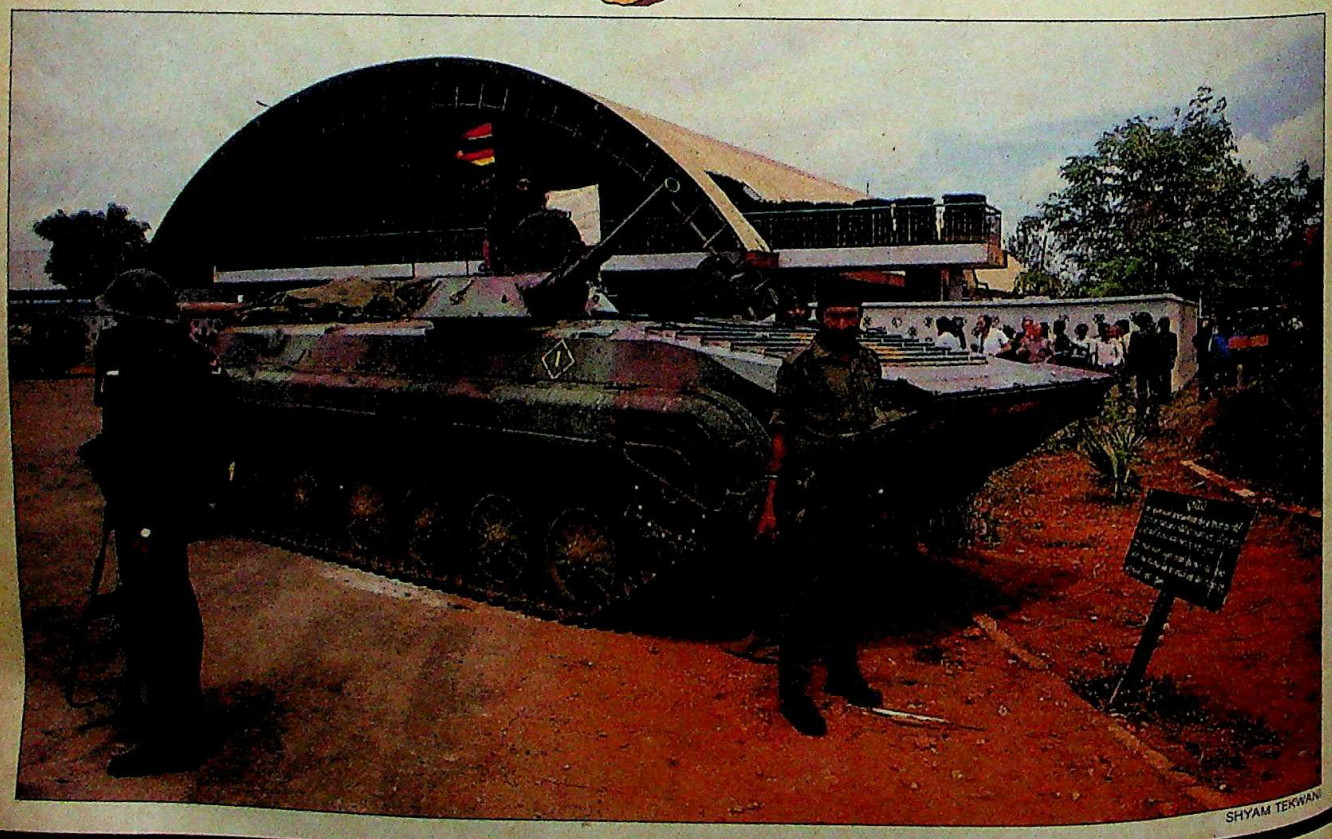
The danger, as a secret CID (Criminal Investigation Department) report on the riots and its origins points out, is of radical elements like the outlawed Janata Vimukti Perumuna (JVP) masquerading as monks. One monk who was arrested and named in the report, was in fact, a JVP activist. Security forces who raided his house in a Colombo suburb unearthed a cache of arms and ammunition.

Though Sri Lankan officials are playing down the threat posed by the JVP, it forms a potentially explosive issue. The success of the JVP-led insurrection in 1971 was precisely because it was able to mobilise Sinhalese youth in protest against "Indian expansionism". Today,

Map by B.K. SHARMA



An Indian army APC in Jaffna: delicate task



SHYAM TEKWANI

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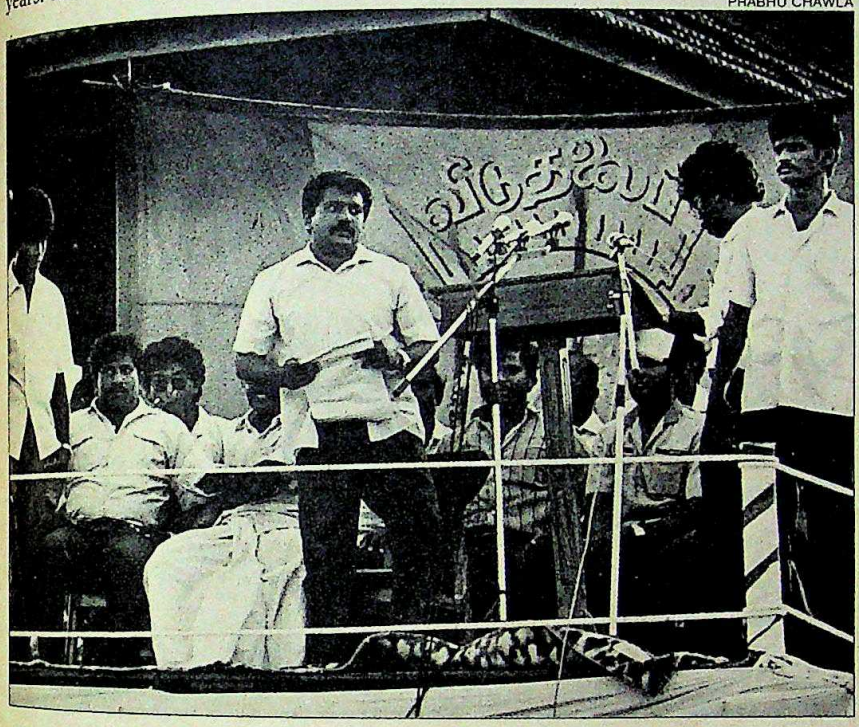
as the recent riots revealed, the campuses are ideal breeding grounds for a similar show of radical youth power. Most colleges have been closed or have functioned intermittently in the recent past, and the number of jobless youth has shot up because of the ethnic strife of the last four years. And, in campuses last fortnight, there were once again rumbles of protest and posters condemning the "Indianisation of Sri Lanka".

However, till now, the JVP has been confined to a relatively small area in the southern part of the island. Sri Lankan officials point out that with the Indian Army having moved in to the north, Sri Lankan armed forces there have been ferried to the south by Indian Air Force transport aircraft to provide added security. But there is also the widely-acknowledged fact that the JVP has infiltrated certain sections of the armed forces and cannot be ignored as a major threat to the success of the accord.

PRABHU CHAWLA



Thus, it is more realistic to accept Tiruchelvam's post-accord assessment as being one of "cautious optimism". The Sri Lankan Legal Department is currently working on what could be the make-or-break issue for the future of the accord—its ratification in Parliament scheduled for next month. The SLFP is certain to stall proceedings by demanding that the motion be sent to the Supreme Court for examination, as the Constitution allows. The Cabinet, however, can insist that the Supreme Court give its decision within 48 hours, a decision likely to favour the introduction of the vote.

But the key question is whether a majority of the ruling party MPs will actually endorse the accord legislation which requires a two-third majority. Under the current numerical representation, if less than 30 out of the 169 ruling United National Party (UNP) members abstain or even vote against the peace accord, the

Pirabhakaran at his Jaffna meeting (left); and armed Tamil militants: uncertainty

PRABHU CHAWLA

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J.R. JAYEWARDENE

"I have never mistrusted India"

THE barricades and frequent security checks outside his private residence at Ward Place, Colombo's most exclusive residential area, symbolises the threat to his life. But there is little tension or fear inside the modest house where a confident Junius Richard Jayewardene, 81, the frail-looking President of Sri Lanka receives his guests. While conversing, he monitors the progress of the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. As time for the TV *news approaches, he ushers guests into the* TV *room so that he can watch the daily surrender of arms by the Tamil groups. The news over, he expresses satisfaction over the developments. For over a month, he has kept away from the media. In an exclusive interview with Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA, *last fortnight, Jayewardene speaks about the role of the Indian Army and his domestic problems. Excerpts:*

Q. Till recently, you have been pursuing a military option against the Tamil militants. What made you change your strategy and sign an agreement with India?

A. We were always for a political solution. But the terrorists never agreed to it. We knew we wouldn't be able to solve this problem except through a political dialogue. Now, they have also agreed. On our own part, we never gave up the political option. We had discussions at Thimpu, New Delhi, and Colombo and these discussions were not military discussions. But the terrorists never even looked at our documents.

Q. Do you feel that India has played an important role in bringing the Tamil Tigers to the negotiating table?

A. Till recently, India was playing the role of a mediator. Now, for the first time, India has discussed this problem directly with us. India's role in this whole problem has changed from a mere mediator to that of a participant.

Q. Do you think that this pact would have come about if the Tigers had not been part of the dialogue?

A. I have nothing to do with them. I have never seen Pirabhakaran.

Q. Have you gained anything politically?

A. One major gain is that terrorism is over. If the accord is sincerely implemented by these parties—the Indian Government, the Sri Lankan authorities and the separatist groups—peace will return to the island. The violence is over.

Q. Keeping in view the mistrust between the Indian Government and your government, do you think this accord will be implemented seriously?

A. I never had mistrust in the Indian Government. In fact, I never had mistrust in the separatists. What is there to mistrust? They (the separatists) are for violence, they are for murder—what is the kind of mistrust you are talking about in this kind of situation. On the other hand, I have been accused of trusting everyone too much.

Q. If you had trust in India, why didn't you sign a similar accord earlier?

A. I don't have a reason myself for this. But the only explanation which I can possibly think of is that it is the first time that India is prepared to tackle this terrorism problem as an active partner with me.

Q. If the accord has led to the end of violence in the north and east, then why has it not been welcomed by the Sinhalese?

A. Violence never lasts long. It has now died down. There was some opposition to the accord in certain parts of the island. It was activated by the Sinhalese terrorists. During the opposition to the agreement, voiced by the Buddhist clergy and the SLFP, they found that the JVP was taking active interest in the violent activities. Others have backed out of the anti-accord agitation, but the JVP is still continuing.

Q. Don't you think you will find it difficult to sustain this accord if your prime minister and minister for national security are opposed to it?

A. In a democracy, you have these freedoms. But when I bring legislations for the accord to Parliament, they will have to support them or they have to leave. I have signed a treaty and, under the Constitution, I have the right to make treaties with any country. I needn't to get cabinet support or approval for it. But when I have to go to the Parliament for legislative measures, they will all have to support them.

Q. If they don't, what will you do?

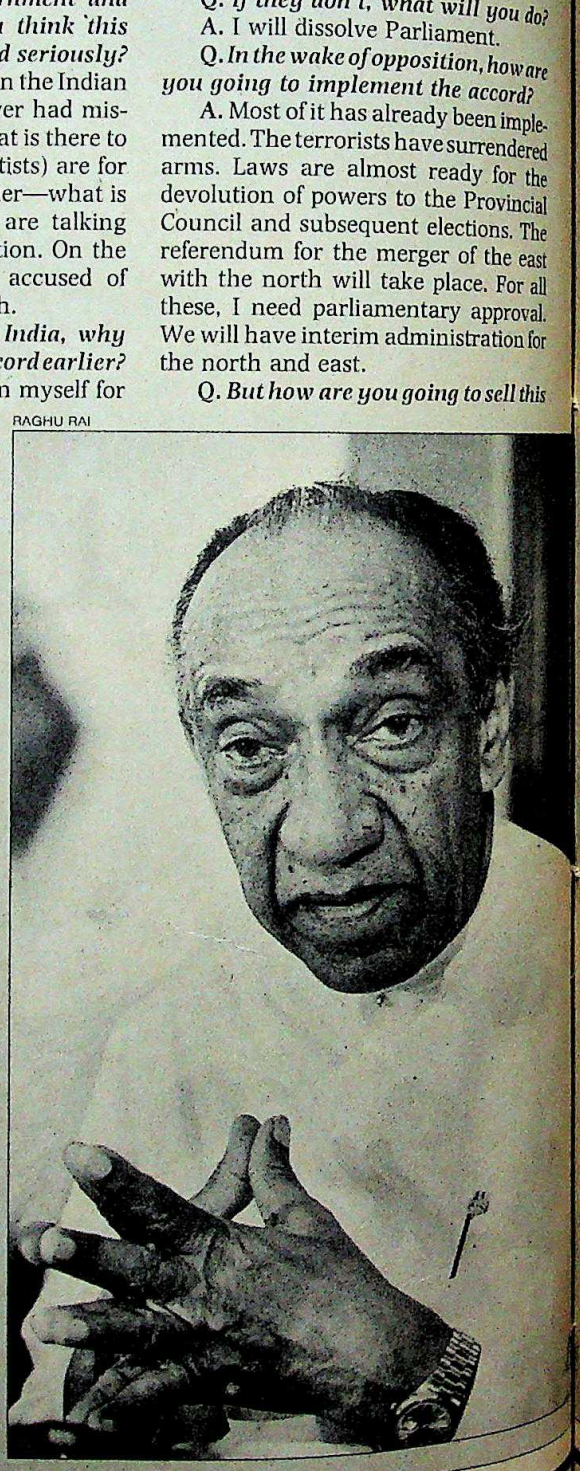
A. I will dissolve Parliament.

Q. In the wake of opposition, how are you going to implement the accord?

A. Most of it has already been implemented. The terrorists have surrendered arms. Laws are almost ready for the devolution of powers to the Provincial Council and subsequent elections. The referendum for the merger of the east with the north will take place. For all these, I need parliamentary approval. We will have interim administration for the north and east.

Q. But how are you going to sell this

RAGHU RAI



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accord to your people who consider it a total surrender?

A. I will do it with propaganda in favour of the advantages of the accord. I will use all democratic means to convince the people that this accord is in the best interests of our country. This might be an issue for the next elections but it would have been completed by that time. I am not going to have referendum on this accord.

Q. *What are the economic gains?*

A. We have nothing to lose. Peace will return to the country which, in turn, will help in reviving economic activity.

Q. *Are you sure that the Sri Lankan people approve of Indian forces?*

A. That is immaterial. The only way they can question it is by votes. And that will be clear during the elections. There are ways, in the democracy, of seeking the people's support for one's actions as President. If we go to the people for every action, then the Government can't function. Unfortunately, the Opposition is not opposing this government by democratic means. They are resorting to violence and this should be suppressed.

Q. *What is the specific role given to the Indian peace-keeping forces?*

A. They are acting under my supervision and directions and they will carry out those instructions. They have to supervise the surrender of arms by the terrorists, maintain law and order with our troops. They have to take part in all peaceful operations.

Q. *Will they be present till the accord is fully implemented?*

A. Well, that will take a long time. Provincial elections will take place at the end of the year. Till normalcy is restored, not only the Indian but also our forces are necessary. But if there is peace, the forces are not necessary. We have enough troops of our own during peaceful times. I would like the Indian forces to remain as long as there is trouble in the north and east.

Q. *If you have Indian forces here, why are you asking for American military help?*

A. I have asked America, England and Pakistan for help.

Q. *What kind of help or assistance you have sought from them?*

A. Whatever help they can give. I didn't make any specific reservations. But we have not asked for any military help. They may offer us helicopters, spare parts. I don't need any military assistance but only material assistance from friendly countries. And I have informed India about these as well. One reason for asking those countries for aid is to show the world that I have not only asked India for assistance, but others as well. Mrs Bandaranaike also received assistance from various countries for containing secessionists in 1971. She got MiGs from the USSR, helicopters from the US and aid from the UK and India. I have not done anything beyond that.

Q. *Since you are dependent on the West, both militarily and economically, don't you expect problems from them in implementing the accord?*

A. Sri Lanka does depend on the West for economic aid, and nothing else. But they can't influence our decisions. I am pro-West even now because there is democracy there. I am for democracy wherever it exists.

Q. *But why are you seeking help from anti-India countries like Pakistan and Israel? Will it not affect your relations with India as well?*

A. Earlier, I sought help from all of them. I couldn't have trained my people in India. They were training the terrorists.

Q. *How are you going to deal with* JVP *Weren't they crushed by Bandaranaike with foreign support?*

A. It is very difficult to give reasons for the revival of the JVP. Many people blame me for it. When I took over, I released a majority of their cadres and leaders. For over five years, they were quiet. And I was under the impression that they had accepted the democratic norm of behaviour. They contested the municipal and local elections. They contested the referendum, and lost in all these elections. But, in 1983, my security informed me that these people are again militarily active. They were preaching violence. I proscribed them. They had a hand in the 1983 riots in Colombo. Since then, they have been working underground, amassing a lot of support. I don't know how they've done this.

Q. *With all these problems, don't you feel exhausted at this age?*

A. They say the brain never gets tired, only the muscles get tired. I can switch off my powers of concentration. At the moment, I am thinking of you and nothing else. That is the way I am made. I can compartmentalise my problems.

Q. *Aren't you thinking of retiring from active politics now?*

A. My term will end in 1989. I can't re-contest without a referendum.

Government's motion will be defeated. Says Tiruchelvam: "A legislative reversal would clearly endanger the accord." Jayewardene has threatened to dissolve Parliament if that happens, but under that eventuality, it will be virtually impossible for the UNP to win a general election. Jayewardene, however, remains President till 1989.

But the voting issue is a double-edged sword. Most MPs of the UNP would go along with the accord only because they would prefer to avoid seeking re-election. The UNP last week celebrated its 10th year in power and the mood of the electorate is clearly for change. On the other hand, the main target of the politically-motivated rioters were ruling party MPs. One was killed and six others had their houses burnt. The mobs extracted pledges from the MPs that they would vote against the accord in Parliament.

JAYEWARDENE, though, is confident that he will swing the MPs on his side before the voting takes place (he also has the resignation of all UNP parliamentarians in his possession which he is capable of holding over their heads). Says de Mel: "During the riots, the MPs were without any protection at all. Now, with 2,500 additional troops moved to the south, they are all heavily guarded. Also, once the advantages of the accord become more apparent, they will be more fortified in their decision (to support the accord)."

The Jayewardene Government has to tread delicately in the weeks ahead with the specific objective of implementing the accord rapidly; convincing the Sinhalese public that the Indian armed forces are there at the express command of the Sri Lankan Government; allaying the deep-rooted suspicions of the Tamils and spelling out the concrete advantages of the agreement it has signed. The Government has moved rapidly on all these fronts. Last week, Jayewardene announced the setting up of an interim administration for the northern and eastern provinces. He also announced a general amnesty for the Tamil militants, many of whom have already been released from detention. He also stated that the Indian armed forces are likely to pull out in August, however impossible that may be to achieve.

On the economic front, de Mel has spelt out the advantages of the accord in relation to the cost of the war to Sri Lanka—an estimated Rs 15 billion in damages to property alone apart from its drain on the country's finances (which comes to 25 per cent of the annual domestic budget of Sri Lanka). And the

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SECURITY

Lethal Lapses

THE fact that the prime minister escaped serious injury seemed to be the only consideration in the clean chit given to security agencies following the attempt on Rajiv's life at Colombo. What should have been one of the most embarrassing moments for Indian security was hailed a success.

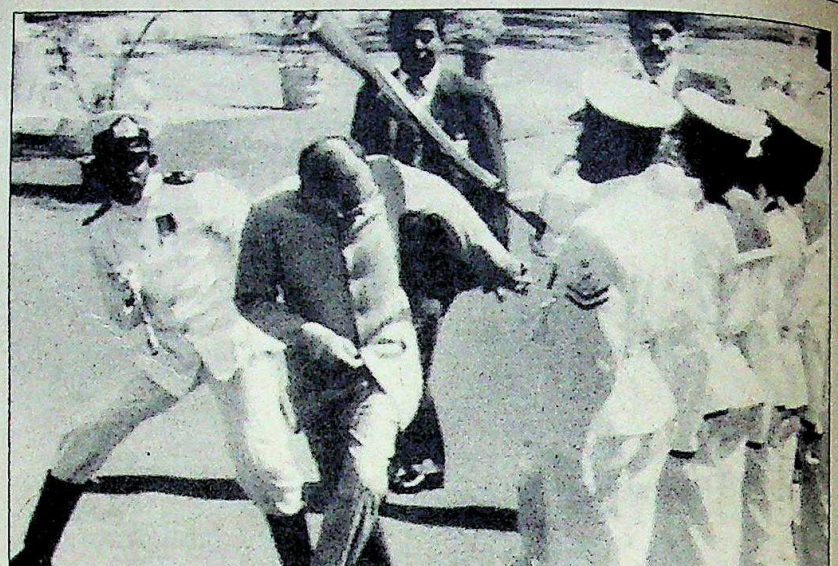
Secretary (Security) T.N. Sheshan had flown in for a preview of arrangements with the advance party and SPG chief Devender Singh led his security team personally. Matters had obviously not been taken lightly. And yet, what happened was not really surprising. The group whose ego was most bruised by the Indo-Sri Lankan accord was quite naturally that of the Sri Lankan armymen, who had lost hundreds of lives fighting the militants. Considering the threat, the guard of honour should have been cut out of the programme. Yet, asked by the Sri Lankans whether they wanted extra security measures, Indian security chiefs only demanded that the rifles of the sailors be exchanged between alternate men just before the ceremony. Finally, in Rajiv's own words, it was "agility" and not security that saved him.

The four-point brief to the innermost security around the prime minister in case of an assault says:

- Block the prime minister with a human wall instantly.
- Shoot to injure the assailant.
- Neutralise the assault weapon.
- Get the prime minister away to safety as fast as possible.

A post-mortem of the incident on these four points clearly shows that at each stage there was far too much delay. For instance:

- The reflexes of the prime minister himself were swifter than those of his commandos. Rajiv had skipped forward a few steps totally uncovered and turned around—a sitting duck for a second attempt if Vijayamuni had had any accomplices—by the time his security reached him.
- The guards did not even take out their guns. Lunging at the man as they did would have been pointless had there been a partner with Vijayamuni.
- The weapon fell after it hit the prime minister, but before any of the SPG guards reached Vijayamuni.
- Even after the renewed ring formation around Rajiv following the incident, he took his own time: somebody should have had the courage to push him into moving away quickly. "This reverence will spell doom one day," said a senior security official in Delhi.



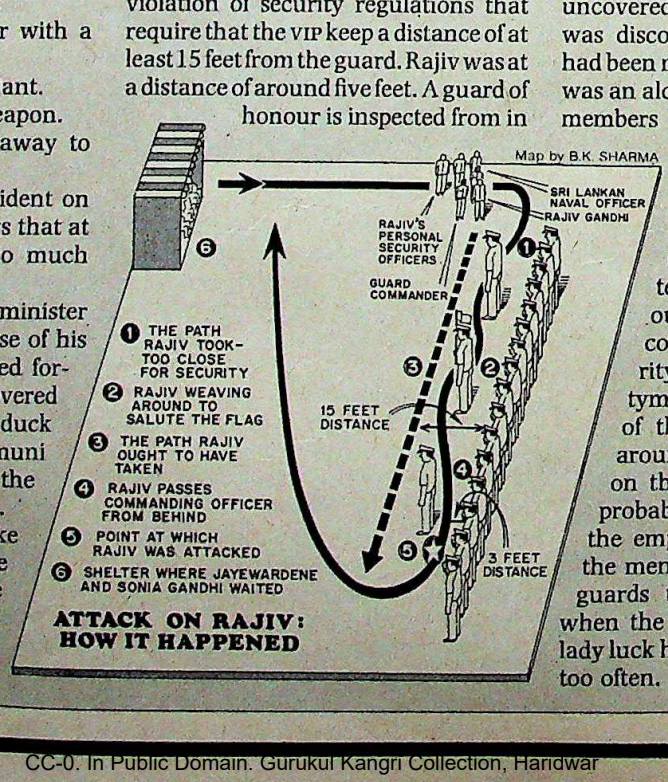
REUTER

Rajiv being attacked: close shave

The crucial lapse took place before the assault. Rajiv was allowed to walk far too close to the guard of honour in violation of security regulations that require that the VIP keep a distance of at least 15 feet from the guard. Rajiv was at a distance of around five feet. A guard of honour is inspected from in front of the commander leading the contingents. Rajiv was weaving his way between them and even passed behind the back of the last commander.

If he was not informed, it is still the fault of the securitymen. And if he didn't adhere to it, it was the duty of the SPG guards to correct him then and there. The assault could have been lethal had the sailor used the bayonet on his gun instead of using the butt.

The interrogation of Vijayamuni for two days by the Intelligence Bureau and the Sri Lankan authorities has uncovered no evidence of conspiracy. It was discovered that his grandfather had been mentally deranged, his father was an alcoholic, and one of his family members a Bandaranaike supporter. But nothing emerged against Vijayamuni himself.



At home, the incident has set in motion yet another review of the prime minister's security. Guards of honour will as far as possible be conducted on jeep with security escort, there may be securitymen walking between the files of the guard to keep the box around the prime minister tighter on the sides. But all this would probably make no difference unless the emphasis shifts to disciplining the mental make-up of the security guards to ensure sharper reflexes when the training is put to test—for lady luck has already saved them twice too often.

—TANIA MIDHA

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unemployment rate is around 17 per cent.

Sri Lanka's major donors and the international financial institutions have already announced satisfaction at the accord and pledged an aid increase apart from emergency funds to get the economy back on the road to recovery. "We have already received offers of assistance and countries like the Netherlands that have frozen funds for projects over the last four years are now being asked to unfreeze them," says de Mel.

In fact, one of the key reasons for Jayewardene suddenly switching his stand and gambling on the accord was the lukewarm response from western countries, mainly the US and Britain, to his pleas for military aid and assistance. The US Administration made it clear that it would not do anything that would upset New Delhi and urged him to settle with the Tamils.

The Sri Lankan Government is hoping that once aid starts pouring in and key export-earners like tourism pick up, the boost to the economy—new projects, additional areas of employment, improved telecommunications, power generation, transport services, water supply and health services—will convince the public that the accord is in everybody's interest.

But there is considerable uncertainty and unease in the north and the path to peace is obviously still a rocky one. The initial euphoria over the arrival of the Indian peace-keeping force has died down and the sudden slow-down in the arms-surrender process by the militants could pose some major problems. "We have extended the deadline for the surrender but I don't foresee any problems," says Lt-General Harkirat Singh, general officer commanding of the Indian peace-keeping force.

But problems are already apparent. The tension between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the other militant groups is palpable and has led to some unforeseen snags. Last week, the LTTE announced that it would "be forced to reconsider the decision to lay down arms in view of the atrocities committed against our disarmed cadres by other Tamil militant groups". The LTTE claims that the other groups have not laid down arms on one pretext or another and have started killing and kidnapping LTTE members.

Meanwhile, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) had earlier suspended the surrender of arms in protest against the abduction of 13 of its members by the LTTE. It was only after the

THE ACCORD

Quiet Moves

IT was a triumph of planning, foresight and secrecy. The first faint ideas for the Colombo accord emerged this May. A crack team of hand-picked officials—including Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon, Intelligence Bureau Chief M.K. Narayanan and India's High Commissioner in Colombo J.N. Dixit—was set up. Its brief: design a solution within the framework of the Sri Lankan Constitution and bring the Tamil militants to the negotiating table.

All politicians, except Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, were kept away. The team was organised in two groups: Menon negotiated with the militants while Dixit got in touch with Jayewardene via his trusted minister Gamini Dissanayake. Key officials in the prime minister's office monitored progress.

Menon (left) and Dixit: main architects

The first round failed. Both the militants and the Sri Lankan Government refused to budge from their earlier stand on the merger of the north with the east.

The moves were called off. But when the Sri Lankan Army launched a major offensive killing 1,000 people, pressure was mounted on India to intervene. Air dropping of relief supplies by India buttressed her position. In mid-June Dixit was summoned by Jayewardene to work out a peace formula. It was here that Dixit played a mastercard. He insisted that India be allowed to send relief to the northern and eastern provinces. The purpose: to use it as a cover to contact militants. Thus, when the first relief ship reached Jaffna on June 25, Hardeep Puri, a first secretary in the high commission, used it to meet Pirabhakaran. It was a fruitful meeting. The militants conveyed that they were ready for talks.

A happy Dixit flew to New Delhi on June 27 to brief the foreign secretary and the prime minister. It was then decided to send another high powered emissary to Jayewardene. Dixit himself was picked for the sensitive assignment. On July 1 he met Jayewardene with the draft proposals. The door had been opened. Between July 1 and July 16, Dixit had 12 meetings with Jayewardene, during which all issues including the devolution of powers to the Provincial Council, withdrawal of the army from the north and surrender of arms, were discussed.

On July 16, in an unprecedented move, Dixit briefed the Sri Lankan Cabinet. The meeting was attended by 12 ministers, including Lalith Athulathmudali. For 45 minutes Dixit held forth, clearing mists of any doubts that the ministers might be entertaining. Next morning, Dixit submitted the revised draft to the President. It was cleared, subject to certain modifications and Dixit returned to New Delhi.

Between July 18 and July 20 a series of meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs were convened. Dixit, alongwith Menon, attended most of them. He then returned to Colombo with a final draft. Puri, at the same time, was meeting the seven commanders of the LTTE. And as Pirabhakaran insisted on meeting Rajiv before signing the document, he with his wife and two children were flown out of Jaffna to Trichy on July 24.

Meanwhile, Dixit received Jayewardene's green signal and dashed to New Delhi. But as MGR was also a major factor, Pirabhakaran was first taken to him. Later he was lodged in New Delhi's Ashok Hotel. For two days Dixit and Menon ironed out differences, before MGR and his Food Minister Ramachandran did some plain talking. And the final charming was done by the prime minister himself.

But all was not yet over. Dixit once again returned to Colombo to brief the Cabinet on July 27. Forty-eight hours later, the historic accord was signed.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Colombo

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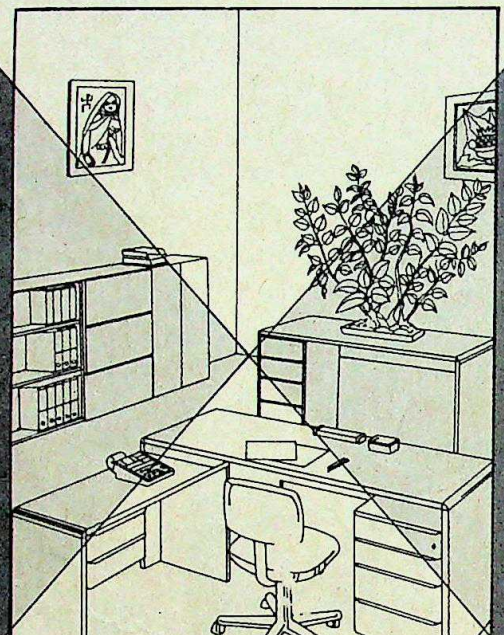

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SHYAM TEKWANI

The LTTE's Yogi and General Harkirat Singh at the surrender ceremony: psychological moment

Indian Army intervened that the abducted men were released. Clearly, the enmity between the other groups and the LTTE is as dangerous and deep-rooted as that between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Indian Army officials in Jaffna also admit that it is highly unlikely that the militants will surrender all their arms. The Indian Army has been further hampered in its attempts to fan out into the eastern part of the island because of the heavily-mined areas around the army camps they have occupied.

In the face of the mounting tension between the militants, the biggest hurdle to the accord's durability could be the proposed referendum in the eastern province on a merger with the north scheduled, according to the terms of the accord, on or before December 31, 1988. Jayewardene himself has gone on record to say that he will personally campaign in the east against the merger.

The key to the merger issue currently lies with the Muslim population which forms 13 per cent of the population in the eastern province and can tilt the balance either way. The Muslims are being wooed by both sides but are likely to opt against the merger for fear of being swamped by the Tamils and losing their identity. "We are willing to offer them a rotation of the chief minister in the political set-up that emerges. There are other concessions we can make to ensure that they vote for the merger and still feel secure," says S. Soosaithahasan, MP for Mannar, the district closest to Tamil Nadu.

But on current indications, the Muslims will require a lot of wooing before they decide to vote for the merger. The crux of the entire issue is what will happen if they vote against the merger. Jayewardene and the Indian Government claim that the Tamil militant groups will have no choice but to accept the referendum result as being the will of the people. But Velupillai Pirabhakaran, the LTTE supremo, made his feelings clear at his Jaffna meeting last fortnight: "We do not accept this accord but because India is a powerful country we are unable to do anything about it. I don't think it will be a lasting solution."

MORE significantly, he has subsequently stated that the LTTE's demands have not changed; an independent Eelam state incorporating the northern and eastern provinces. Asked if he would renounce violence in pursuit of his goal, his answer was an unqualified no. The fact that the Indian troops cannot overstay their welcome is another sticking point in the context of Pirabhakaran's views. People like Soosaithahasan, however express the hope that once the political process gets going in the north, the militants will change their attitude. "Once they acquire responsibility, they will change," he says.

But for that to happen much will depend on the correct balance of diplomacy and pressure that the Indian Army can bring to bear on the militants. Dixit has been given full authority by South Block to handle the situation and advise the Indian Army as he sees fit. If he is given a free hand without the kind of interference that had aborted earlier Indian mediation efforts, he is capable of pulling it off. Not only is he extremely well-informed about the Sri Lankan scene, he has managed to establish an excellent rapport with Jayewardene over their occasional glasses of cognac together.

For New Delhi, the stake in ensuring the accord works couldn't be higher. The accord itself is a tacit acknowledgement by the Sri Lankan Government that India is the regional superpower and its sphere of influence over the region can no longer be denied. In the regional context, it is a repetition of the Monroe Doctrine, a forcible statement that any external forces prejudicial to India's interests cannot be allowed to swim in regional waters. That message will undoubtedly extend to the other countries in the region as well.

But in the context of the accord itself, much also depends on Jayewardene and how he plays his domestic cards in the crucial weeks ahead leading up to the parliamentary vote. Already Jayewardene and Rajiv have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. If the accord fails, Sri Lanka is doomed. If it works, it will be the least they deserve.

—DILIP BOBB in Colombo

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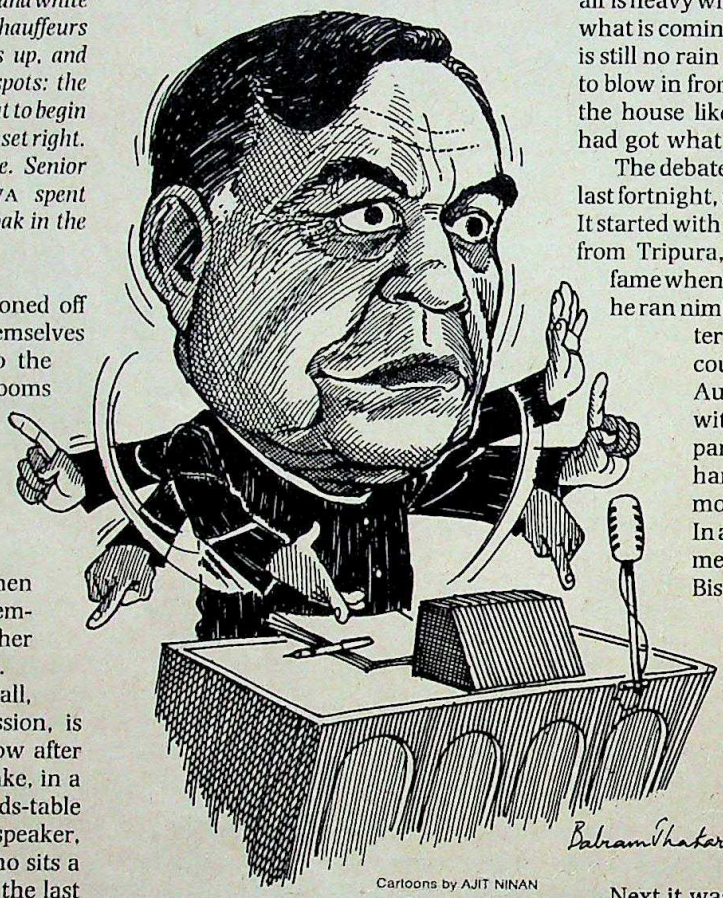
PARLIAMENT

The National Stage

The Bofors debate brings out the star performers

THEY drive up in their Marutis and white Ambassadors, wave their liveried chauffeurs away, pull their dhotis and lungis up, and walk into that most sacred of all spots: the Indian Parliament. Business is about to begin and the whole nation is waiting to be set right. It is an important, important time. Senior Correspondent SIMRAN BHARGAVA *spent several days in the Lok Sabha to soak in the atmosphere. Her report:*



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

THE roads have been cordoned off and khaki men position themselves outside every entrance to the round, dignified building that looms like immortality over central Delhi, a mystery dome where it takes six security checks to get in and where no cameras and no recorders are allowed. This is after all, a gathering of the most wanted men and women in the country, the members of Parliament who sit together in the highest forum of the land.

It is 11 a.m. and the inside hall, where the Lok Sabha is in session, is slowly filling up. The MPs sit, row after row, divided like six slices of a cake, in a room that is carpeted a deep billiards-table green. All converge towards the speaker, honourable speaker, the man who sits a step above the rest and who has the last word—if he can get it in. Leaving their public images outside, here the 547 MPs come into their own.

And they are human after all, far more human than they look in their inaccessible offices lined with formidable files and guarded by watchdogs from babudom. So what do they do in there, these elected representatives of the people, in that most important of all places, the Parliament? They make laws, they argue, they hoot, they quibble for holidays, they throw paper planes, they nod off to sleep and they run the nation. They are at once the most serious of statesmen and irrepressible schoolchildren.

It is the question hour, a loaded 60 minutes where the ministers are answerable to the MPs who are responsible to the people who swept them to power. The subjects range from unruly rallies to developments in Fiji to the illegal stay of Pakistani nationals. Why, for instance, does it take nine days for letters to reach a certain village in Uttar Pradesh, asked an irate MP. "All letters are equal," said the minister. "We don't discriminate rich men's letters from poor men's letters." Mamata Banerjee, the fiery young woman who shook the giant Somnath Chatterjee from Jadavpur, insists on "some cool discussion, please" on the implementation of the 20-point programme. Everything is orderly, business is proceeding as it should with burning questions that the concerned minister must be ready to answer.

The question hour ends sharp at noon to give way to the zero hour, where anyone is allowed to discuss matters of importance. Everyone lets loose, all at once. Now everything depends on who speaks louder. Even those members who had dropped off, nudge themselves awake. It is as if the train that was chugging along smoothly has suddenly stopped at a noisy station. "*Hamari bhi to suniye* (listen to me also) sir, please," an MP pleads with the speaker while another one is hurt: "Sir, I've been standing for 10 minutes. You haven't even looked at me sir." For the 15 or 20 minutes that it lasts, it is a noise that passeth understanding.

And yet this is only the prologue. The air is heavy with tension. Everyone knows what is coming up. Outside it is hot, there is still no rain but the storms have begun to blow in from Sweden. Bofors settles on the house like doom. Bofors—and who had got what from whom.

The debate that charged the house up last fortnight, ran almost like a stage play. It started with Ajoy Biswas, 46, CPI (M) MP from Tripura, who misfired his way to fame when, on the spur of the moment, he ran nimbly up to the Defence Minister K.C. Pant, and before you could say Swedish National Audit Bureau, had run away with the motion on the Bofors panel, leaving Pant with his hands stretched apart and the most amazed look on his face. In a minute, a wily Congress(I) member had made his way to Biswas, snatched the controversial paper right back and smugly handed it to Pant again. Biswas apologised, was suspended and taken back again after which he sat through the discussions like a child who had been publicly admonished.

Next it was the turn of K.K. Tewary, 45,—a man with neatly oiled hair and a lovingly manicured moustache, known once upon a time as "the hero of the zero hour" who had thereafter stumbled in and out of a ministry. He was asked to leave the House for unparliamentary remarks that he aimed at Professor Madhu Dandavate, veteran of the Opposition. He stormed out, stormed in and then stormed out again, three gold rings flashing on his clenched fingers. Yes, these were exciting days in Parliament and most of the MPs were making sure that they were in on the action.

The real issue was coming up: the Joint Parliamentary Committee that was to probe the Bofors affairs. That took the House apart. In a debate that lasted two whole days, several MPs emerged as the stars of Bofors. There was the erudite Jaipal Reddy, the Janata MP on crutches, who caused a furore in the treasury benches with a cutting remark that he

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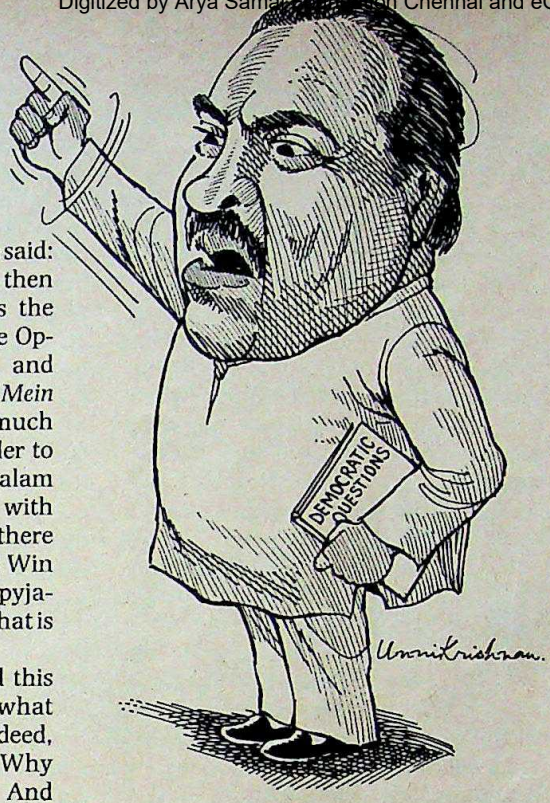
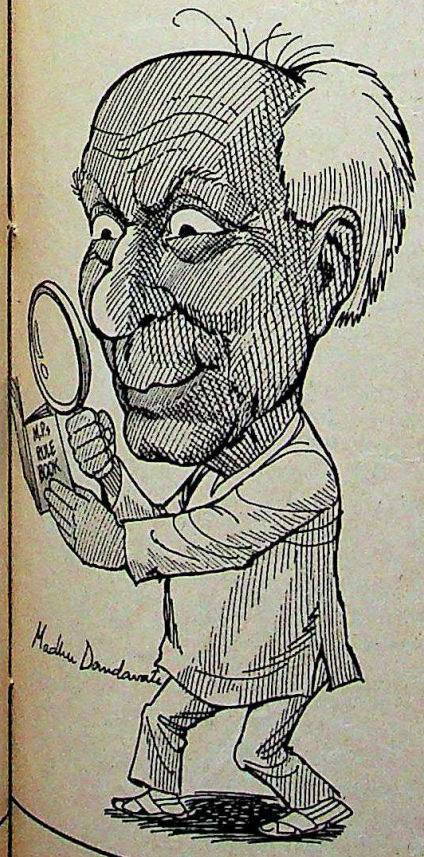
later withdrew: "Our country is being ruled by non-resident Indians and resident non-Indians." And the elderly Indrajit Gupta (CPI), perhaps the most commanding figure of the Lok Sabha, who talks little but still makes the most sense. He put the Opposition viewpoint in a nutshell when he said: "If your attitude is take it or leave it, then we will leave it." Then there was the gigantic K.P.Unnikrishnan from the Opposition benches who stood up and quoted dramatically from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. "You cannot imagine how much you have to deceive a nation in order to rule it," he said in his thick Malayalam accent, his mighty frame heaving with emotion. "The prime minister said there were no middlemen, who then was Win Chadha?" he continued, pulling his pyjamas up. "It is the power to question that is the essence of democracy."



It went on and on. How should this parliamentary committee function, what should be its scope, its powers? Indeed, should there be a committee at all? Why not cancel the contract altogether? And where was this Win Chadha who has changed history by disappearing? From the treasury benches, 35-year-old Rangarajan Kumaramangalam rose, a young, fiery trade union leader, who had been bouncing around from seat to seat and in and out of the hall. "No longer can we say this august House maintains discipline or ethics. People walk in, they snatch papers, they threaten assault," he said, in his impish way, flinging his hands about wildly. "This is the first committee of its type that is coming out with open hands and saying, please investigate me." But, the bell had been pressed down twice to tell Kumaramangalam that his time was up and lunch was on.



CENTRAL Hall is the place to which the action then shifted—a club so exclusive it would turn Delhi's power groupies green envy. Only MPs and the most senior journalists are allowed in here. It is said that this is the place for delicious food and uncensored gossip. Even the silent ones of the House like Abdul Ghaffoor—lovingly called Ghaffoor chacha—are known to tell the most outrageous jokes and are an absolute delight in Central Hall. There are other MPs here—Datta Samant, whose shadow loomed over Bombay's textile mills for several months, Bhagwat Jha Azad, a senior member of the House and the only one able to defend the indefensible. And there are all those women who sit together in the House but who look as if they'd rather be knitting sweaters somewhere. Balkavi Bairagi, whose books include *Koyi to Samjhe* and poetic translations of *Cinderella* and *Gulliver's Travels*. One by one they come back, dressed in their virginal whites and almost all nicely rounded around the middle. And then the war begins.

There is a commotion in the House after lunch: Has there been another attempt on the prime minister? Has Win Chadha been found? Has there been a terrorist attack? No, it is simply the MPs arguing about whether they get one or two days off for Eid. They get one, and it's time to get down to business again. The dialectics continue, with each side offering its point of view on the proposed committee. This is the stuff democracies are made of, this counter-questioning. But again and again, the Opposition is defeated by its lack of numbers. Four and a half slices of the Lok Sabha cake go to the ruling party and a mere slice and a half to the Opposition, where the MPs sit densely packed as if that would make them seem more plentiful.

Dinesh Goswami (AGP), a forceful bespectacled speaker who composes his arguments well, continues the quest for truth. "Was the decision to purchase the guns based on the evaluation reports? Did the kickback of Rs 40 crore influence a

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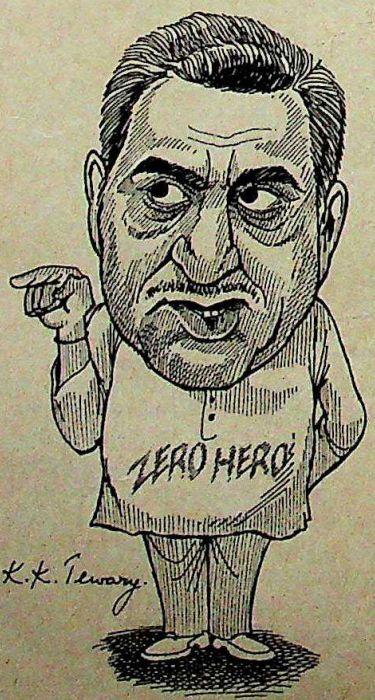
decision to go in for second best?" he demands. Directly above him, in the gallery reserved for Rajya Sabha members, former minister of state for defence Arun Singh looks down, a sheep out of its fold, rolling a piece of paper over and over again in his fingers and running his hand through his greying hair. Bholanath Sen from the Congress(I) has his say in the matter, although he spends more time talking about the CPI(M) than about Bofors. Suddenly Sen, a balding, elderly man wearing glasses, breaks into Bengali. "In Bengal we have a phrase that the mother of the thief shouts the most. That's the case with them," he says. "I have a sweet tooth for the CPI(M)."

THE day is over but the debate is not. The next day is the climax of the Bofors drama in, what Parliament-watchers said, was the loudest, longest racket ever. It started with the surprise appearance of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his unprecedented move in making the statement: "I categorically declare that neither I nor any member of my family has received any consideration in these transactions." As the prime minister walked out and Pant rose to reply to the debate, everything happened all at once. Up rose the determined N.V.N. Somu (DMK), demanding to speak on the issue. And up rose V.C. Shukla, tall and wiry, for the first time after he had been expelled. The Congress(I) was in no mood to listen anymore and Balram Jakhar, the speaker, put his foot down. "Enough is enough. It is my right to declare the closing and I've done it," he said. "I am not going to budge today." The entire opposition got to its feet to let Shukla speak. Jakhar said no, "because I am the speaker and I say so." Dandavate, known as the man who remembers all the rules and procedures—including what happened in the House of Commons in 1756—whipped out his rule book and asked for more time. "Kindly open the rule book, sir. Page 170, rule number 364," he said. "Some cool discussion please," shrieked Mamata Banerjee. The man in front of her shrank from the blast. The Opposition shouted while Congress(I) members clapped and the speaker appealed. In a corner of the House, an MP furiously retied his lungi. The press doubled up over the railings directly above, scribbling feverishly, trying to seize the hour.

Somu appealed again for time and when he didn't get it, stuck his chin out at the Congress(I) and chanted, "Bofors, Bofors, Bofors", after which he made an allegation at a certain lady in the treasury. The lady rose, the knitters of sweaters rose, K.K. Tewary rose. Everyone was speaking all at once. From somewhere, a paper missile landed on Arif Mohammed and he yelled as if he had been hit by a rock. The speaker, who must play "mommy" when the kids are fighting, refused to budge. "Expunge, expunge," he went. The CPI(M) kept up a drumbeat. Two foreigners sitting in the diplomatic gallery above nudged each other, unable to believe what they were seeing. By now everything had got out of control. Somu who had been yelling for the last hour, called for a glass of water and swallowed a pill. Unnikrishnan brought a hanky out of his pocket and wiped his forehead dry. Through it all the handsome C.P.N. Singh sat on a Congress(I) bench, an amused expression on his face and V.C. Shukla loomed, silent and motionless, over the House, waiting for his turn to speak.



And then K.C. Pant's voice flowed, loud and clear, like water over a raging fire. "I cannot understand how this House can function, unless we obey the speaker," he began. "This Parliament is a reflection of the country. What is this verbal diarrhoea all the time?" Before long the entire Opposition had walked out, the motion was put to the House and admitted. The Joint Parliamentary Committee was to be set up. The journalists, exhausted by the action, streamed out for a cup of weak tea from Panditji's sleepy orange cart that is parked in the corridors of the graceful building at all times. Outside, the opposition members gave vent to their anger and issued a statement that they would not be any part of this committee with its "truncated powers".

With Bofors, much of the energy went out of Parliament. The next day was Friday, and like a sieve, more than half the MPs had dropped out. At its lowest, there were 26 members in the House. True Parliament can be nail-biting excitement, but it can also be dull, deathly dull like a school assembly that threatens to go on forever. Fridays are like that, Parliament at its most desultory. Most of the MPs have gone back for the week-end. Those who are left sit with their chins resting on their palms. Vyjayanthimala Bali, the showpiece of the House, walks in and out and the MPs' eyes walk in and out with her. Some come, sign up for their Rs 75 attendance fee, peep in and leave immediately. Only a few journalists hang around the press gallery, spent, but who must stay on, not knowing when the star performers of Parliament might swing into action again.

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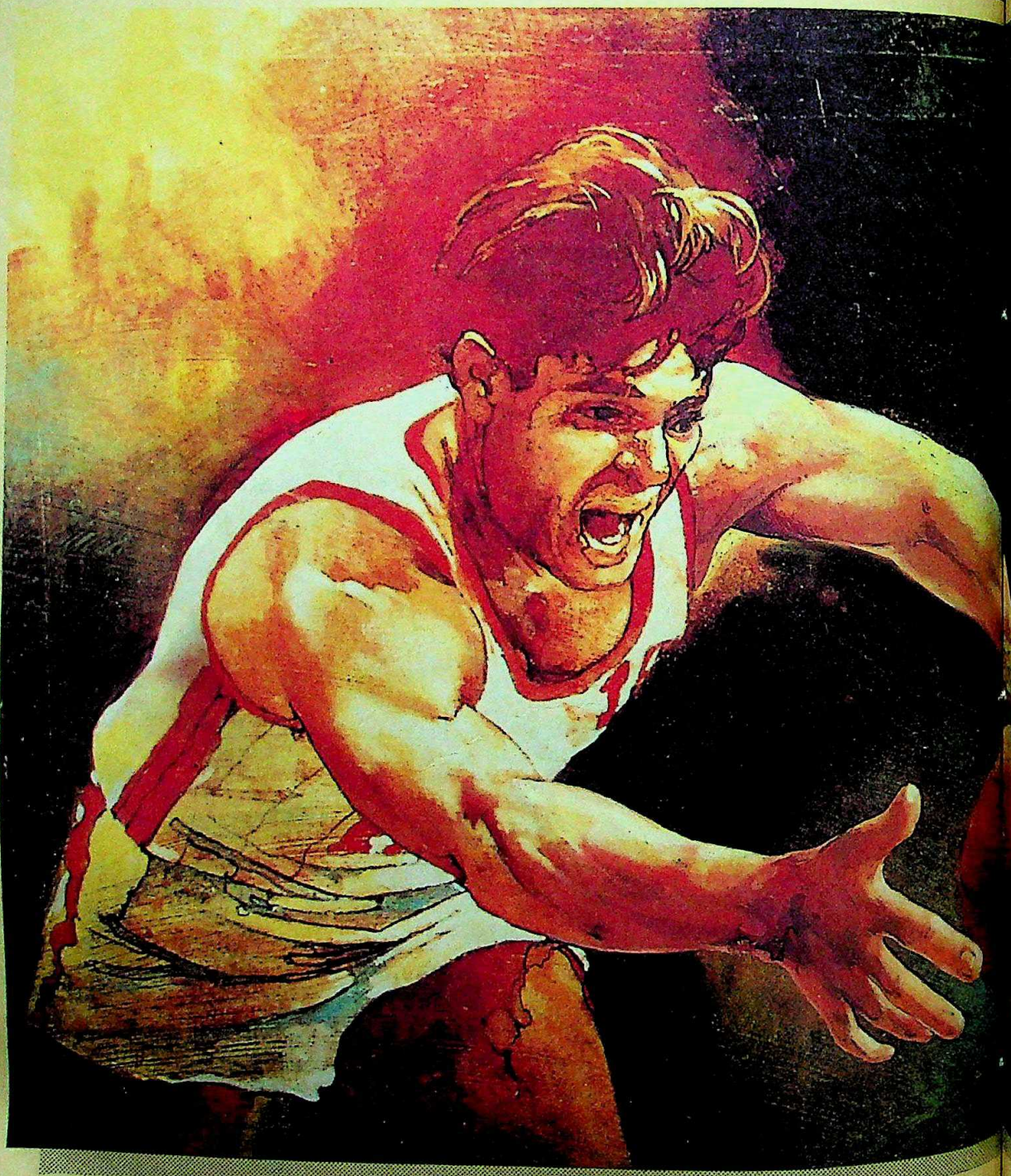
GRIT

1984-86: a record 64% growth puts Shalimar Paints back am



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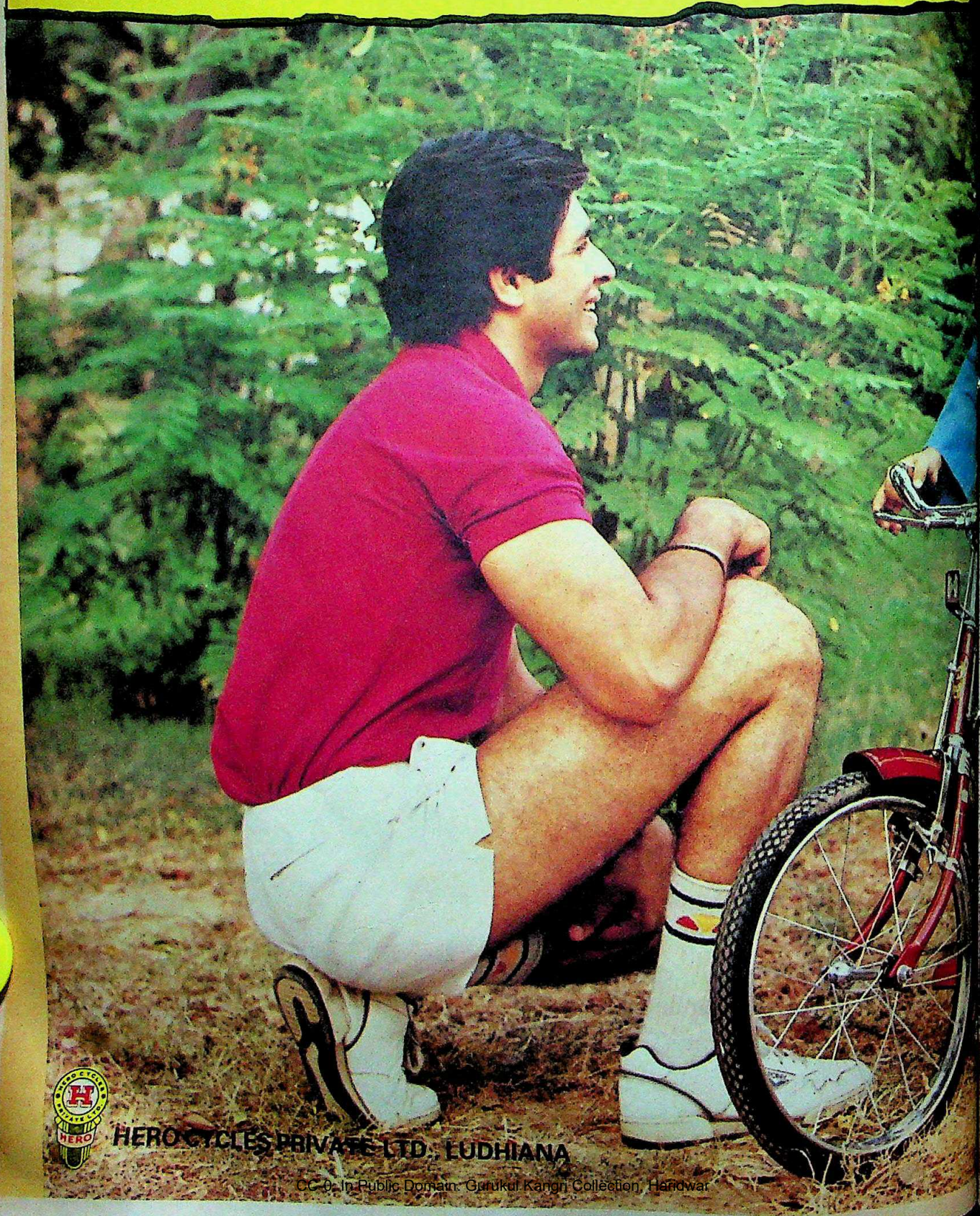

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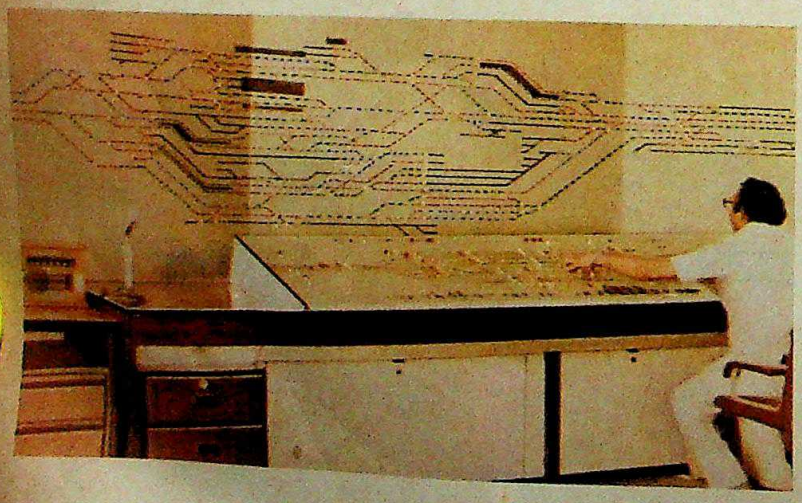

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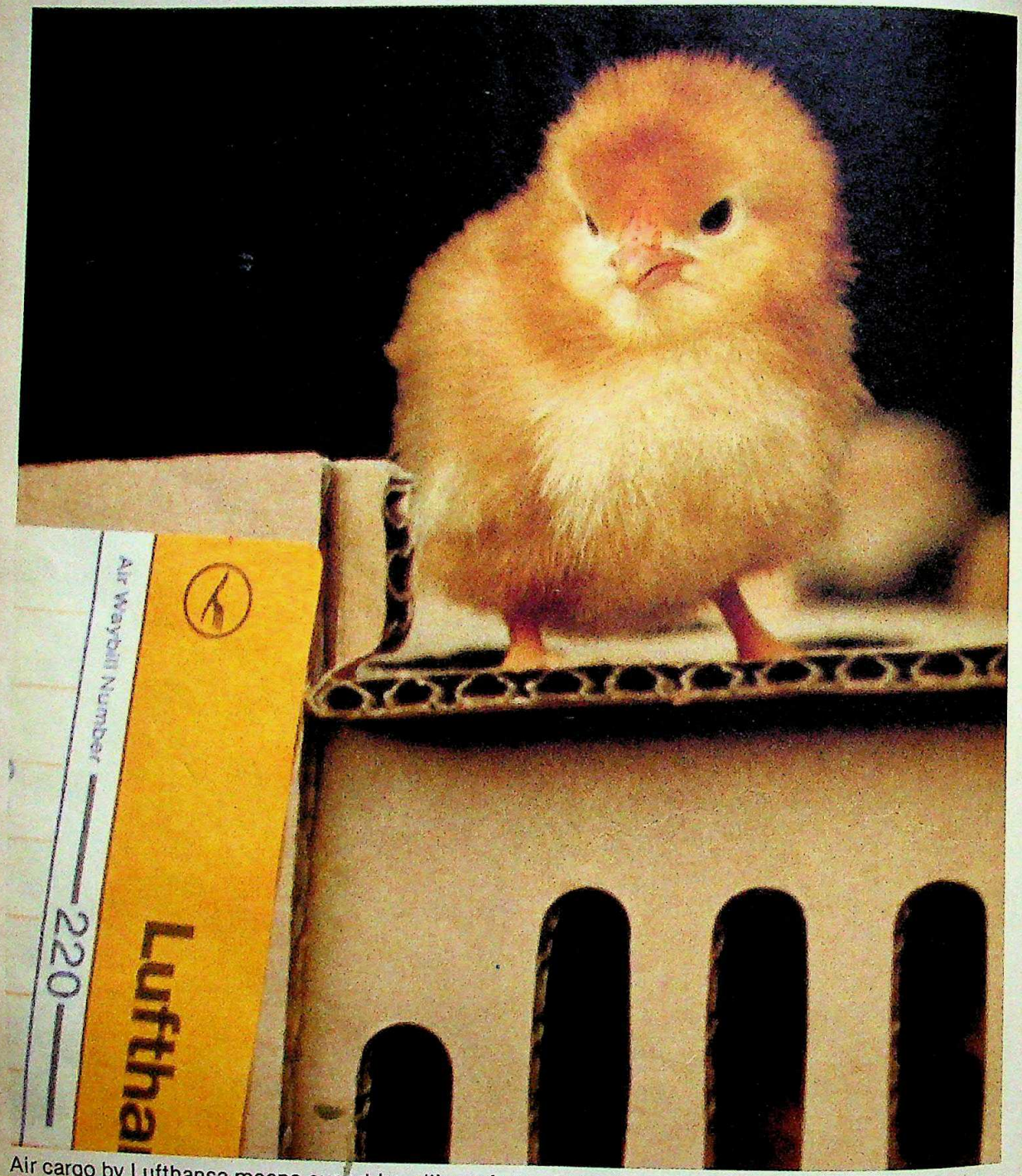

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BLITZ

Kicking up a Row

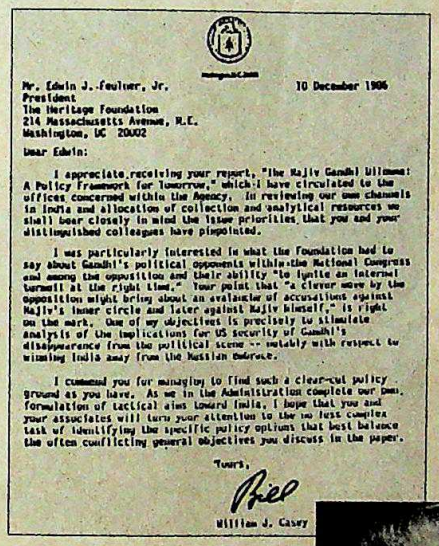
A questionable CIA letter talks of destabilisation

THE monsoon session of Parliament was round the corner and the Opposition was loaded with Bofors ammunition to grill the Government. Nerves in the Congress(I) were frayed. Rajiv Gandhi's statement on July 21 that the Government had evidence of a systematic attempt to destabilise the country and that this evidence would be brought to light "at the right time" did not find many takers. Yet, when the crucial hour struck in Parliament on July 28, Congress(I) members were waving photocopies of *Blitz*, Russy Karanjia's Bombay-based weekly tabloid, that screamed: "Here's proof...CIA Dagger Behind Plot to Oust Rajiv." The Congress(I) had finally found a stick to beat up a din louder than the Opposition—a letter purportedly from the late CIA director William Casey to Edwin Feulner, president of the Heritage Foundation (a conservative think-tank close to the Reagan Administration), discussing the foundation's report titled *The Rajiv Gandhi Dilemma: A Policy Framework for Tomorrow.*

In the letter published, Casey stated: "Your point that 'a clever move by the Opposition might bring about an avalanche of accusations against Rajiv's inner circle and later against Rajiv himself' is right on the mark. One of my objectives is precisely to stimulate analysis of the implications for US security of Gandhi's disappearance from the political scene—notably with respect to winning India away from the Russian embrace."

Hot denials from the US Embassy in New Delhi were ignored and the Congress(I) pressed for an adjournment motion on the letter. The embassy maintained that the letter was a "complete forgery" pointing out that the letterhead was not centred and was blurred in relation to the clarity of the copy; there was no space between the date and the first line of salutation—unlikely in US Government letters; the margins were too narrow, as if to fit the entire text on one page; Casey would not have a defective typewriter in which the T's were not barred, as in the letter.

Blitz came right back the next week with another print of the same letter, this time with the headline: "Forgery? Here's Final Proof." All the 'flaws' were now corrected. This print also had a handwritten note by Edwin Feulner on the top-right corner, a 'Received' stamp on the top-left and 'The Director, Central Intelligence Agency' inscribed above to complete the letter-head. Karanjia



Mr. Edwin J. Feulner, Jr.
President
The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

10 December 1986

Dear Edwin:

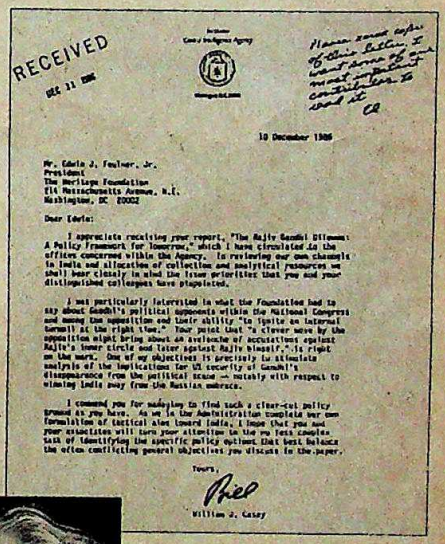
I appreciate receiving your report, "The Rajiv Gandhi Dilemma: A Policy Framework for Tomorrow," which I have circulated to the offices concerned within the Agency. In reviewing our own channels in India and allocation of collection and analytical resources we shall bear closely in mind the issue priorities that you and your distinguished colleagues have pinpointed.

I was particularly interested in what the Foundation had to say about Gandhi's political opponents within the National Congress and among the opposition and their ability "to ignite an internal turmoil at the right time." Your point that "a clever move by the opposition might bring about an avalanche of accusations against Rajiv's inner circle and later against Rajiv himself," is right on the mark. One of my objectives is precisely to stimulate analysis of the implications for US security of Gandhi's disappearance from the political scene -- notably with respect to winning India away from the Russian embrace.

I commend you for managing to find such a clear-cut policy ground as you have. As we in the Administration complete our own formulation of tactical aims toward India, I hope that you and your associates will turn your attention to the no less complex task of identifying the specific policy options that best balance the often conflicting general objectives you discuss in the paper.

Yours,

William J. Casey



RECEIVED
DEC 31 1986

Please send copies of this letter. I want some of my friends to see what conservatives think of Reagan. Also let me have a copy of the report you sent him. Thanks. I read it. CA

10 December 1986

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Yours,

William J. Casey

The "Casey letters" in *Blitz*; and Karanjia: doubtful authenticity

claimed that these details had been left out in the first print "to trap the Americans". As for the difference in spacing, Karanjia admitted they varied because the white spaces in the first print had been compressed to reduce the height. But the two *Blitz* versions do not seem to be different letters, as claimed by US officials.

The CIA itself reacted sharply. "It is preposterous," said Bill Baker, public affairs director at CIA's headquarters in McLean, Virginia. "The letter is a clear case of forgery by a third force to undermine Indo-US relations." At the Heritage Foundation spokesman Brad Miller said: "This is so much like Soviet disinformation. There was no report by that title."

The US Government presented an analysis of why the second print too was a forgery. Casey would have addressed Edwin Feulner as 'Dear Ed', not 'Dear Edwin'; the language in the letter was not normal American usage; and Feulner's note on top was not in his handwriting.

Back home in India, Karanjia claimed that Rajiv had assured him in a recent interview that the Government would take up the matter with the US Administration. "What you (*Blitz*) printed seems to relate very closely to events," the prime minister told him.

It may not be altogether impossible that a powerful, devil-may-care spy-master such as the late William Casey would indeed launch a subversive operation even outside the purview of US policy. But the cautious Casey wasn't likely to put any such thing on paper, more so without any secret classification.

Karanjia has had a previous record of being charged with forgery. In 1952, the police charged that Karanjia forged a letter from the then US ambassador to India Chester Bowles to himself, stating: "(I) would be most eager to meet you and your communist friends (at a) quiet evening party....Only please do not make much noise about this sort of thing." The letter, written on US Embassy stationery, was then leaked to *Current* Editor D.F. Karaka for Rs 1,000. Karanjia himself later denounced the letter as a forgery. This time however, with only photocopies of the letter available, it will be more difficult to make any such categorical assertion, though Karanjia's case is not very convincing.

—TANIA MIDHA with M. RAHMAN and SHEKHAR GUPTA

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MADHYA PRADESH

The Luck of the Draw

The winners in this VIP lottery are the organisers

UNION Communications Minister Arjun Singh's Churhat Children Welfare Society and its controversial lottery scheme have been on the firing line for some time. Principal Correspondent N.K. SINGH *visited Rewa and the powerful minister's home town, Churhat, to find a tax official who moved against the society being victimised, while the society's grandiose claims of charitable activity were largely fiction. Yet, the state Government continues to bend over backward to help a society that seems above the law. His report:*

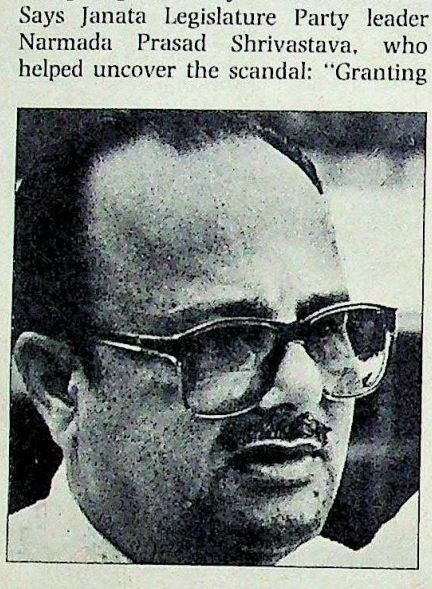
CHANDRA Prakash Mishra, 45, could scarcely believe the order. In less than a year of being posted as income tax officer at Rewa (population: 1.20 lakh), he was being transferred back to Jabalpur, from where he had come in the first place. His request to seniors that the transfer of May 11, 1987, be cancelled was turned down.

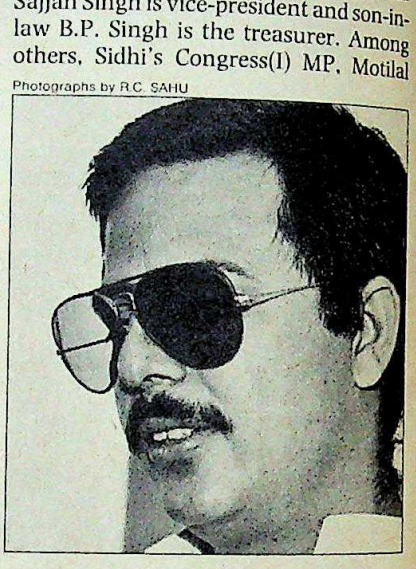
Mishra then appealed to the Central Administrative Tribunal at Jabalpur. Pleading that the order was politically motivated and "contrary to the transfer guidelines", he pointed out the revenue increase of Rewa circle from Rs 1.94 crore to Rs 2.68 crore during his tenure. And, finally, he brought in the Churhat Children Welfare Society.

Mishra alleged that he had been under "strong" pressure not to investigate the affairs of the society (against whom he had passed an order for an additional income tax demand of Rs 1.47 crore). The tribunal stayed his transfer in June.

But Mishra had won the battle, not the war. On July 3, he was replaced by another officer, stripped of work and made Rewa's additional income tax officer, a newly-created post. Files relating to a lottery run by the society were summoned to the income tax commissioner's office at Jabalpur.

The lottery scandal, centred around 12 draws between July 14, 1984 and April 7, 1985 to raise funds, simply refuses to die down. In the recently-concluded monsoon session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, the matter generated heat once again. This followed a state Cabinet decision on May 15 to waive Rs 25 lakh in lottery taxes outstanding against the society. Almost simultaneously, the district collector of Sidhi, where the society is headquartered, had condoned several violations of the Madhya Pradesh Lottery Act, giving the society "benefit of doubt". Says Janata Legislature Party leader Narmada Prasad Shrivastava, who helped uncover the scandal: "Granting tax exemption to a society which violated the law at every step smacks of favouritism."





Photographs by R.C. SAHU

Arjun Singh (above); son Ajay Singh; and the society's health centre at Churhat: unanswered questions

The Lok Dal(A)'s state unit has threatened to launch an agitation on the issue. A Janata Party leader has complained to the state Lok Ayukta, who is believed to have begun investigating the society's affairs last fortnight. And the state BJP wants to intervene in a case against the society in the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

The Government has accepted in the Assembly that the society had violated laws in conducting the lottery. Chief Minister Motilal Vora has promised action against the guilty—though nothing has been done as yet. The lottery has figured in both houses of Parliament too, though Arjun Singh has dismissed the charges as baseless.

The Churhat Children Welfare Society was formed by Arjun Singh, then the chief minister, on January 19, 1982. It was ostensibly formed to provide homes to destitute children, run children's hospitals and undertake family welfare programmes in rural areas. Nine days later, Mother Teresa was flown to Churhat (population: 10,000) to lay the foundation-stone of the Sanjay Gandhi Children and Family Welfare Centre. Later, Sanjay's name was quietly dropped.

Although the minister is not a society member, five of the eight members are related to him. It is headed by a distant relative, Martand Singh of Rewa, a former ruler and Congress(I) MP. Arjun Singh's son, Ajay Singh, is the secretary, brother Sajjan Singh is vice-president and son-in-law B.P. Singh is the treasurer. Among others, Sidhi's Congress(I) MP, Motilal

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Singh, and the party's MLA from Churhat, Indrajit Patel, are also members.

The organisation seems to have received favoured treatment right through. It was registered as a charitable society on the very day it filed an application. It soon collected Rs 5 lakh in donations, including Rs 1.50 lakh from Union Carbide—a fact Arjun Singh denied after a gas leak from Carbide's Bhopal plant killed about 2,500 people in December 1984.

But the society had set its sights higher. It asked the Arjun Singh-led state Government to permit it to float a private lottery to raise funds. The go-ahead came immediately—the Sidhi collector, acting on orders, issued a licence within four days of the application.

The idea was a money-spinner. The society eventually printed tickets worth Rs 15 crore—no private body in the state until then had printed tickets worth more than Rs 2 lakh—and totalled sales of Rs 5.44 crore. The profit was Rs 1 crore, the highest in the state's history. Indeed, the income outstripped the annual earning of the state Government lottery.

The reason was that though, under the lottery act, it had a licence for one year and only one draw, it conducted a dozen draws over 15 months. Pointing this out, the Sidhi collector wrote to the society in November 1984 that "the next draw of the said raffle is unlawful". Ignoring this, nine more draws were held.

Ruling on the society's application, the Sidhi collector condoned 11 unlawful draws on April 10 this year without asking why earlier warnings had been brushed aside. The society's specious argument was that since the licence did not specify the number of raffles, it had assumed that it was valid for a full year from the date of the first draw.

The peculiar chain of events did not stop here. The organisers were reluctant to pay up several prize-winners. In at least three cases, neither banks nor the post office could "locate" the society's office at Churhat. The claimants ran round in circles, only to be told that the 45-day time limit for claiming prizes had lapsed. The money came only after police complaints and legal threats. Says Shrivastava: "Something must be shady if a sitting MP, a sitting MLA and a VIP's son-in-law cannot be traced in these small towns."

Ajay Singh argues that only claims made after 45 days were not honoured. An income tax raid and seizure of documents from the office of the lottery's organising agents, A & A Enterprises, also apparently caused problems. "But everything has been sorted out," Singh claims.

Oddly, an incredible Rs 3.48 crore remains "unclaimed", swelling the society's coffers. Ajay Singh explains that this amounts to prizes on unsold tickets. But there is no clear explanation for the apparent failure of eight out of 13 first-prize winners to make claims. "How can the society be held responsible if people don't come forward?" asks Singh.

Although the society should have filed details about its lottery, the state Government told the Assembly on at least four occasions that it had not done so. Though Ajay Singh argues that the raids on the organising agents brought this about, the truth is that this statutory went unfulfilled even before the raid. Besides, several Central Government guidelines governing lottery conduct were violated.

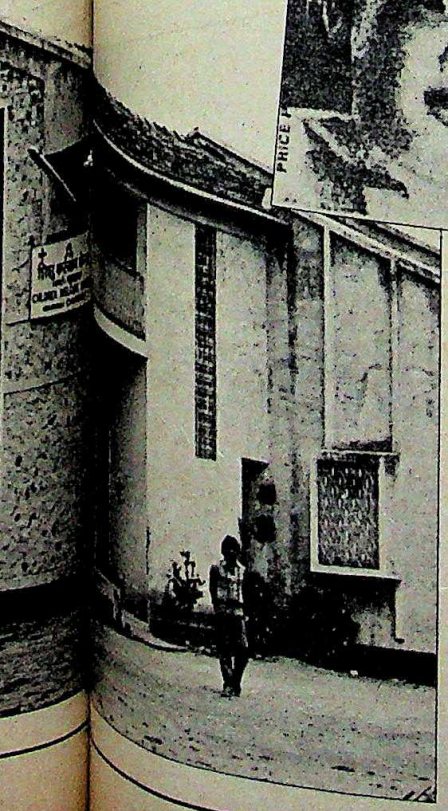
Also violated was Section 10 of the state lottery act, under which organisers must pay a 25-per cent tax on income within 30 days of the draw—in this case Rs 25 lakh. Until end-'86 the society neither applied for exemption nor paid the tax—and went unscathed.

The subsequent plea for exemption was curiously granted on May 15, 11 days after the Government received a notice from the high court in a writ asking for attachment of properties of the society's office-bearers against lottery tax dues. The decision rendered the writ irrelevant. But says BJP's Kailash Joshi, leader of the Opposition: "We want to tell the court that the Government exempted the tax after receiving the notice."

Ajay Singh insists that his society was actually done in. "Other bodies which applied for private lotteries were granted exemption almost immediately. We were kept waiting for eight months," he complains. But the point is that even organisations like the Police Welfare Centre, Bhopal, and the All India Women's Conference were denied exemption.

The society is under question on other counts too. Being a charitable body, its income is tax-free. It, however, is duty-bound to deduct income tax from prize winners' money and deposit it in the treasury within a month. The society declared prizes of Rs 4.6 crore, but disbursed only Rs 57.5 lakh. It did not furnish names of prize winners—or the full accounts—to taxmen despite several reminders. "There was no option but to tax the entire Rs 4.6 crore," said an official.

It would seem that, from the very outset, the lottery organisers were arrogantly confident that they could flout the law in any way they chose.



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How smart travellers earn interest on the money they're carrying...

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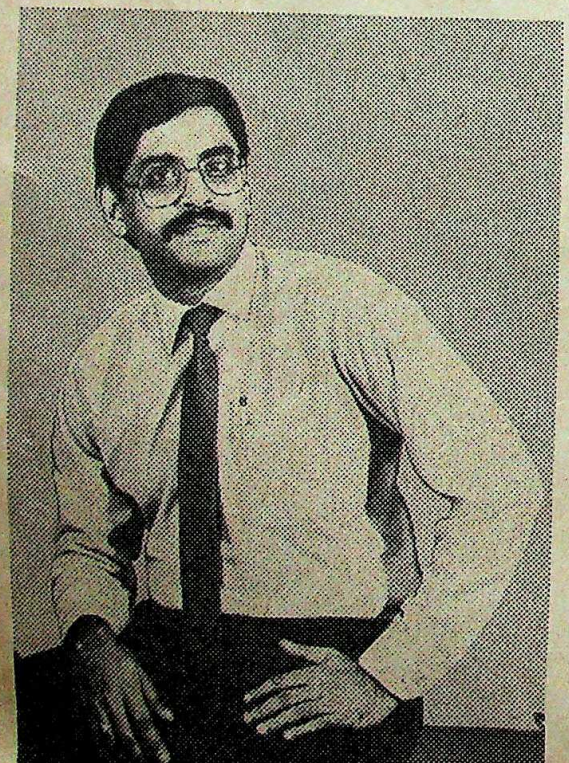

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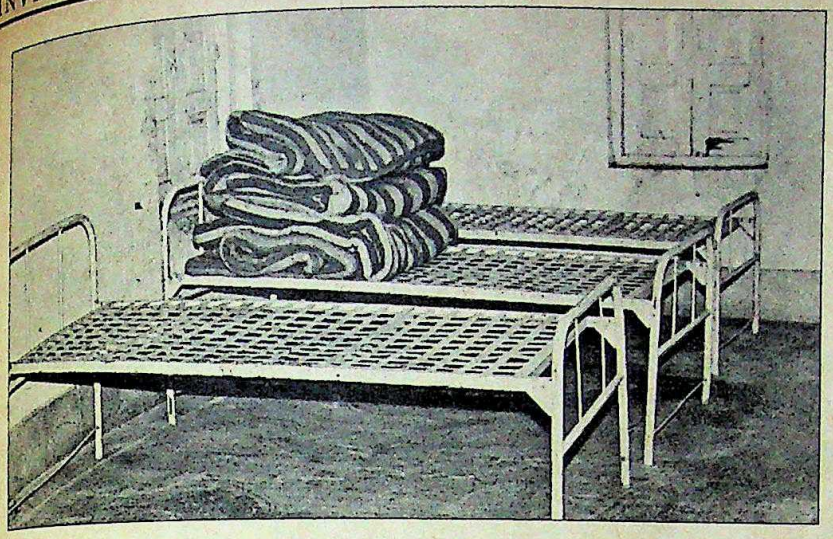
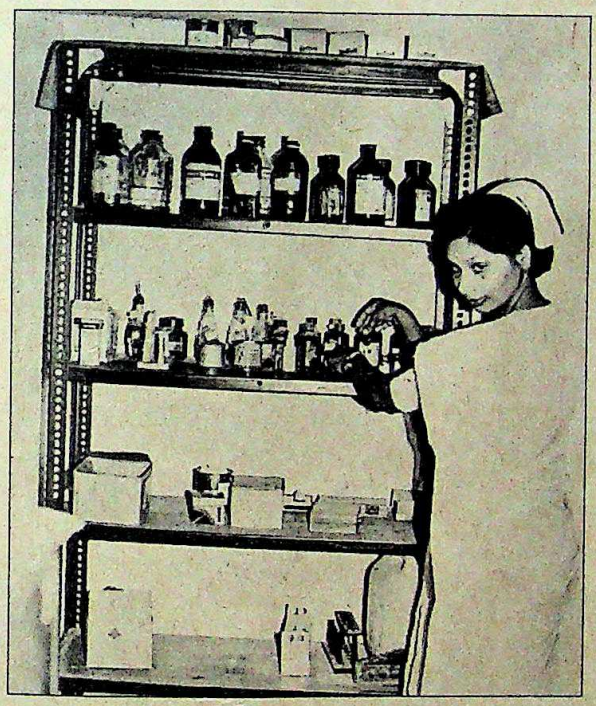


The medical facilities provided by the society in Sidhi district are minimal. They tally neither with the vast sums of money raised nor with Ajay Singh's exaggerated claims.



Unoccupied beds (above); and the 'laboratory' at the society's hospital: low investment

This led to the notice to deposit Rs 1.47 crore—a grossly inflated claim, says Ajay Singh—as against the Rs 9.52 lakh deposited so far.

Three years ago, the taxmen at Rewa had refused to renew the tax exemption granted earlier to the society. When asked for details, the society withdrew the application and went directly to the Central Board of Direct Taxes. It exempted the society from tax from 1984-85 to 1988-89, although the income tax commissioner at Jabalpur advised against it.

The officer at Rewa apparently suspected that the society wasn't carrying out the welfare activities it claimed it was. The society has shelved the entire scheme to house destitute or handicapped children, an initial objective. Explains Ajay Singh: "We found that very few children need this sort of home because of the socio-economic realities and joint family system in the area." The activities are mainly confined to running an immunisation programme—funded by the Centre—in 123 villages of Sidhi, holding a few periodical health camps and distributing callipers, tricycles and hearing aids.

Ajay Singh claims that the society is running a 30-bed hospital at Churhat, a 10-bed health centre at Hatwa and two five-bed centres at Kuspari and Bharatpur in Sidhi district. It also has 23 village health posts, each manned by two paramedical staff, he says. Each health centre supposedly has a doctor and there are eight of them in all.

But an investigation revealed that the health centres at Kuspari and Bharatpur exist largely on paper, and the Hatwa and Churhat centres have fewer beds than claimed. Also, the health posts are nowhere to be found. The facilities at the existing centres—including the main hospital at Churhat—are too meagre to justify the bloated claims.

At Kuspari, the centre is housed in a dingy room with a desk, a couple of chairs, a steel almirah and an examination table in disuse. The tiny centre simply cannot accommodate five beds. Says Dr B.L. Namdeo, part of a mobile health team: "It is opened once a week when we come here."

Though a doctor is posted at Bharatpur, the story is hardly different here. When INDIA TODAY visited the centre on a working day, the sole room was locked. Five beds can't fit here either. "There has never been any indoor hospitalisation facility here," says the landlord.

The main hospital at Churhat, although fairly clean, is not very popular—on one day last month, only one of the 10 beds—not 30, as claimed—was occupied. While appealing for condoning of lapses, the society had told the collector that its hospital "distributed free medicines to the needy". But Dr S.K. Sen, the man in charge of the health operations, admits: "Treatment is free but we cannot supply free medicines to all patients." The facilities are minimal: the hospital 'laboratory', for instance, contains little beyond a cupboard full of medicines. The health camps are funded almost entirely by the state Government.

Where then has all the money gone? The society has so far collected about Rs 1.05 crore—says Ajay Singh—of which it has earmarked Rs 27 lakh as its share towards the Rs 1.8-crore immunisation programme. Ajay Singh says about Rs 27 lakh has gone for the building fund. The rest of the money is lying in banks or has been invested in national securities. And that is what the Opposition has so crudely suggested: that the society is a fund-raising gimmick aimed at creating a tax-free infrastructure for the Singhs' political welfare. To prove that the charge is untrue, the society will have to gear itself for some real action.

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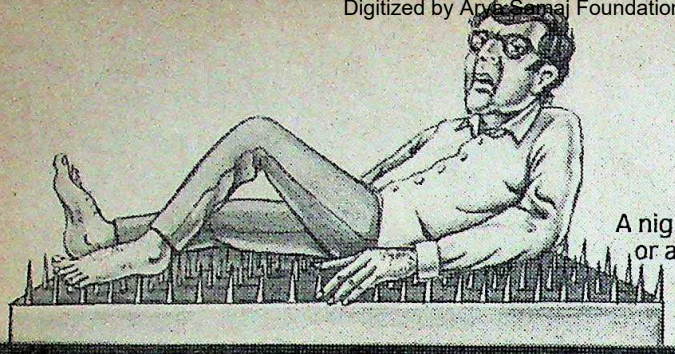

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SECOND ATTEMPT

AFTER its disastrous bid to enter the soft drinks market some years ago, Lipton is all set to make another game attempt. The last time around, its high-pitched advertising campaign was let down by a flat product (branded '21') that did not live up to the promise. But this time around, Lipton plans to go in for non-carbonated drinks and a large variety of flavours. With Pepsi Cola's attempt to enter into the Indian market running into a serious problem because of the stiff opposition from the food department, and with several other new soft drink manufacturers proving that unexplored niches do, in fact, exist in the market for new products (like Frooti and Great Shake), Lipton clearly hopes that it will be second time lucky.

DEAD LINE

THE Siemens bid to enter the core area of telecommunications technology (electronic switching equipment for telephone exchanges) may not get very far. Siemens was one of several private sector giants which hoped to capitalise on the Government's decision three years ago to throw open the telecom sector to the private sector. But, the Government has now decided that this should not be permitted, because the public sector Indian Telephone Industries needs a new project to absorb 7,200 workers who will otherwise get retrenched because old technologies are being phased out. So, the Siemens joint venture with the West Bengal State Electronics Development Corporation will not be given the green signal by the Central Government.

USER-UNFRIENDLY

FOR years, the problem was thought to be the timely completion of the Hazira-Bijaipur-Jagdishpur gas pipeline, and a controversy flourished over which contractor would manage to do the job in time. Now, it seems, the pipeline will be ready on time, but there are few users for the gas that it will transport from off the western coast, all the way into the heart of northern India. With many of the fertiliser plants, that are supposed to use the gas, not expected to come up as scheduled, the Government has asked the pipeline contractors to postpone laying certain portions of the pipeline, and it is also looking for new customers for the gas. Two possible candidates are power stations in New Delhi and Faridabad. This will mean extending the pipeline all the way to the capital, at a cost of approximately Rs 200 crore. But, officials insist that this investment will be recovered in one year from the sale of the gas.

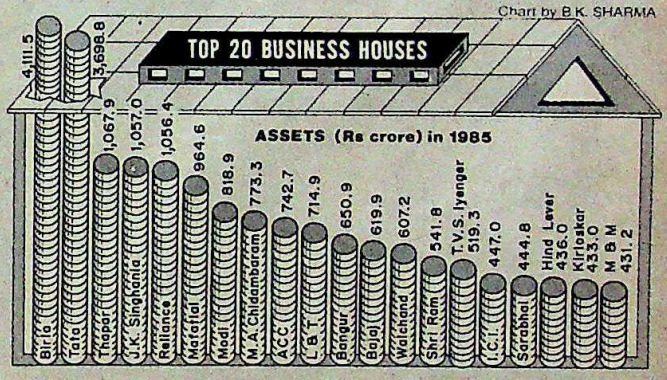
BRANCHING OUT

WITH K.K. Modi having eyed the consumer goods market for some years as a growth area of the future, it was perhaps inevitable that his Godfrey Phillips India should eventually branch out from the uncertain world of cigarettes to other fields, using its marketing reach to good advantage. The company now plans to get into the business of selling tea—a proposal that ITC had once considered and finally rejected. Godfrey Phillips also plans to get into the real estate business, using its properties in the big cities as launching pads. And a move into the food products area is a third possibility, because the company's American parent, Phillip Morris, has recently acquired General Foods of the US.

TOP TWENTY

THE big get bigger in the world of business, and quite rapidly so. The official figures on the assets, turnover and pre-tax profits of the top 20 business houses in the country reflect continued prosperity in virtually all the cases. The assets of all 20 houses grew by Rs 4,566 crore to Rs 20,115 crore in 1985, an increase of 29.4 per cent in one year. Profits, in some cases, have grown even faster. Those of the Tata

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



group, for instance, were barely Rs 113 crore in 1984 (up only marginally from Rs 110 crore in 1980). But, in 1985, they shot up to Rs 252 crore, ahead of the Birlas (Rs 154 crore).

The Birlas, however, are well ahead of their chief rivals when it comes to assets (Rs 4,112 crore as against the Tatas' Rs 3,699 crore), and marginally ahead on turnover (Rs 4,231 crore, as against the Tatas' Rs 4,130 crore). These official figures, however, may be understating the real size of the big groups. Chloride of UK, for instance, while recently announcing its tie-up with S.K. Birla, described the Birlas as a $6 billion (Rs 7,800 crore) group.

COLD COLLABORATION

SULZER of Switzerland is coming to India, in collaboration with the R.P. Goenka group, to set up a joint venture in Pune for manufacturing refrigeration equipment and liquid nitrogen plants. The Goenka group already sells Sulzer equipment in India, including the well-known Sulzer looms, and business last year totalled a handsome Rs 65 crore. The partnership is obviously a happy one, because the trading relationship is now leading to a joint manufacturing venture. Pune will initially be a Rs 15-crore production operation, but will not, at least initially, make the Sulzer looms. Demand in the country is said to be too small as yet and the domestic production of these looms will not be cost-effective. At best, the looms will be manufactured at a later date.

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RELIANCE INDUSTRIES

Spinning out of Trouble

Government measures help in a partial recovery

THERE is action on the Reliance front again, as the company tries gamely to recover from the sharp setback it suffered in 1986. The management of Reliance Industries is rushing ahead with plans to ease the firm's financial burdens and liquidity crunch. At the same time, efforts are on to improve profitability levels from last year's disastrous state. Moreover, the Government is now taking decisions that weave a pro-Reliance pattern, in sharp contrast to the pattern of last year when V.P. Singh was finance minister.

So far, the evidence suggests that part of the financial squeeze has been eased. Last fortnight, the company got its shareholders' approval for a substantial increase in its share capital, by Rs 30 crore. This comes on top of a proposal to convert Rs 500 crore worth of outstanding debentures into shares, at a premium of Rs 62.50 for each Rs 10 share (this alone will take its share capital up, from Rs 52 crore to Rs 121 crore). The result will be a reduction in the interest burden (the debentures carry 13.5 per cent interest), in exchange for a smaller dividend burden.

Reliance has also put forward a novel financing plan to the financial institutions. It proposes that Rs 85 crore worth of plant and equipment that the company has already installed at its huge Patalganga complex in Maharashtra be sold to the institutions, which will then lease the equipment back to Reliance at the normal leasing rates. Reliance will use the equipment, but will gain cash liquidity of Rs 85 crore.

While all this indicates that the company is on the move again, Reliance's profitability problem remains serious. The company's half-yearly results (for January-June 1987) are expected shortly. But figures submitted by the company to the financial institutions, suggest that profitability in the first quarter of 1987 was worse than in 1986. For, though the company's January-March sales rose by 32 per cent to Rs 184 crore, profits before tax and interest charges rose 10 per cent, to Rs 38 crore.

The company's projections for the full-year show that it expects operating profits in 1987 to be even lower than in 1986, dropping from Rs 14 crore to Rs 10 crore. Next year, despite the operation of two large, new plants, operating profits are expected to be as low as Rs 13 crore. In contrast, the figure for 1985 was Rs 71 crore, on a much smaller turnover.

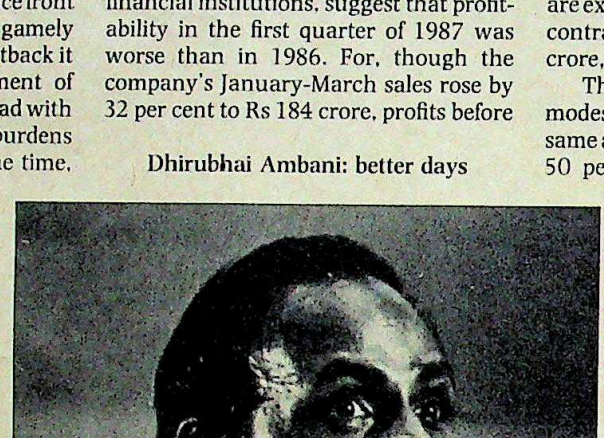
The dividend pay-out is also projected modestly, at 25 per cent for 1987—the same as for 1986, but half the 1985 level of 50 per cent. Even this dividend (on a sharply enhanced capital of Rs 150 crore, following the debenture conversion and the fresh issue of shares), will mean a total pay-out of Rs 37.5 crore, most of which will therefore have to come from the company's substantial reserves. Clearly, the profit squeeze on Reliance Industries continues.

The big difference now seems to be that the Government is once again smiling kindly on Reliance, and the old hostility is over. Already, the Government has allowed the premature conversion into shares of Reliance's 'G' series debentures worth Rs 500 crore. Now, it hopes the Government will also permit the conversion into shares of Reliance's 'E' and 'F' series debentures, overturning V.P. Singh's decision last year to not allow such conversion. If this comes through, it will further reduce the company's interest liabilities. Since all the conversions are to take place at a premium price on shares, they will also help boost the company's financial reserves enormously.

Meanwhile, the Government has taken two other decisions that help Reliance. It has recognised the glut in the polyester staple fibre market and taken this item off the open general licence import list, giving some protection to Reliance's troubled polyester fibre operations. The Government has reduced the import duty on PTA (Purified Terephthalic Acid) by Rs 3 per kg, with Reliance being the biggest user of PTA as a raw material for its polyester operations.

A third proposal is now in the Finance Ministry, to reduce the

Dhirubhai Ambani: better days



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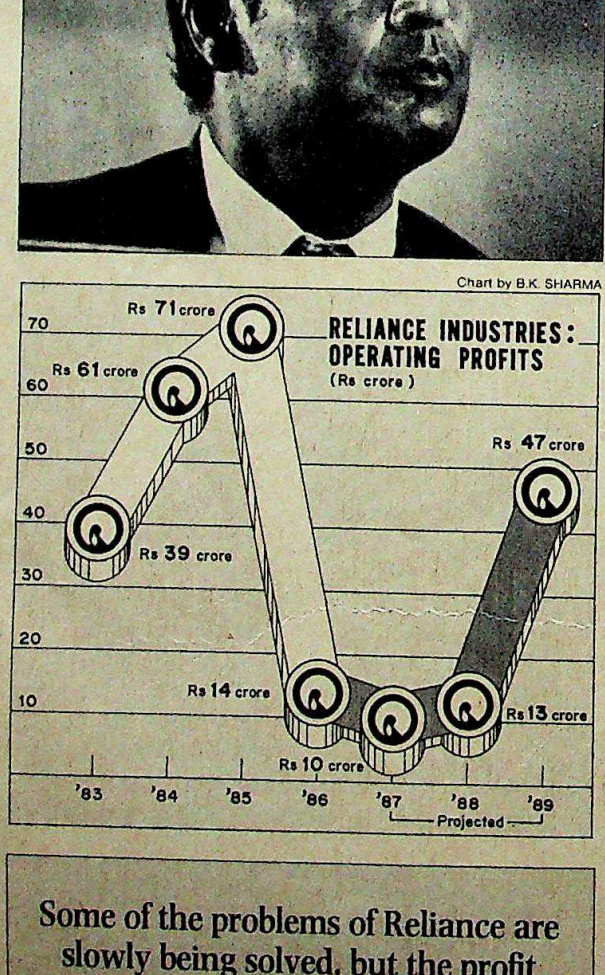

Some of the problems of Reliance are slowly being solved, but the profit squeeze is still continuing.

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import duty on N-Paraffin, from Rs 10,000 per tonne to around Rs 2,500 per tonne. N-Paraffin is a raw material for the manufacture of LAB (Linear Alkyl Benzene), and Reliance's 50,000 tonne LAB plant is expected to go on stream shortly. The duty reduction is being opposed by domestic producers of N-Paraffin. If the proposed reduction comes through, it could save Reliance up to Rs 40 crore a year in raw material costs.

If these decisions and proposals make for a pattern that is quite different from the pattern of 1986—when a series of government decisions hurt Reliance financially—then the company could be in clover once again. Certainly, it has got over the financial hump, especially the liquidity crisis that it ran into last year—partly due to sharp cost over-runs of around Rs 300 crore on its LAB and PTA projects (caused partly by a rise in capacity). Around the same time, the company had faced a problem in issuing its 'G' series debentures, with the Finance Ministry delaying clearance and reducing the share premium that Reliance wanted.

Information now available shows that this forced the company to increase its bank borrowings from Rs 38 crore to Rs 136 crore, step up its unsecured loans from Rs 70 crore to Rs 144 crore, and to sell units of the Unit Trust of India worth Rs 37 crore. The situation finally changed when the company's 'G' series debentures were successfully sold.

Nevertheless, Reliance had to resort to substantial window-dressing of its accounts in order to mask the serious problems it faced. While the annual results for 1986 reported a profitability slump, they declared a substantial increase in sales turnover, of 24 per cent to Rs 911 crore. Yet, detailed figures show that the company's sales turnover was boosted artificially, and that sales of the company's own products actually fell during 1986. This was masked by quadrupling trading activity in fabrics and yarn. Between 1983 and 1985, such trading activity was stable at around Rs 50 crore per annum. But in 1986, this quadrupled to Rs 207 crore and may have been done purely to boost the company's turnover.

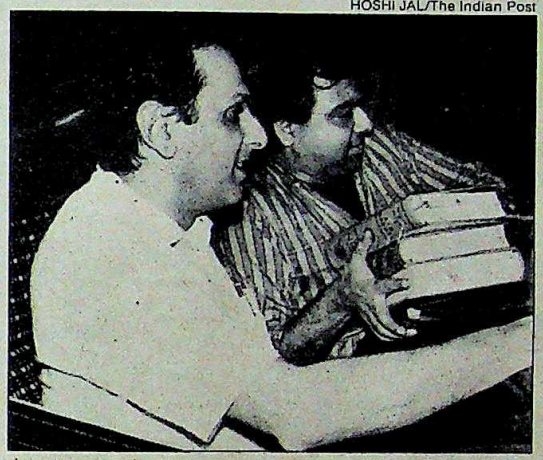
This was at a time when the company's own production of fabrics fell from 46.8 million metres in 1985 to 42.4 million metres, the value of sales dipping from Rs 211 crore to Rs 174 crore. Yarn sales did increase from 14,183 tonnes to 20,005 tonnes, but the average price realisation was so much lower that the financial sales dropped from Rs 252 crore to Rs 220 crore. And while the company

NUSLI WADIA

Petty Charge

IT was a week-end that Bombay Dyeing Chairman Nusli Wadia will long remember. The 43-year-old industrialist is not used to unwanted visitors at his luxurious beachside bungalow in Central Bombay. But on Saturday, August 1, his security guard watched helplessly as a posse of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials barged in flashing identity cards and demanded that Wadia accompany them to the agency's office.

HOSHI JAL/The Indian Post



Wadia (left) with Jethmalani

An unwell Wadia refused to budge until it was made clear to him that he was being put under arrest. Bombay Dyeing's company doctor C.F. Billimoria was summoned and lawyers S.B. Jaisinghani and Mahesh Jethmalani informed. At the end of the half hour drive to the CBI office, Wadia was formally placed under arrest. The textile tycoon, a British passport holder since 1962, was charged under Section 14 of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and Section 5 of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1949, for having falsely declared his nationality as Indian while staying on different occasions at the Oberoi and Taj Hotels in New Delhi.

There was a lot that was unusual about Wadia's arrest. The CBI is normally deployed for major crime or corporate frauds. The arrest was on a Saturday, when the courts are closed and getting bail can be tricky. Wadia was picked up for violating statutes which are rarely enforced, since they are directed against either foreign spies and saboteurs or to assist foreigners in locating their itinerant relatives in India. "These were wartime provisions and to my knowledge nobody has ever been prosecuted under these laws," fumed lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani.

The charge would have been serious if Wadia had been arrested under FERA for failing to settle hotel bills in foreign currency, as required by law for all foreign visitors. But as a foreign citizen permanently residing and working in India, the Bombay Dyeing chairman was entitled to pay hotel bills in rupees. Since Wadia derived no special advantage in lying about his nationality, the lapse could always be explained as one committed by hotel staff routinely filing in registration cards for their regular VIP guests.

If the pettiness of the charge against Wadia appeared confusing, the line of inquiry by the CBI officers during his seven-hour detention seemed pretty clear. The Delhi sleuths were mainly interested in Wadia's stay in the capital at the Oberoi from November 15 to 20 last year. Michael Hershman, president of Fairfax, the Washington based intelligence agency utilised by the Finance Ministry during V.P. Singh's tenure, to investigate the foreign holdings of Reliance chairman and Wadia rival Dhirubhai Ambani, had stayed at the same hotel from November 14 to 17. The CBI was trying to extract information from Wadia to link the textile tycoon with Hershman, something which the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission inquiring into the Fairfax affair had failed to do through a written questionnaire to the Bombay Dyeing chairman.

Wadia could face many other problems too. His visa expired on July 12, and he applied for a renewal on July 9. Wadia is still to get back his passport with the visa, and the Government could well deny a fresh visa on the ground that he has committed an offence. The last, obviously, has still not been heard on the subject of Nusli Wadia's foreign citizenship.

—M.RAHMAN

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also sold a substantial quantity of polyester staple fibre, it lost money on this during the year.

The outlook for the current year remains uncertain. While some of the duty changes that the Government has announced will help the company, polyester fibre prices remain depressed in a market awash with excess supply. The profit projections show that in 1988, neither the PTA nor the LAB operation will be very profitable. A sharp pick-up in profits is projected only for 1989 and beyond.

Meanwhile, in a puzzling development, Reliance seems to be readying to tap the market for dimethyl terephthalate (DMT), which is a substitute for the PTA that Reliance itself should be manufacturing. DMT producers in the country say they have been sounded by Reliance, although Reliance had argued in a court case two years ago that it had fully switched from the DMT route to the PTA route, and that it could not use DMT as a raw material any more. Investigations suggest that the company has been having an unusually high rate of wastage on its PTA consumption, but these could not be confirmed.

There was trouble in store on another front too, with the Government filing a complaint for prosecuting Reliance on a charge of evading excise duty to the extent of Rs 1.17 crore. An earlier customs show cause notice for Rs 120 crore evasion also hangs fire.

But observers dismiss these as cases that will not get very far. The central message that came through amid the flurry of activity in Reliance was that the problems of 1986 (now revealed to have been far more serious than most people had suspected) are now more or less over, and that the company is now anxious to make up for lost time—through the premature conversion of debentures, the issue of fresh shares, the leasing of its own equipment, and the commissioning of the PTA and LAB plants, which represent an investment of nearly Rs 700 crore. Even more important, the signals from New Delhi were encouraging.

The only remaining problem appeared to be profitability, on which the projections remain downbeat till 1989. With the markets flush with polyester goods, it seemed unlikely that there could be a sudden upturn on this front. But the company's half-yearly results, expected to be announced soon, should provide a crucial pointer.

—T.N. NINAN

SIKKIM

Tax Fiddle

A money-laundering scheme

WITH its picturesque scenery and soft tax rates, Sikkim is veritably the last Shangrila. Last fortnight, however, trouble came to paradise. The state Government discovered that a laundering multi-crore business in black money brought in from outside Sikkim had been flourishing for years.

As some of the biggest names in and out of Sikkim—including film stars, well-known industrialists and a local minister's wife—figured in the deals, the issue threatened to break out into a major scandal. The state's Finance Department swiftly mounted an offensive by serving show cause notices on local businessmen, asking them as to why action shouldn't be taken against them for transferring money disproportionate to their known sources of income outside Sikkim.

"I am going to hand-cuff everybody involved."
NAR BAHADUR BHANDARI
chief minister, Sikkim

The Government moved to prosecute businessmen who failed to obtain a mandatory transfer certificate or did not pay a 1 per cent local tax on such transfers. Vowed Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari: "I am going to handcuff everybody involved."

However, it is doubtful whether the state can take action against outsiders, as state Finance Secretary K.C. Pradhan admits—the notices immediately cast a spotlight on the tax fiddle. As Pradhan explains it, outsiders struck deals with local businessmen to launder money, on payment of commissions. The local businessmen would then file affidavits in court claiming that they had earned the money in Sikkim, and then send over a declaration to the outside partner that the cash was being gifted to the non-Sikkimese "friend". Apart from enabling the money to get on the books, this helped the outsider to evade tax since gifts and loans are exempt from tax in the hands of the receiver.

Exactly how much cash was laundered is unknown. The state Government says it was Rs 3.5 crore. Several Sikkimese businessmen think that it was between 10 and 50 times that amount. The minister's wife alone is suspected of having transferred Rs 3 crore. Similarly, B.K. Shres, a local businessman, is suspected of having funnelled Rs 1 crore.

While the guilt or innocence of the individuals at whom allegations have been levelled (like Rajesh Khanna) will have to be established by the courts, Bhandari is quick to defend his colleagues: "I think the allegation about certain ministers and their wives being involved in this racket isn't true."

In fact, Bhandari vehemently insists that the Government is not hand-in-glove with the culprits, and that the courts should have smelt a rat when they were flooded with affidavits claiming that local residents had earned huge incomes. "We have no control over the courts," adds Bhandari. "And why did the income tax authorities in other states accept the claims of people that they had received unnaturally large sums of money as gifts?"

Finally, Bhandari claims that his government took the initiative to investigate. Says he: "It is our investigation that has brought such rackets to light." This, however, is only partly true. The Central tax authorities had first asked the state Government to investigate reports that large sums of money were being sent out of Sikkim. And while the state authorities have now called for court records, they could have done this well before the Centre entered the act.

Still, the state Government is now anxious to clean up the mess. In early 1983, the Centre extended its excise laws to the state after a host of companies rushed to Sikkim to avoid paying excise duties. Central income tax laws do not apply to the state, but Bhandari fears that the Centre will slap income tax on Sikkim, citing the tax evasion. With the state's tax on business income now at 3 per cent, that would turn Shangrila upside down.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Gangtok

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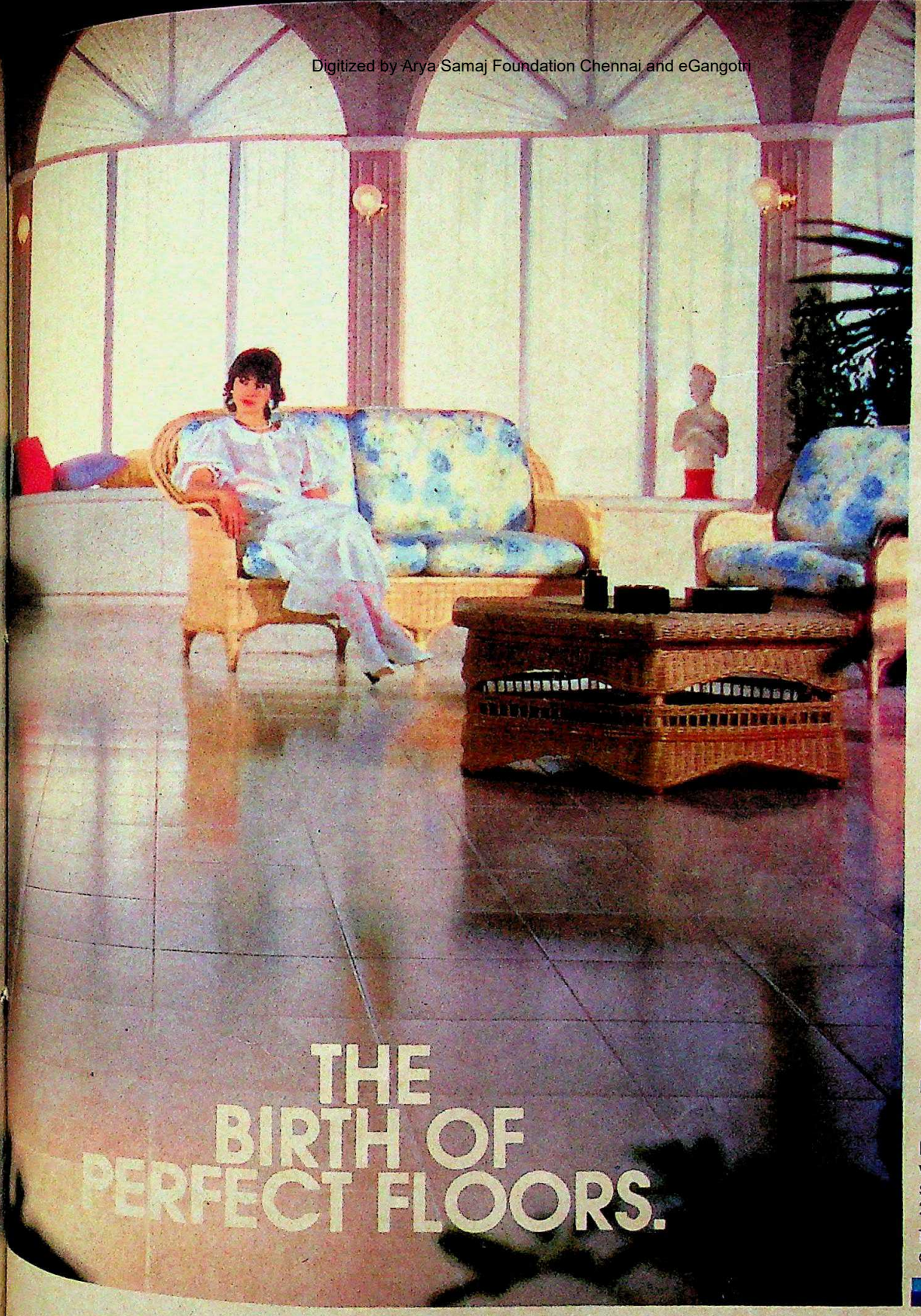

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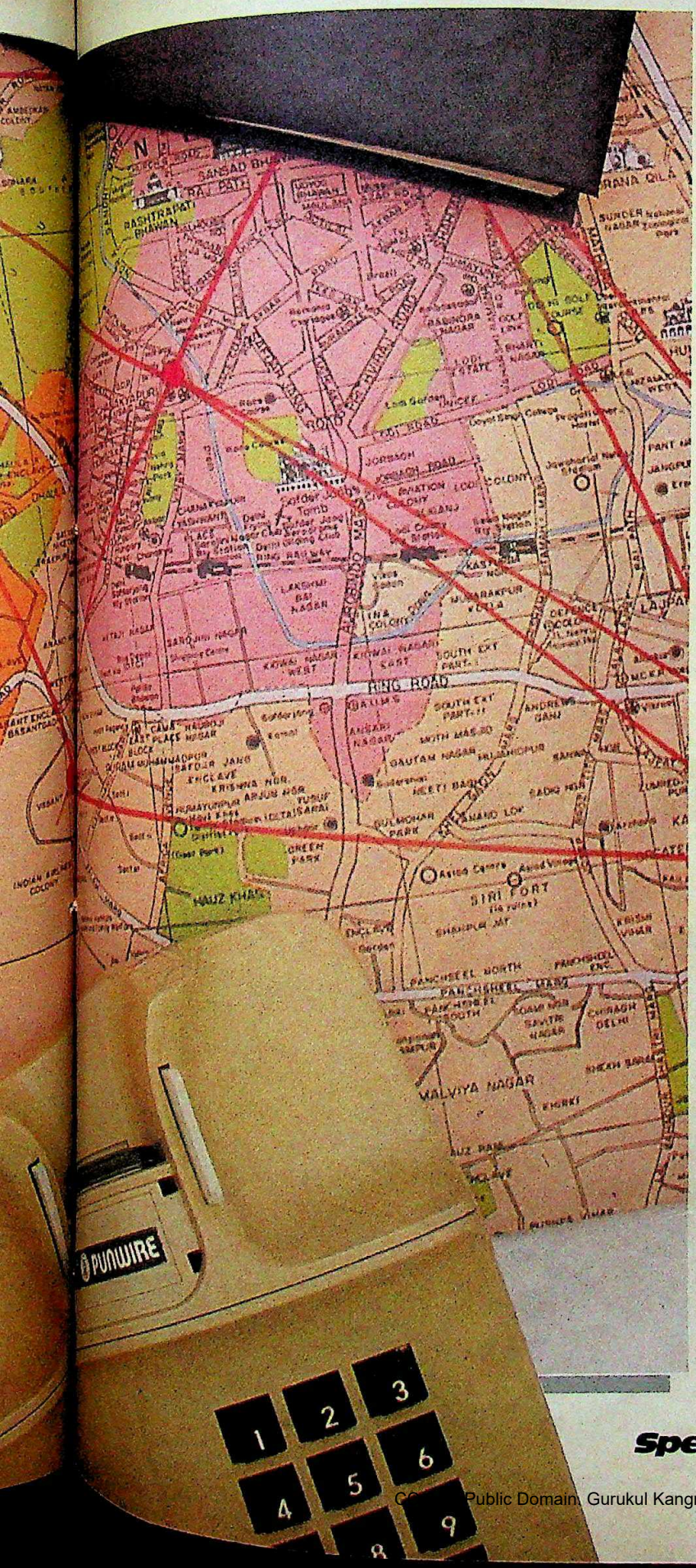

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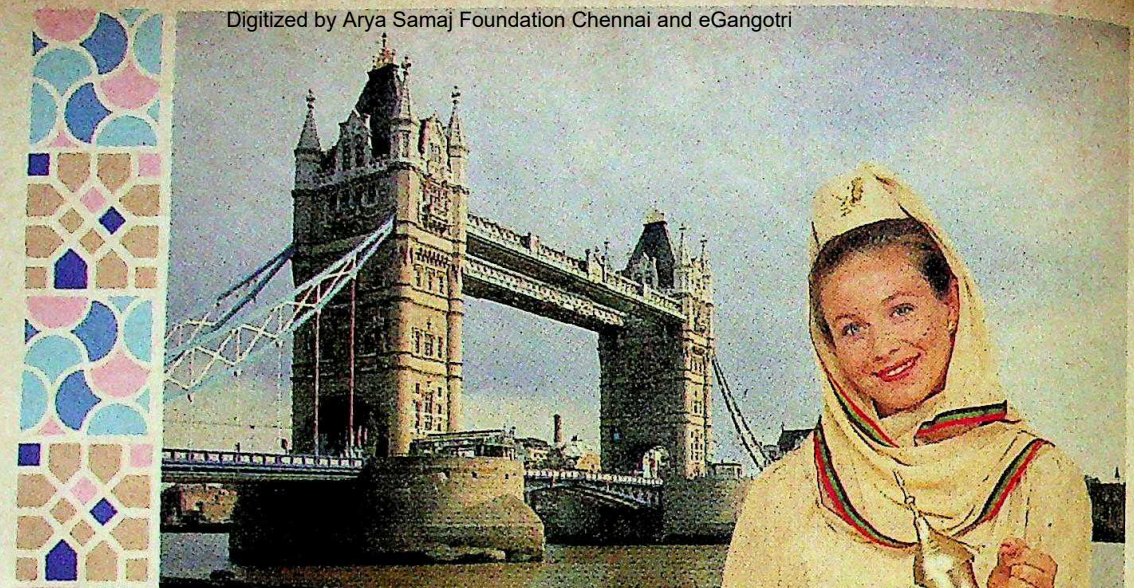

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JUTE INDUSTRY

Dismal Days

22 mills down shutters

THEY once dotted the outskirts of Calcutta, furiously turning out a golden fibre that set cash registers ringing. For it was then a monopoly industry with a growing internal and external market. But today, in more than one industrial suburb, the sirens calling workers to work have fallen silent, virtually signalling the end of yet another smokestack industry era.

The gold has turned into dross. Battered by cheap synthetic substitutes, high production costs and dwindling export markets, the 150-year-old jute industry has plunged into an unprecedented crisis. With an estimated Rs 100 crore in red ink splashed across its ledgers, 22 of the country's 70 jute mills have downed their shutters in the last eight months alone, throwing 80,000 employees on the streets.

Yet, the worst is not over. With low foodgrain production expected (owing to the poor monsoons), and a drop in cement production (because of a demand slump), the gunny bag market is heading for a crisis. Even before this, cheaper synthetic bags had eaten into the jute product markets, taking away nearly 30 per cent of the cement and half of the fertiliser packaging business.

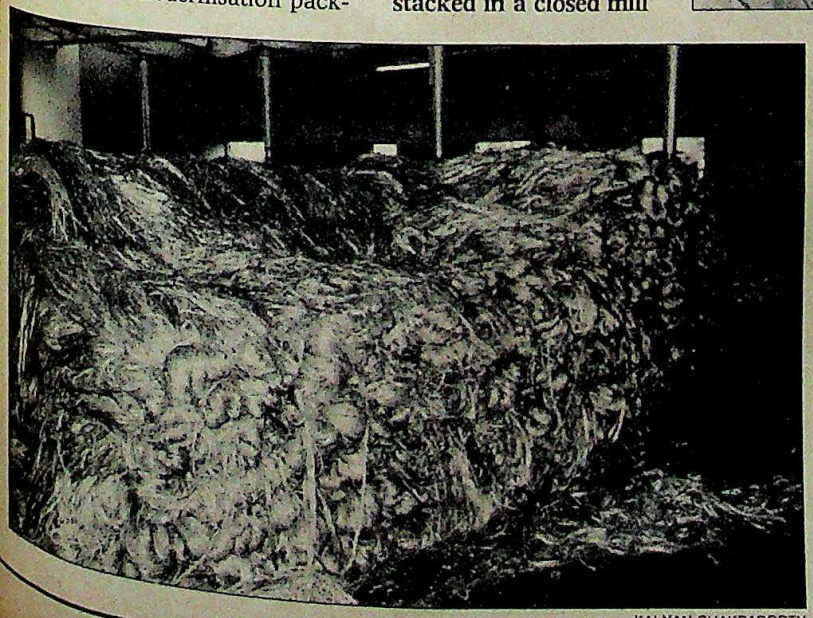
The Government is now frantically trying to help an industry that supports four million farmers. Last November, it threw the industry a lifeline in the form of a Rs 150-crore modernisation package. Another Rs 100 crore special jute development fund has been created, plus a third fund to help retrenched employees with a graded, three-year package of assistance, calculated as a percentage of their last salary drawn. This year the Government also passed a new law involving the mandatory use of jute bags to pack items like sugar and foodgrains.

Yet none of these measures seems to have had the desired effect. Argues a jute industry expert: "A modernisation package with a growing market is one thing, but its implementation, when the market is falling, is another." The Government itself is sharply divided on what exactly should be done. While Textile Ministry officials insist that the package is comprehensive, Minister of State for Commerce Priya Ranjan Das Munshi says that it would only lead to more mills closing down. Said Das Munshi: "The package is very limited in scope and provides no incentive for sick units, except inevitable closure."

The minister's ire is partially understandable. Although 15 mills have applied for finances, the Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI), which is administering the fund, has been sitting indecisively on the applications for the last nine months (except in one case). Laments M.N. Poddar, chairman of the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA): "The Government is not clear on what it wants to do and IFCI is taking time to clear schemes for modernisation."

BHAWAN SINGH

Munshi (right) and jute stacked in a closed mill



KALYAN CHAKRABORTY

The IFCI, however, faces a dilemma, as the modernisation package will make rationalisation of labour inevitable (to the tune of 20 per cent) and cannot be implemented without the consent of the trade unions. Asserts Monoranjan Roy, a prominent CPI(M) trade union leader: "We will not allow any reduction of the labour force."

Yet, as an executive in one of the mills pointed out: "The new looms will require only one worker for four looms, instead of two workers required for one loom in the old machines." Clearly, the modernisation that is considered essential for the industry's survival comes at a price that many consider unacceptable.

While the mill-owners blame the unions for stalling the modernisation process, the industry itself has been partly responsible for the current dismal scenario. Assured of a monopoly market in gunny bags and hessian, mills have been raking in profits in most years, and did not diversify sufficiently into high value items like carpet packing, yarn and blended fabrics. Says a senior official in the jute commissioner's office: "Seventy per cent of the mills' production consists of sacking items, for which the market is dwindling and production is uneconomical."

Meanwhile, West Bengal's Left Front Government sees a panacea for all the industry's troubles in nationalisation and advocates a ban on import of synthetic granules for the manufacture of synthetic bags. But these demands are not likely to get very far with the Centre, which has turned its face firmly against nationalisation. Also, a senior Textile Ministry official pointed out: "Banning of imported granules can destroy the synthetic fibres market and induce demand, but this will mean subsidising inefficient production by providing a monopoly market." Ironically, the Government is already providing a monopoly market for jute bags by banning the use of synthetic substitutes.

The Government is clearly pinning its hopes on the modernisation package as the only long-term solution. So far, this has made a slow start. But there is little doubt that with every third jute mill in the country now lying closed, the alternative to hard decisions today can only be more closures down the road.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Calcutta

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CAR INDUSTRY

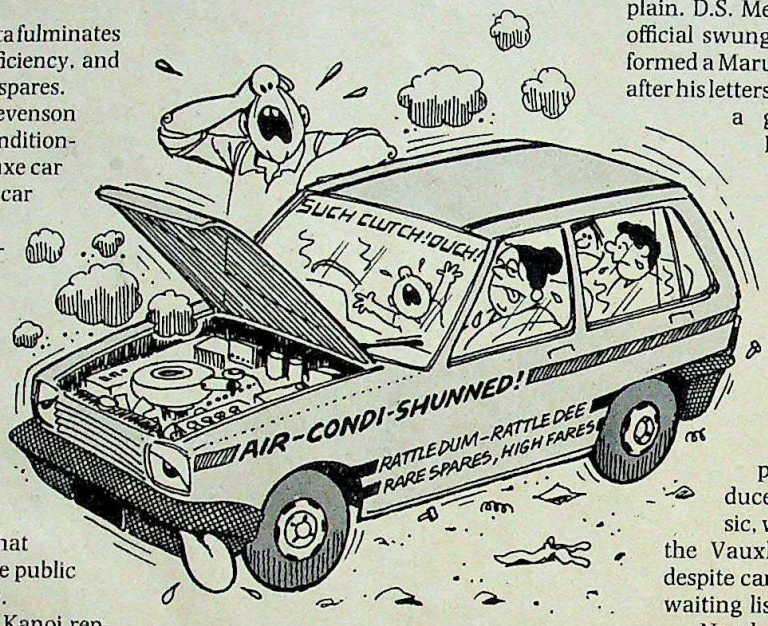
Driving Into Trouble

High expectations, low performance

IN New Delhi, D.S. Mehta fulminates about Maruti's fuel efficiency, and the stiff price-tags for spares.

In Bombay, Keith Stevenson complains that the air-conditioning in his new Maruti deluxe car doesn't work, that the car overheats and rattles.

And in Calcutta, businessman Shashi Kant Kanoi has kicked off a crusade against the Standard 2000. After flooding newspapers with irate letters, he is readying to move the Calcutta High Court and the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, claiming that Standard Motors misled the public on the car's fuel efficiency.



Mehta, Stevenson and Kanoi represent a rising tide of customer disillusionment with the new generation of cars, introduced in the Indian market over the past four years. Around the country, het-up owners of Marutis, Standard 2000s and even some Premier 118 NEs are increasingly sounding off on issues ranging from low fuel efficiency and indifferent customer service to wind-screen wipers and door handles that break prematurely. Clearly, India's promised automobile revolution hasn't quite worked out the way it should have.

The customer rumblings mirror a dramatic reversal of the position two years ago, when manufacturers held out the heady prospect of turning out sleeker, more power-packed vehicles that guzzled less petrol. After Maruti Udyog collaborated with Suzuki Motors of Japan to introduce its 800 cc vehicle, slick new models hit the roads. Standard Motors launched the top-of-the-line Standard 2000 after tying up with Britain's Rover, while Hindustan Motors unveiled the Contessa and Premier introduced the 118 NE.

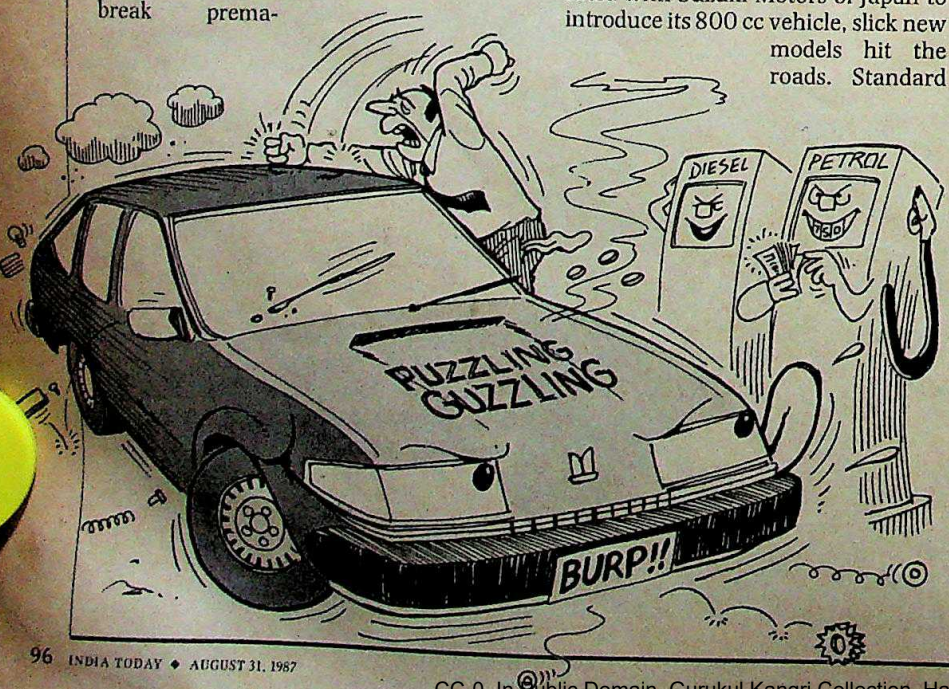
Now, some of the disappointed clientele has done more than verbally complain. D.S. Mehta, a retired government official swung into action last June and formed a Maruti Users Association (MUA), after his letters to nine newspapers evoked a gratifying response. And Kanoi has been spreading the word about the Standard 2000.

The rash of complaints may even be telling on Standard 2000 sales. Some of those who booked the car are not even driving it out of showrooms. Hindustan Motors' Contessa also met with a poor response, till it introduced the latest Contessa Classic, with an Isuzu engine under the Vauxhall bonnet. But Maruti, despite cancellations, still has a long waiting list.

Nearly all manufacturers have faced the cutting edge of customer disappointment. Premier Automobiles has had complaints about the shock absorbers in its 118 NE (the problem has now been solved). There has also been disillusionment about the car's delivery schedule. The company is hopelessly behind on its production targets—owing partly to a penal ban, imposed for some time, on the import of components. Barely 3,000 cars have been turned out so far, against bookings of 75,000 in 1985. Result: the car commands a premium of Rs 20,000 in Bombay.

The cacophony of complaints is partly fuelled by the widespread belief that—contrary to manufacturers' claims—many of the new cars are gas guzzlers. A number of Maruti users say the car gives them barely 13 to 15 km to the litre—not much more than what is given by the Premier Padmini—and is well short of Maruti's promised 20 km. Standard Motors, in turn, says that its plush car should run for over 15 km on a litre of petrol in ideal driving conditions, that official agencies have certified this twice over, and that it should give between 7 km and 10 km per litre even in city driving. Scores of Standard 2000 owners, however, question the claim, coming up instead with a figure of 5 km to a litre.

Indeed, the Government suspected



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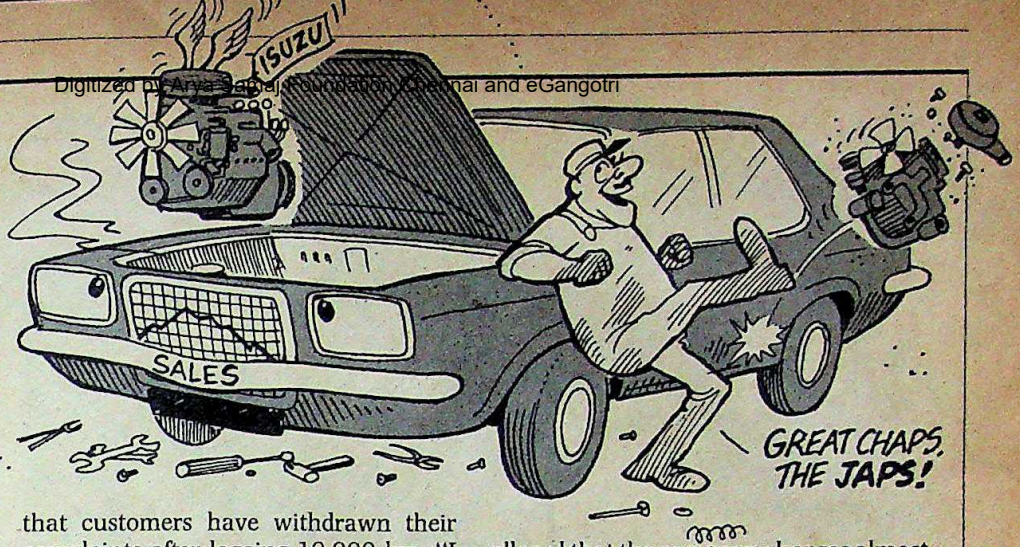
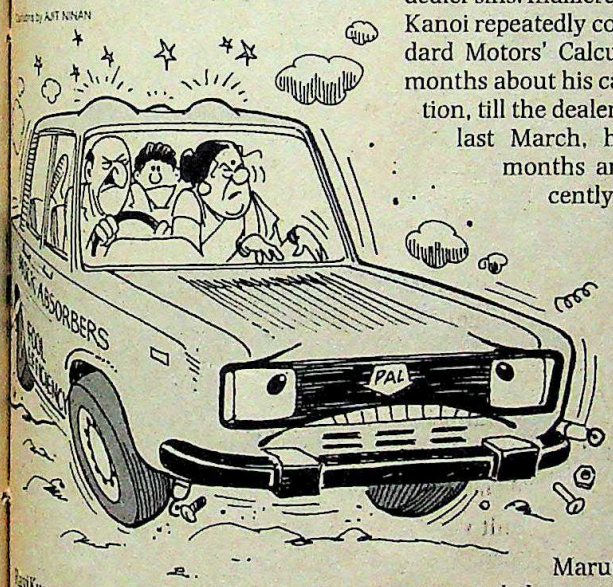


hanky-panky last year and withdrew its sales tax rate of 25 per cent (the normal rate is 35 per cent) for fuel-efficient cars manufactured by private firms, till they cleared official fuel-efficiency tests afresh (which added further to production delays at Premier, for instance). Nevertheless, car owners remain unimpressed. Pradeep S. Mehta wrote to the MUA from Calcutta complaining that Maruti's fuel consumption claims were exaggerated.

The heat arises from the mismatch between the ideal driving conditions that the Government prescribes for its fuel-efficiency tests and city driving conditions. In terms of fuel consumption, explains K. Ravindran, general manager of Standard Motors, "the difference can be as much as 55 per cent".

The Government is partially to blame for this. "It's the Government that ultimately ratifies fuel efficiency claims and lays down test norms," points out car buff



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

Tapan Kumar, an influential member of the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India. As yet, the country does not use what are called chassis dynamometers for simulating ideal city driving conditions. The Automotive Research Association of India at Pune, one of the agencies responsible for testing vehicles for fuel efficiency claims, however, soon provide some hope. It is believed to be working out a "standard driving cycle" for the country, a yardstick that is to be arrived at after putting instruments into cars and monitoring their performance for around a year.

On the other hand, Ravindran argues that Standard 2000's mileage improves after it has run 6,000 km, that an Austin Rover's fuel efficiency is tested in the UK only after it has covered this distance, and that customers have withdrawn their complaints after logging 10,000 km. "I can show you any number of letters from customers, testifying to increased mileage after doing 10,000 km. These were the same people who had complained earlier," he adds.

Amidst this rumpus, consumers are swift to point to other manufacturer and dealer sins. Indifferent service, for one. Kanoi repeatedly complained to Standard Motors' Calcutta dealer for six months about his car's fuel consumption, till the dealer took back the car last March, held on to it for months and returned it recently, saying that the car gave a mileage of 14.8 km. The dealer, says Kanoi, maintained that he had conducted fuel efficiency tests, even though he didn't have the facilities to do so, as Ravindran admits.

Maruti Udyog often seems to behave no better. Says MUA's Mehta: "Maruti users cannot get spare parts or their cars repaired, except through Maruti Udyog or its authorised dealers. Yet both disown total responsibility, charge fantastic sums and do not give a guarantee even for a day."

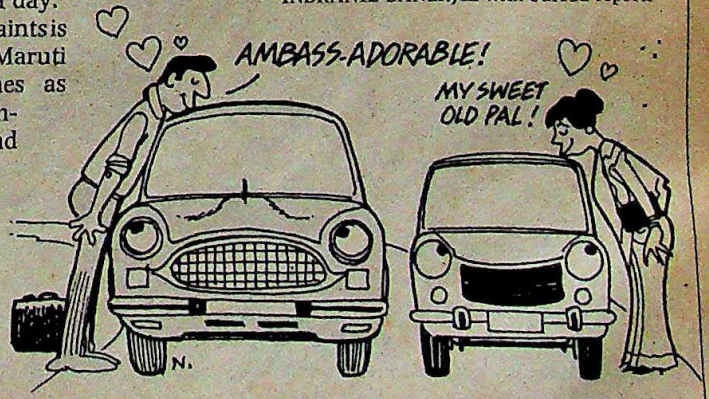
The litany of complaints is long. Among them: Maruti spares cost four times as much as those of an Ambassador or Fiat, and dealers fail to entertain complaints during the warranty period. While a random survey revealed that many Marutis had a clutch problem, Maruti owners have alleged that the company charges almost as much as an imported clutch even though it is made locally.

Maruti Udyog's Managing Director R.C. Bhargava concedes that Marutis have run head on into problems but maintains that these were due to design defects which have been debugged. "We have a sample check of ancillary manufacturers' products. It is not possible to check all the components, so some of them might be bad. But they are only small in number," he says.

On prices, Bhargava says that component specifications and quality are superior and so they are not strictly comparable with those of other cars. For good measure, he adds: "Many of the faults are due to bad driving habits. People in India begin driving in second gear, which affects the clutch."

Whatever the explanations, the result of the disillusionment is an ironic turnaround. And the old war-horses of the Indian automobile market now seem to be making a modest come-back. The waiting-list for Premier's Padmini model had disappeared, but Chairman Vinod Doshi says buyers now have to queue up for between six and eight months for the car. And Hindustan Motors' Ambassador is still going great guns, proving several market surveys wrong. India's automobile revolution seems as unpredictable as its automobiles.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE with bureau reports



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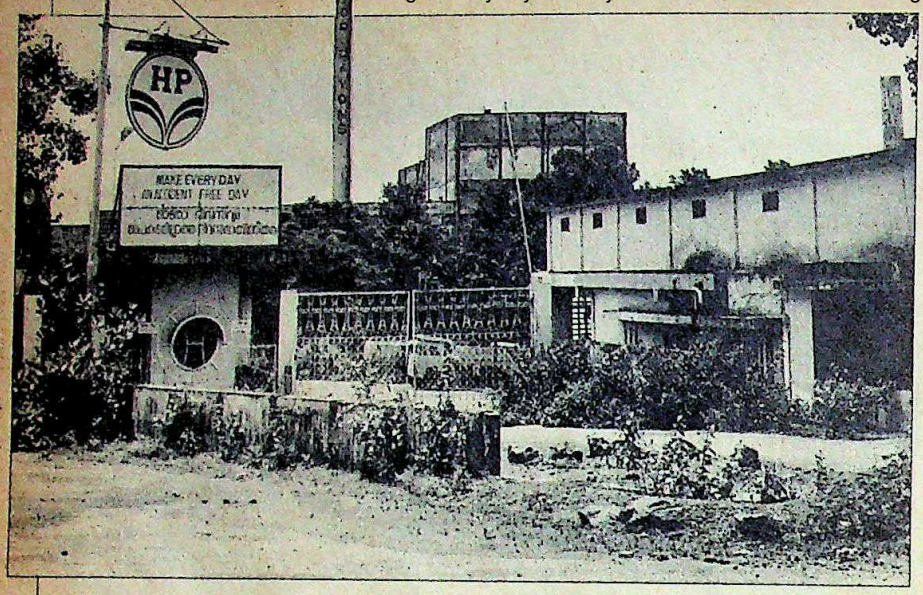

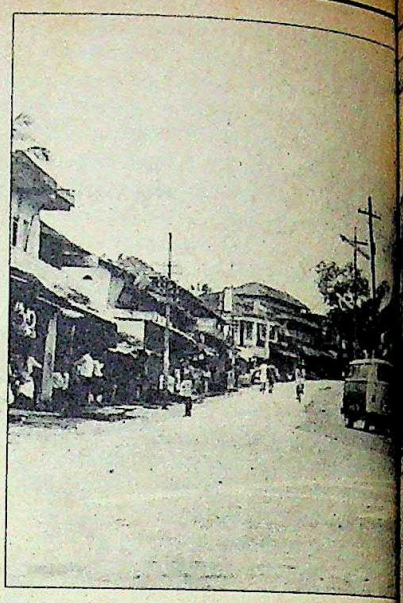

GRASIM INDUSTRIES

A Disastrous Closure

Once-rich Mavoor turns slowly into a ghost town

THE bus does't stop at Mavoor any more. The biggest business in this once bustling town (population: 24,000) is pawning jewellery to get cash. More than half the 17 hotels in the town have closed down; and the only cinema hall, which used to run three shows daily, has slashed admission rates and runs only one show a day. There is growing migration, and a sudden rash of suicides.

In its more illustrious days during the '70s, Mavoor (in Calicut district) prided itself on being the most prosperous panchayat in Kerala. But its lifeline—the Grasim Industries (formerly Gwalior Rayon) pulp and fibre unit—closed down just over two years ago following labour problems and raw material shortages. And there seems little chance of the unit re-opening in the foreseeable future.

The gloom in Mavoor is inescapable. The economy of the town and its surrounding areas has simply crashed. M. Dharmajan, former panchayat president and union leader of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions says: "Every month Rs 92 lakh in wages used to circulate in this area. After this stopped, there has been an economic crisis in Calicut district."

The Grasim closure has left 4,231 people jobless, and indirectly affected another 1.2 lakh people. Most factory workers have been reduced to working in nearby stone quarries and brick-making units. Others earn their keep as agricultural labour, loaders and fishermen. Some 2,500 people have since been compelled to migrate, and Mavoor has come to look like a ghost town.

Says K.V. Shamsuddin, secretary of the local merchants' association: "At one time, I had nearly 1,000 customers with credit facilities who worked in Gwalior Rayon. From three loads of provisions a week, I now get a supply only twice a week." Other traders have closed shops as they cannot recover debts. In the circumstances, as Shamsuddin says, shopkeepers can hardly pressure buyers to pay up. After all, where will the money come from?

The bankruptcy is also reflected in the figures of the three cooperative banks in Mavoor. In the last two years, they have loaned more than Rs 1.5 crore against gold deposits, a figure considerably higher than in the past. The banks are in a quandary: borrowers have failed to repay loans and pick up their ornaments, but local leaders won't let the banks auction the security on the ground that the gold belongs to the people of Mavoor.

No enterprise, it would seem, has been unaffected. Of Mavoor's 17 hotels, nine have since gone under and one has been converted into an arrack shop. But even that isn't doing well as residents prefer to brew their own cheap liquor.

The local bus stand too is deserted. With private bus operators losing interest in Mavoor now that its main source of income has disappeared, their daily trips to the town have dropped from 62 to 35. The ferry service across the Chaliyar river to Vazhkadu tells the same story. Three years ago, the right to operate the ferry was bought for Rs 14,500 in the annual auction conducted by the Mavoor panchayat. Today, the going rate is Rs 8,050 and the ferry contractor, Abdul Rahman, says: "If the factory does not reopen, there will be no takers at the next auction."

The hard times have even affected people's dietary habits. Kamaluddin, a wholesale fish dealer, laments that sales have declined to a fifth of the earlier level. Since they cannot afford most meat or vegetables, residents now consume the easily available jackfruit and tapioca. In textile shops, the average of daily sales has sunk from Rs 4,000 to a pitiful Rs 250.

The Gwalior Rayon Multipurpose Society, a cooperative providing cheap provisions to workers, closed eight months ago. Says Secretary Abubacker: "We owe Rs 40 lakh to merchants in Calicut, and they have started proceedings against us. Even if the factory is reopened, it will take years to clear the debts."

Agricultural labour has also been hit by the silent machines. Mohammed Ali, a rigger in the factory's engineering division, regularly employed four people for his banana plantation nearby. But now that he has nothing else to do, he handles most of the work himself. Says Ali: "Many workers like me who had bought land near Mavoor have got rid of their agricultural labourers, creating tension."

The frustration of the town's residents was evident recently when panchayat

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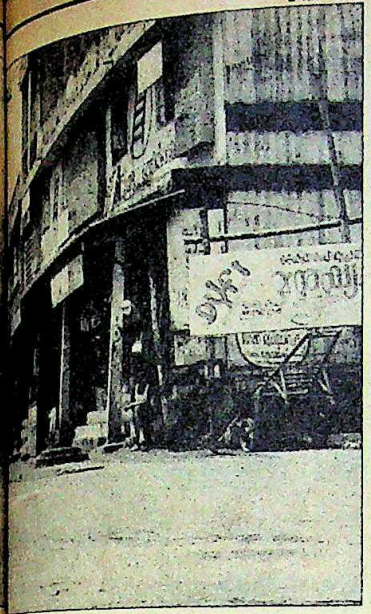
Bhas Fotos



The idle Grasim Industries' unit (left): and the town (above): ruined economy

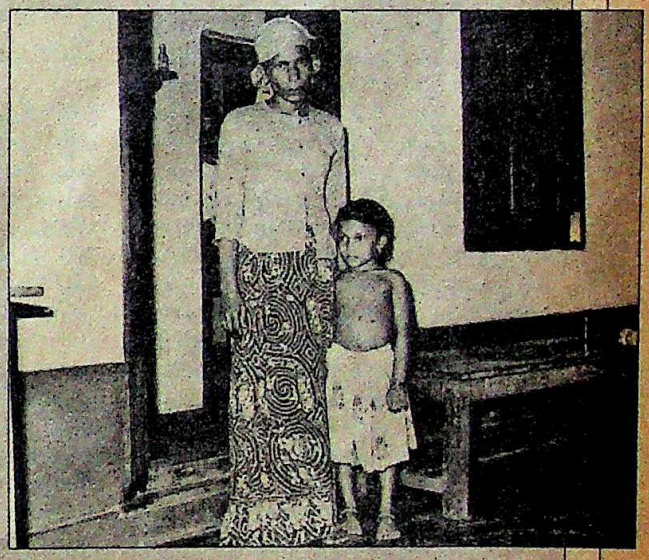
officials, doing their rounds to collect local taxes, were roughed up by an irate mob. In the last two years, five factory workers have committed suicide. Among them was Moosa Koya, a rigger, whose case illustrates the present social tensions. Ayesha Kutty, his wife, says the problem arose as their oldest daughter, married six months before the strike, had to take her in-laws four gold coins in addition to what had already been given. When the factory closed and Koya failed to deliver, her in-laws sent her home in disgrace. Her father looked for alternative work, and finding no way out, took his own life.

The Grasim management has, however, continued to provide electricity and water to its workers' quarters. It has also kept open a higher secondary school rated as one of the best in the district. Says employee N.P. Narayanan: "Some of us are forced to continue living in Mavoor for the sake of our children's education." But while the school is open, medical facilities to workers have been withdrawn.

Most Mavoor citizens blame the local union leaders for the current stalemate. From the early '80s onwards, the factory has been beset by innumerable strikes, organised by dozens of trade unions of varying political hues. Whenever a strike was settled, workers alleged that union leaders had sold out to the management. Eventually, a new union became dominant—the Gwalior Rayon Organisation of Workers (GROW)—which was formed in 1984, and headed by A. Vasu, a former Naxalite leader. The last strike was instituted by GROW, and quickly turned vio-

Mohammed Ali, a rigger in the engineering division, employed people on his banana plantation. Today, people like him handle the work themselves, creating tension with agricultural labour.

Ayesha Kutty, the wife of a rigger, has to support the family herself. Unable to provide dowry after their daughter's marriage, her husband committed suicide.



Abdul Rahman, ferry contractor, sees worse times ahead if the factory doesn't reopen. Auctioning the ferry service—that fetched a good price—may soon not be possible.

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lent, forcing the management to close the gates. Says Vasu: "All the unions have formed a united front, and this time we are determined to get all our demands fulfilled." The demands include the immediate payment of bonus at a higher rate from 1982 to 1985, permanent employment to nearly 600 workers, and a long-term agreement on the wage structure.

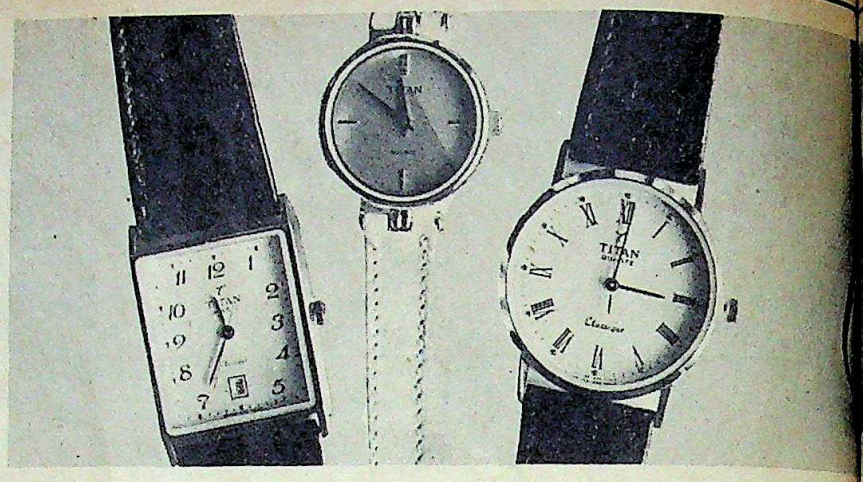
The management refuses to concede these, arguing their stand is linked to government policy on raw material supplies. The factory, which has a production capacity of 200 tonnes per day, needs 3.6 lakh tonnes of raw material—mainly eucalyptus and bamboo—annually, to work at full capacity. When production began in 1963, the company bought 30,000 acres of forest land from a former prince. But in 1971, the Kerala Government nationalised private forest land. R.N. Saboo, executive president of the Mavoor unit, says: "When we initially started in 1959, we had an agreement with the Government which said that forest land would not be nationalised for 60 years. We won our case against nationalisation in the high court, but lost in the Supreme Court."

The unit then had to depend on raw materials from neighbouring states. But later, these states banned the inter-state movement of bamboo and eucalyptus to protect their own industries. To top it, say management sources, the state Government started diverting raw materials from Grasim to the newly set up Hindustan Paper Corporation (HPC) at Veloor. With the Government supplying only a third of the raw material required, say factory officials, capacity utilisation slumped.

As Saboo says: "Over the last five years, our Kerala operations have resulted in a loss of Rs 21.39 crore." He also bitterly criticises the government policy of providing HPC raw material at Rs 12 per tonne, while he pays Rs 550 per tonne, adding that in Tamil Nadu, the rate is Rs 150 per tonne. But, he says the company's request for the supply of raw material at Rs 220 per tonne has had "some positive response" from the state Government.

In the last assembly elections, Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar promised that a victory for his Left Democratic Front would lead to the Mavoor unit's reopening. That hasn't yet happened, but Industry Minister K.R. Gowri says: "We are doing our best," and the workers' demands as also the raw materials issue are being sorted out. Till that happens, Mavoor stands as a sorry symbol of strident unionisation and warped government policy.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI



WATCH INDUSTRY

Changing Times

New companies try to capture a lucrative market

THE Indian watch market is being shaken in a way it hasn't been before. With a host of new companies entering the fray—offering an undreamt of range of watches—the days of total domination by Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT) and the smaller Allwyn may soon be over. Even the smugglers, who have had a field-day until now, may find that their time is up.

The new companies are in the fray to capture a market with an annual demand estimated at between 12 million and 15 million watches. Half the demand is currently met through foreign watches, of which 80 per cent is contraband. That situation could change rapidly when the new watches, priced from as low as Rs 45 to as high as Rs 14,000, sweep the market.

Ticking off in style at the moment is Titan, a joint sector company promoted by the Tatas and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), in technical collaboration with France Ebauches. Offering a stunning range of 160 models in gents' and ladies' quartz analog (electronic watches with the conventional dial), Titan has already sold 80,000 watches—worth nearly Rs 4 crore—in the first three months. It has ambitious plans to assemble six lakh watches in the first year at its modern Rs 54-crore factory at Hosur, near Bangalore, and aims to achieve its full capacity production of two million watches in just three years (compared to HMT's five million at present).

And to capture the quartz digital market (electronic watches with numerical display), Titan has applied for setting up another plant at Hosur, this time in collaboration with Casio, to manufacture a further two million watches annually. Titan claims that its digitals will be waterproof and longer lasting, so prices will begin around Rs 125 as against the rock-bottom of Rs 15 to Rs 30 for which throw-away digitals smuggled in from Hong Kong are available.

Also in Bangalore with a Rs 13-crore unit is the Bifora Watch Company, set up by a group of non-resident Indians, in technical collaboration with Bifora Uhren of West Germany. It will manufacture five lakh quartz and mechanical watches in the first year and reach its full capacity of one million watches annually by 1990.

Semi Conductors Ltd (SCL), the public sector electronics giant which has been supplying modules to small-scale digital watch makers since 1983, has also recently launched C-MOS, its own brand of digital electronic watches. Offering seven models priced between Rs 45 and Rs 130, it sold 25,000 pieces in the very first month. With a production capacity of 2.5 million watches, it anticipates a turnover of Rs 2 crore from C-MOS this year.

There is also good news for those who wish to indulge in expensive Swiss makes. Longines—favoured by the prime minister himself—has recently opened a service centre to compete with the existing centres of other upmarket brands in the country. Raymond Weil of Switzerland has gone a step further. Goel Private Limited, makers

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BHAWAN SINGH

New models: wooing customers

of Camy clocks, have started assembling these elegant dress watches in Bombay. Initially introduced in Bombay and Pune, the ultra-slim, 18-carat electro-plated watches will soon be available throughout the country at prices ranging from Rs 1800 to Rs 14,000. With an installed capacity of 1.70 lakh watches, Goel hopes to assemble 50,000 pieces in the very first year. "Our product will be competing at the top end of the market, where the demand today is met only by smugglers," says C.L. Samant, the company's marketing manager.

However, for the electronic watches to establish themselves, they will have to first contend with mechanical watches which—unlike most other countries—continue to dominate the Indian market. This is especially true in the rural and semi-urban areas, which are seen as the most likely growth areas.

In 1986-87, for instance, HMT produced just 2 lakh quartz analog watches out of a total production of 5 million pieces. Similarly, only a quarter of Allwyn's million-plus watches were quartz. Neither plans a major shift at present. Asserts T. Narasimha Rao, head of Allwyn's watch division: "The demand for mechanical watches will last for another 10 years." And S.P. Khanna, HMT's chief public relations officer, adds: "Aggressive marketing by new entrants like Titan and Bifora will boost quartz demand. But we plan to expand our quartz unit only after assessing the market; right now it is still in a state of transition."

EXPLAINING the popularity of mechanical watches, Bifora's Marketing Manager H.K. Lingaraju says that they continue to be cheaper than quartz watches. Lack of service centres for quartz watches, the availability of batteries only in towns and the fact that mechanical pieces are rated as more durable are also responsible for this unusual demand pattern.

However, the continuing fall in the price of electronic watches over the last five years makes the new manufacturers hopeful of change. SCL's Deputy General Manager, Marketing, Pushpendra Mankad points out that smuggled goods from Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to be considerably cheaper than the cheapest mechanical watches. He says that if "digitals can be offered with guarantee and after sales service, this creates a big opportunity" as it could overcome rural anxieties.

In their bid to have watches ticking away on more Indian wrists, manufacturers are also trying to cater to special market segments. SCL has designed some C-MOS watches specially for children, whom it views as a major market for its digitals. According to one estimate, the number of Indian women wearing watches has also increased by about a third in the last decade. The demand is expected to swell further as more women take up jobs. "We are laying great emphasis on ladies' watches," says Samir Shah, managing director of Indo-French Time Industries, makers of Timestar.

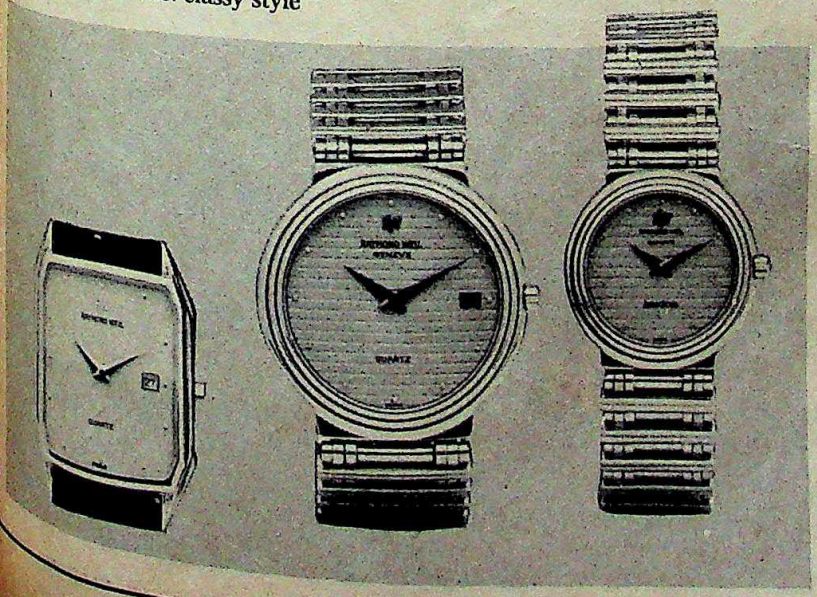
Even so, watch consumption in India is one of the lowest in the world—only 20 per 1,000 against 35 in China, 200 in Europe and 400 in the US. China has become the world's fifth largest producer, making more than 40 million watches annually as against just 7 million in India. Says Anil Manchanda, executive vice-president of Titan: "If India's watch consumption can be brought to China's level, the potential national market will be 30 million watches annually."

The Government's crash programme, under which import licences were granted to private manufacturers to assemble watches in 1977, plus the slashing of customs duty on imported components by almost half in 1985, have both boosted the Indian watch industry. It has, however, lagged behind in the government-stipulated indigenisation programme. Manufacturers, though, also blame bureaucratic delays for this situation.

Now, however, with both the yen and the Swiss franc hardening, the local industry is better placed to tackle the threat from smugglers. "If the industry takes up this challenge, India could even start exporting its watches," says Mihir Kharod, editor of the watch industry journal, *Trade Post*. All added up, it seems to signal good times ahead for the industry.

—M. RAHMAN with ANITA PRATAP and bureau reports

Up market watches: classy style



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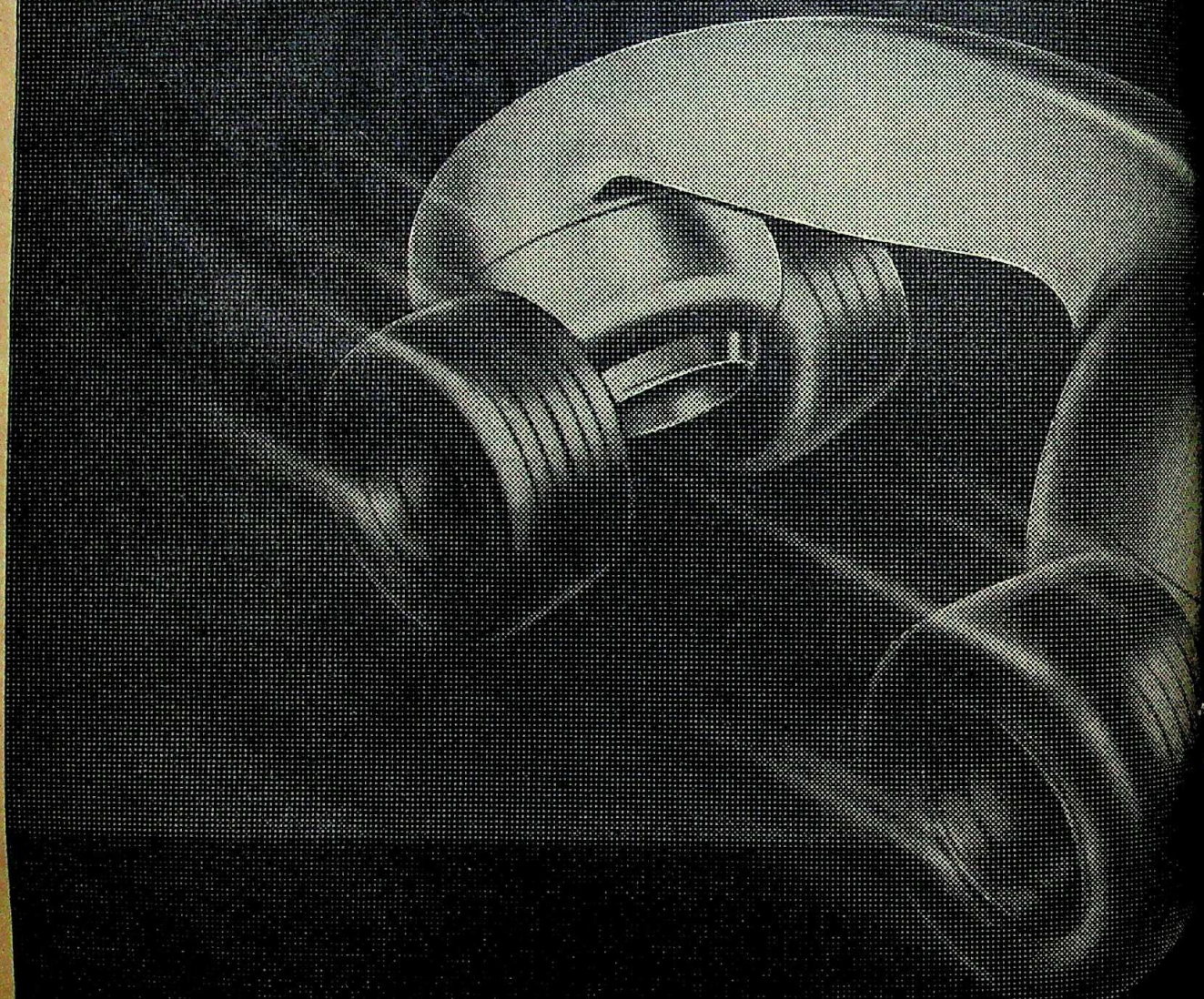
When you don't have to dig 'n' delve.
You can tell...



It's Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables

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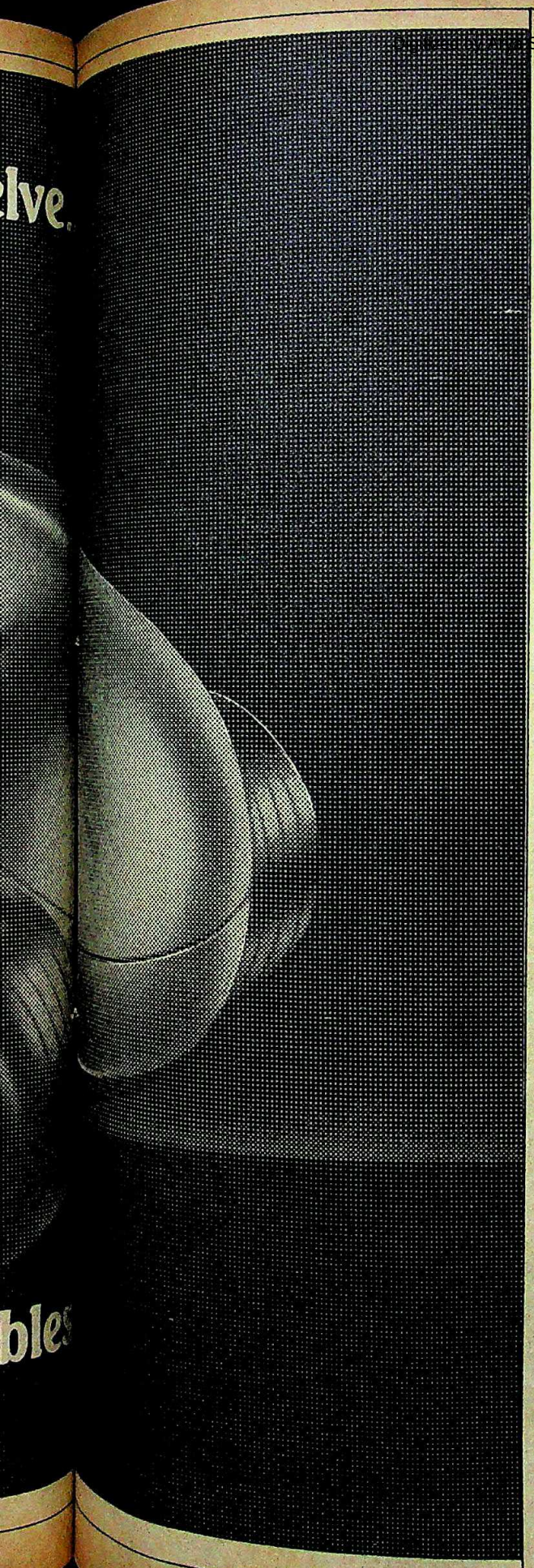
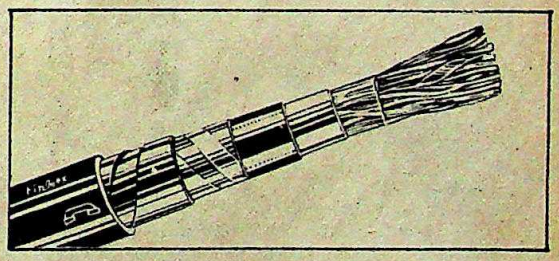


The road is ribbon-smooth for miles together. No trenches are being dug across its smooth surface. Pedestrian pathways are free of rubble. The Telephone People aren't busy digging up routes to find cable faults every second day.

Is it a mirage? No.

It's Finolex at work. Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables - made in technical collaboration with United Technologies, Essex Group Inc., USA - are helping revolutionise telecommunications in India.

They are the very latest and most reliable high tech products. Once they are laid underground there's no question of constantly uprooting them to find a cable fault. That's why for the best lines of communication, Finolex Cables are specified.



In Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables an exclusive insulation compound gives the cable a longer life. The jelly acts as an effective moisture barrier and resists seepage during handling or laying. Also, to prevent electrical interference from outside the cables are provided with special screening. Hence, no interruptions no matter how bad the weather.

Finolex gets your message across without getting your routes dug up.

Finolex
Cables Limited
26/27, BOMBAY-PUNE ROAD,
PIMPRI, PUNE 411 018 (INDIA)

Finolex gets people together

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THE MARKETS

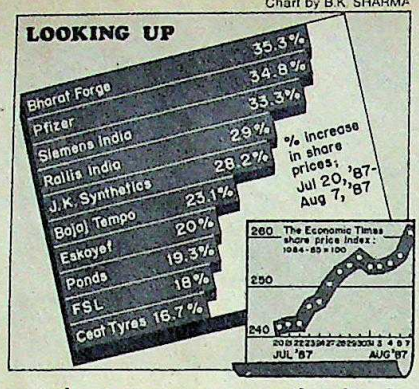
Upward Swing

Share prices spiral

THE markets never cease to surprise. Amidst the general gloom that prevailed two months ago, few would have forecast a dramatic 22 per cent jump in share prices in just five weeks. Yet that is precisely what has taken place since late June, with *The Economic Times* index climbing swiftly from the year's trough of 213.7 to 261.2 by August 7. The index is now tantalisingly close to the year's peak level of 264.4, clocked just before the Union budget.

If the initial recovery in early July was followed by a period of adjustment and rolling back of prices, last fortnight saw shares register another confident upward thrust. The shifting of N.D. Tiwari to the Finance Ministry was a major factor inducing optimism in the market, while an official fiat asking all brokers to square up their outstanding positions within the stipulated 90-day

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



period put new pressure on the already frustrated bears. The Unit Trust continued its buying operations, and an encouraging crop of annual company results pushed up several scrips.

There is no euphoria, of course, but confidence is finally returning to the market. There are encouraging signs of investors coming back into the trading ring, for even the non-speculative scrips have been finding more buyers. The poor monsoon, offering gloom for several industries that depend on a thriving farm sector, could yet depress sentiment (and indeed has already done so for fertiliser shares), but this was a problem for the future.

Several shares did remarkably well over the fortnight, including Bharat Forge, Siemens, J.K. Synthetics, Bajaj Auto and Ceat Tyres (which is coming out with a convertible debenture issue). Unit Trust buying propped up KSB Pumps, Mukand Iron, MRF, Asian Paints and a few others, while the shares of multinational companies continued to stay in the limelight. HMM and Food Specialities notched up handsome gains.

Upbeat annual results and dividend announcements (plus bonus issue considerations in some cases) by companies like Bombay Dyeing (whose chairman's arrest was ignored in the general cheer), Vareli Textile and Ahmedabad Electricity underscored the point that several companies and sectors continue to prosper. There were the corporate laggards too, of course (including Orkay, Grasim and Hindustan Motors). But again the bad news was ignored.

The immediate future could see some profit-taking and covering of positions, leading to a fallback from last fortnight's price levels. But the boom could well get fresh wind, helped along by pragmatic government policies.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 7.8.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	37.00	28.00	36.00	2.00 +
Associated Cement	241.50	138.00	164.00	8.00 +
Atlas Copco	152.00	78.00	78.00	40.00 - *
Associated Bearings	1180.00	500.00	1175.00	100.00 +
Bajaj Auto	5100.00	3950.00	5075.00	550.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	172.50	210.00	5.00 +
Bata India	160.00	74.75	77.50	70.50 - **
Bayer	785.00	375.00	395.00	nil
Bharat Forge	115.00	63.00	115.00	30.00 +
Birla Jute	58.00	44.50	50.50	3.50 -
Blow Plast	145.00	92.50	132.50	20.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	95.50	40.50	95.00	8.00 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	101.00	127.00	5.00 +
Brooke Bond	101.00	77.00	96.00	3.00 +
Ceat Tyres	71.00	45.00	70.00	9.00 +
Century Enka	1160.00	815.00	982.50	72.50 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	91.00	2.00 -
Citurgia	75.00	53.00	73.50	7.50 +
Colgate	415.00	215.00	228.75	125.00 - **
DCM	47.00	23.00	36.50	1.25 +
Dunlop	79.50	71.25	78.00	1.00 -
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	51.00	1.00 -
Escorts	84.00	39.50	40.50	1.50 -
Finolex Cables	305.00	114.00	305.00	65.00 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	167.00	25.00 +
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	25.50	0.50 -
G.E. Shipping	30.75	16.00	29.25	3.25 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	90.00	102.00	2.00 -
Grasim Ind.	118.00	80.00	118.00	3.50 +
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	132.00	2.00 -
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	166.25	240.00	57.50 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	84.00	92.00	4.00 +
Hindustan Motors	35.35	22.20	23.10	3.30 -
Hind. Dorr	407.50	202.50	285.00	17.50 +
IEL	64.75	45.00	51.50	8.50 -
Indian Organic	78.00	41.00	41.50	4.00 -
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	64.50	7.50 +
Indrol	510.00	160.00	230.00	8.75 +
Ingersoll-Rand	355.00	265.00	332.50	12.50 +
ITC	78.00	40.00	51.00	2.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	54.50	8.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	235.00	40.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	52.50	5.00 +
KSB Pumps	382.50	220.00	382.50	52.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	78.00	4.50 +
Lipton	79.50	57.00	73.00	6.00 +
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	16.50	1.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	51.00	1.00 +
Mc Dowell	95.00	41.50	95.00	13.00 +
Motor Industries	550.00	317.50	530.00	95.00 +
Mukand Iron	81.00	62.00	79.00	6.00 +
National Organic	577.50	382.50	417.50	17.50 -
Nirlon	26.00	8.50	8.50	3.75 -
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	29.50	38.50	1.50 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	41.00	5.50 -
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	230.00	15.00 +
Ponds	375.00	222.50	340.00	60.00 +
Premier Auto	30.00	17.00	26.00	2.50 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	94.00	3.00 +
Raymond	100.00	48.00	99.00	7.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	205.00	143.00	205.00	23.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	110.00	124.00	7.50 +
Richardson Hind.	327.50	210.00	307.50	22.50 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	26.50	2.00 -
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	75.00	3.75 +
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	96.00	22.00 +
SPIC	53.50	36.00	38.00	6.00 -
Tata Steel	1207.50	607.50	765.00	62.50 +
Telco	685.00	350.00	450.00	35.00 +
Wimco	56.50	30.00	33.00	2.00 -

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**Ex-bonus

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.2255	9.1282
Austria	Schilling	100	100.3600	98.5849
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.5290	34.2660
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.1301	42.0440
Canada	Dollar	1	9.9701	9.8681
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8418	1.8224
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3400	9.2700
France	Franc	1	2.1367	2.0824
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6899	1.6720
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0700	0.0700
Iran	Rial	100	17.92	17.83
Italy	Lira	100	0.9800	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	8.85	8.60
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7976	0.7660
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.000	45.5300
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1877	5.1328
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0000	0.9900
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6200	0.60000
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.1824	6.1557
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7000	0.6800
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.2612	6.1819
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1100	0.0998
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4400	0.4200
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0095	1.9832
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.4351	8.3468
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2100	0.1900
Thailand	Baht	100	50.25	49.000
UK	Pound	1	20.7200	20.5925
USA	Dollar	1	13.1925	13.0625
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5300	3.5000
USSR	Rouble	1	20.2522	20.1200
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.1225	6.9444

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.8.87.

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Give the devil his due.

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A truly envied TV doesn't happen just by magic. Not even black magic. That's why, when your neighbour envies your pride as an ONIDA owner, don't be too proud to discuss the reasons. You can begin by telling him about ONIDA's world-famous pedigree. And that itself will explain some of the features that you can then show him.

When he's floored by the mind-blowing clarity and sharpness of the picture, give him a helping hand by mentioning that the secret lies in ONIDA's much higher resolution than that of any other brand, and on the direct processing of signals within the TV.

Then when he's moved by the great sound, show him the sound features that make it possible. The novel Triple Speaker function where the tweeter lets you clearly hear all frequencies. And the unique adjustable ear flaps that invite you right within the acoustic field of the TV!

All this talk, mind you, is not merely to give credit where it's due. You have a major motive. Because, only when all your neighbours buy their ONIDA, can you stop worrying about their envy, and relax.

ONIDA with cordless remote. Neighbours' envy. Owners' pride.

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The Nerolac Guide to Better Homes — Paint Budgeting

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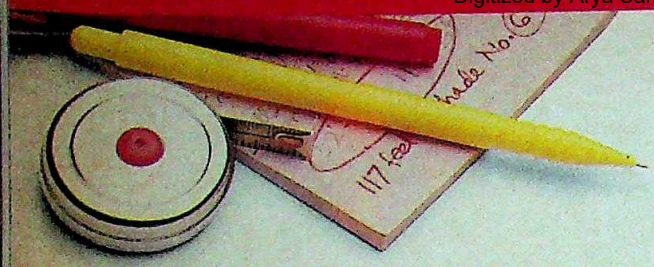

Thorough surface preparation with Nerolac systems ensures fewer repaints

How to tailor your budget without cutting corners.

Planning your painting expenses requires careful consideration. To balance your lifestyle with your budget, Nerolac guides you step by step in planning the optimal budget for your need.

Measuring up to your needs

Begin by estimating area to be painted. Note length, breadth and height of room. Calculate painting area: twice length plus breadth, multiply by height. Subtract door, window and glass areas. For ceilings, multiply length by breadth.

The right paints for your budget

Next decide the type of paint you need. A luxurious, silken feel? Nerolac Acrylic Emulsion fits the bill. Although initially somewhat expensive, it is very cost-effective in the long run. Every litre covers double the wall space. And lasts twice as long. Should cost be an overriding factor, choose an economical paint with a rich finish — Nerolac Washable Oilbound Distemper. Perfect for walls and all concrete ceilings. Wood, however, requires a durable protective enamel paint. Like Nerolac Synthetic Enamel. So do bathrooms and kitchens.

Estimating your painting cost

Next check the covering capacity of the paint chosen. Divide the painting area by covering capacity. This is the quantity of paint your home needs. Multiply by the per litre cost and add up your expenditure. To this you will need to add labour costs. Take estimates from a few recommended painters. Make sure that they include good surface preparation. A scrape-down, filling with putty, smoothening and protecting with Nerolac primer ensures a longer paint life.

Slashing budgets without cutting corners

If the cost works out too high, here are some tips to cut down extras. Consider painting bedrooms, kitchens and corridors with Nerolac Distemper, while only the living room can be adorned with Nerolac Emulsion. Furniture can be given a new lease of life with a coat of Glossolite Synthetic Enamel and a final coat of Nerolac Synthetic Enamel — to give a bright look to your entire home.

Nerolac Paints. Always a shade better

Once you've chosen the right paint, the rest is simple. There are hundreds of colours and moods to choose from. And Nerolac Hi-Power Universal Stainers combine to give you exclusive designer shades that are entirely your own.

Watch out for the Nerolac Guide to Paint Selection in the next issue. And for the complete Nerolac Guide to Better Homes — with easy do-it-yourself tables, tips on decor and much more — write in for your free colour booklet today to

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NEROLAC PAINTS

Always – a shade better

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Discover a market at your boat-step

VISIT Thailand

Floating markets where vendors congregate in an environment uniquely Thai. Bountiful orchards and market gardens. Mystical temples and fabulous palaces. Boat races, fun-filled festivals, ceremonies and glittering spectacles. In 1987, the Royal Orchid is going to bloom like never before.

1987 is Visit Thailand Year. And naturally, the best way to get there is on board Thai Airways, your very own airline. We fly to Bangkok eight days a week.

So step aboard Thai and fly to market.

Thai

Smooth as silk.

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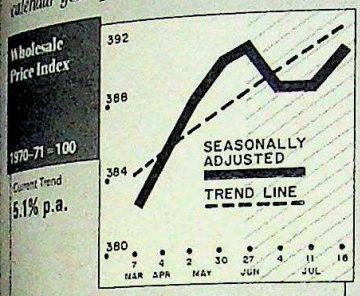
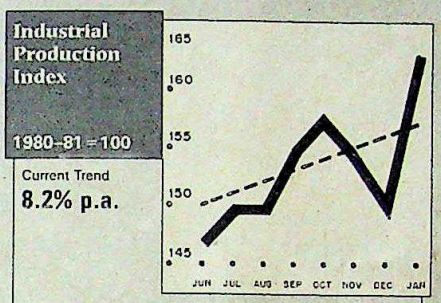
Inflation has crept up by one percentage point, but still remains at 5 per cent. Money supply is well under control. There has been a minor credit squeeze on the private sector. Power generation is well below par. The bourse shows a recovery, and gold continues to glitter.

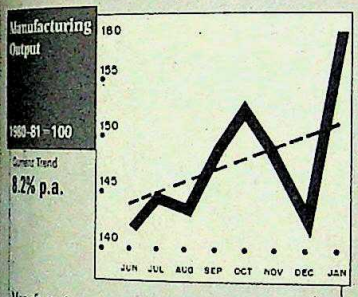
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months (weekly data) or two years (monthly data) figures. The quarters referred to in the text are calendar year quarters.



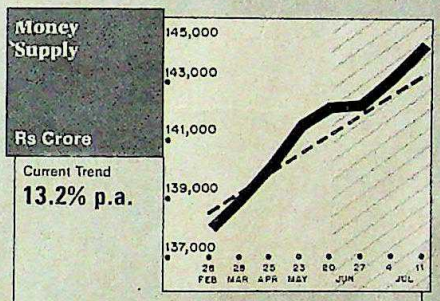
There is a very gradual upward crawl in prices—from 4 per cent to 5 per cent. With poor monsoons, does this augur inflation?



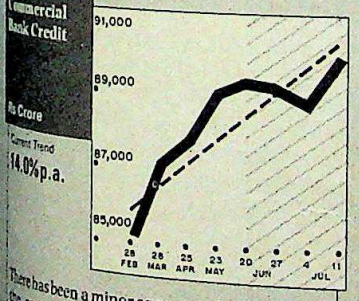
January (the month for which data is available) saw an 8 per cent increase in production, after a drop in November and December.



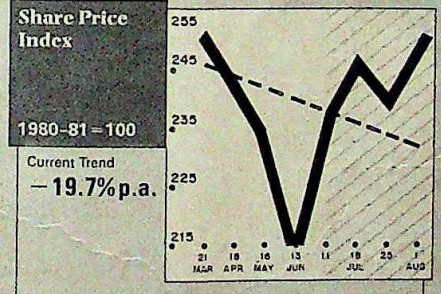
Manufacturing output did better than the overall industrial index, with a 10.4 per cent growth in January over December.



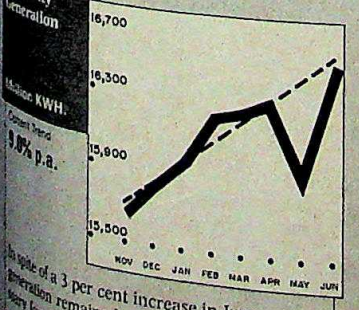
Money supply, however, is well under control—well and truly leashed by the Reserve Bank of India.



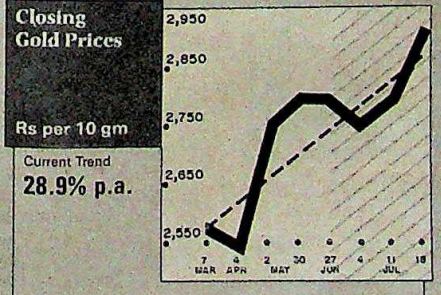
There has been a minor squeeze in bank credit to the commercial sector, instead of the slight expansion that occurs in July-September.



The long-term trend is still negative, but shares have registered a rally from mid-June, backed up by a 4 per cent increase last fortnight.



In spite of a 3 per cent increase in June, power generation remains lower than the rate necessary for planned growth.



Gold prices continue to be on the rise. Like property, the yellow metal is attracting all manner of investors.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items between July 1-15, 1987

	% Growth
Hides Raw	16.37
Machine Tools	6.32
Moong	5.75
Cotton Raw	4.75
Cables and Wires	3.97
Chillies	3.43
Tea	2.95
Zinc	2.91
Cement	2.78
Cotton Yarn	2.14
Coconut Oil	1.77
Groundnut Seeds	1.76
Bajra	1.67
Eggs	1.58
Jute Textiles	1.5
Tobacco Raw	1.49
Rape and Mustard Seeds	1.39
Masoor	1.38
Silk Raw	1.32
Linseed Oil	1.16
Coir Yarn	1.09
Arhar	1.09
Mining Machinery	1.01
Coffee	.99
Caustic Soda	.92
Bolts and Nuts	.91
Meat	.89
Mustard Oilcake	.88
Mustard Oil	.82
Groundnut Oil	.81
Industrial Instruments	.75
Boilers	.73
Coir Fibre	.73
Pipes and Tubes	.69
Dyeing Materials	.68
Matches	.68
Limestone	.63
Solvent Extracted Oil	.62
Pesticides and Insecticides	.59
Woollen Cloth and Woollen Khadi	.58
Buses	.57
Copper and Alloys	.57
Jowar	.56
Tractors	.53
Power-Driven Pumps	.50
Sugarcane	.50

Of the 139 series considered, 69 of them with a total weight of 32.484 had a positive growth and 69 of them with a total weight of 53.41 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, June	542.6	492.7
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, June	53.5	52.0
Call Money Rate		
Per cent, June	9.68	10.00
Letters of Intent Issued		
Numbers, June	130	95
Industrial Licences Issued		
Numbers, June	39	51

Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP

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Sobering Decision

THE Karnataka Government has decided to deliver a decisive punch to its drunk employees. The chief secretary recently issued a circular warning all employees that severe action would be taken against those "in the habit of consuming intoxicating drinks during working hours".

As a follow-up to the circular, Transport Minister P.G.R. Sindhia suspended a drunk clerk while on a surprise visit to the regional transport office. It would seem though that the phenomenon of drinking on duty is commonest among the constabulary as some recent incidents have proved.

Sindhia: stern action

Though the circular certainly sounds impressive, many see this as another attempt by the Ramakrishna Hegde Government to boost its sagging image. In fact the Congress(I) leaders go a step further to say that if there is increased drunkenness on duty, the Janata Party Government has only itself to blame. They point out that as against the 1,359 licences granted for opening liquor shops by successive Congress(I) governments over 35 years, the present Government has approved a staggering 6,854 liquor shops in just four years. The state Government has chosen not to refute these figures.

Battling it Out

AFTER Vasantdada Patil was publicly put in his place by Rajiv Gandhi, it seemed to be Sharad Pawar's turn. Last fortnight, the powerful Congress(I) leader came under pressure for his political rivalry with Maharashtra Chief Minister S.B. Chavan.

Pawar made headlines after Jambuwantrao Dhote, general secretary of the Rashtriya Samajwadi Congress and former Vidarbha Congress(I) leader, wrote to Rajiv Gandhi making various corruption charges against him. Dhote also sent a copy of the letter to Chavan, claiming that Pawar had Rs 100 crore stashed away in Swiss banks; that he had bought shares in the Marathi daily *Sakal*; that he had a stake in a

Pawar (left) and Dhote: hitting hard

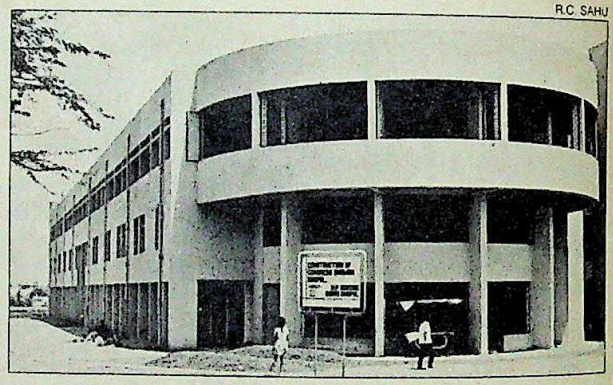
building project in a Bombay suburb and that he was exploiting several trusts in Baramati, his home district. Chavan promptly asked Chief Secretary K.G. Paranjpe to "find out the facts" relating to the building project and the Baramati trusts. He however said that the other charges did not come under the purview of the state Government.

Though Chavan maintained that he only initiated "routine action", this unusual step against a powerful rival for chief ministership seems to indicate that he is spoiling for a fight. In the meantime, Pawar called a press conference in Bombay. Vehemently denying Dhote's charges, he demanded an inquiry by a government agency, saying: "I will be very happy to cooperate."

A Building for Free

THE political fortunes of the ruling party at the Centre may be taking a nose-dive but its financial position in Madhya Pradesh is certainly improving. Three years ago, the state Government allotted the Congress(I) a prime 1.06-acre plot of land on the annual lease-rent of just one rupee. And plans to construct a seven-storey, 27,000 sq ft Congress Bhavan has cost the party almost nothing. Twenty-eight traders who want space have advanced Rs 2 lakh each for the construction, and will pay a combined rent of

R.C. SAHU



Congress Bhavan in Bhopal: solid asset

Rs 42,000 per month. A nationalised bank has already rented the first floor for Rs 70,000. In fact, every inch in the complex has been rented out, leaving no space for the party itself.

The Congress(I) had been allotted the land in lieu of its old building in the city, acquired in 1974 and for which it received compensation of Rs 4.80 lakh. Though the Janata government, in 1977, cancelled the allotment, arguing that adequate compensation had been paid, the land was re-allotted, when the Congress(I) regained power in 1980.

The building—only the ground and first floor are constructed—is awaiting inauguration by party President Rajiv Gandhi, who failed to show up on two planned dates. Still, the real losers remain only the traders who have rented space.

Showering Charges

IT was a monsoon festival with a difference. At the two-day Phuhar function, organised last fortnight to coincide with the arrival of the monsoons, the audience was treated not to folk melodies but to a 90-minute slanging match between Vice-Chairperson of the Bihar State Kala Academy, Tara Gupta, and Secretary Gajendra Narain Singh. By publicly airing their differences, they only proved what has been commonly known—that the academy, since its inception in 1981, has been beset by sloth and political infighting.

The acrimonious debate began when Gupta, whose name

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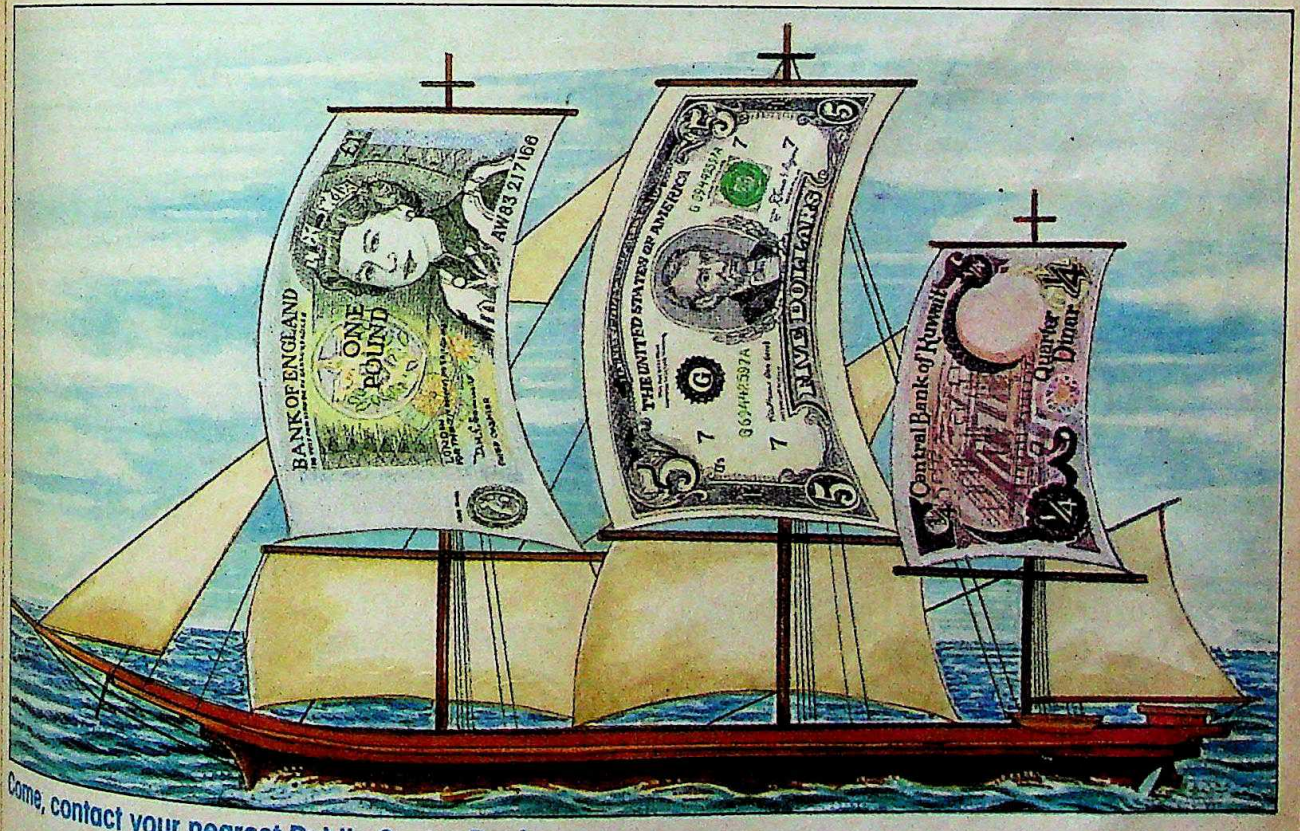

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- Oriental Bank of Commerce
- Punjab National Bank
- Punjab & Sind Bank
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- State Bank of Hyderabad
- State Bank of Indore
- State Bank of Mysore
- State Bank of Patiala
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- State Bank of Travancore
- Syndicate Bank
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- Union Bank of India
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- Vijaya Bank

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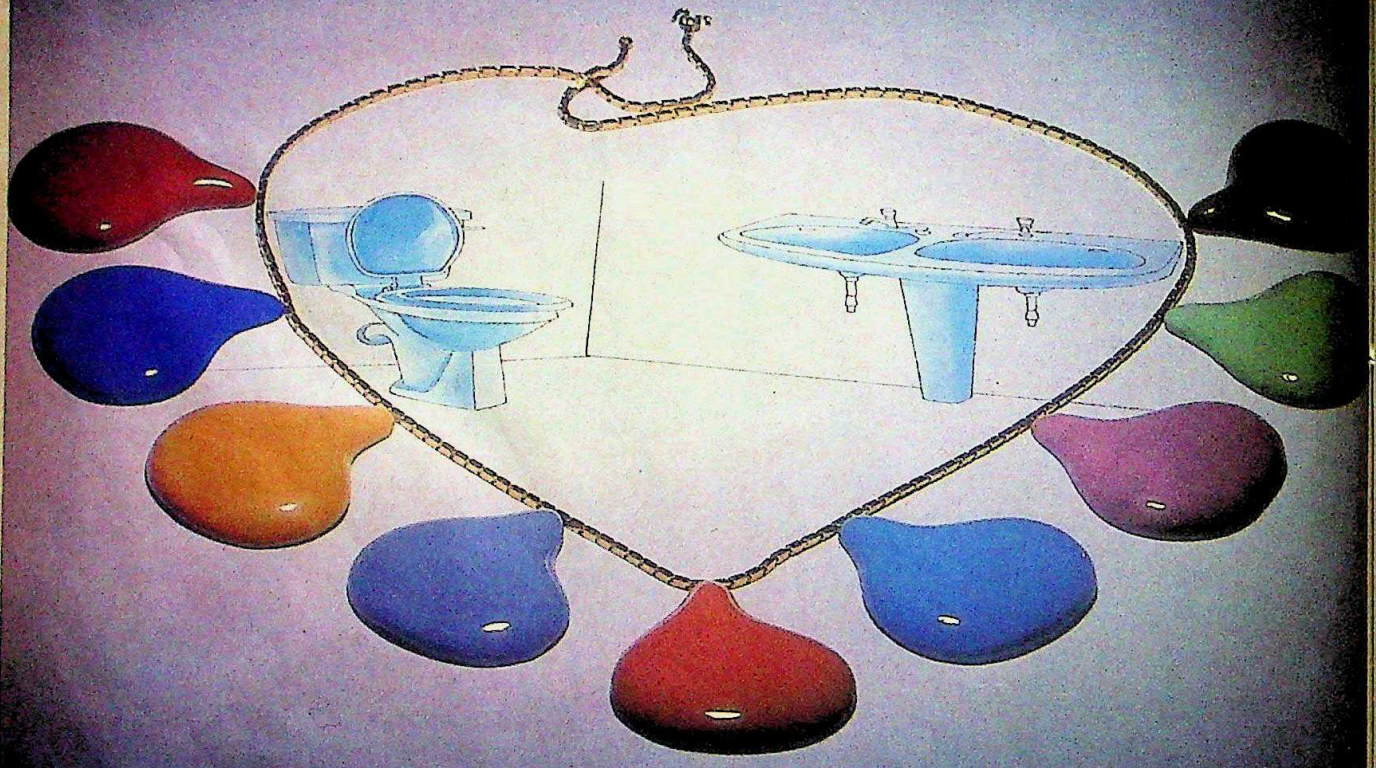
What the well-dressed bathroom is wearing...



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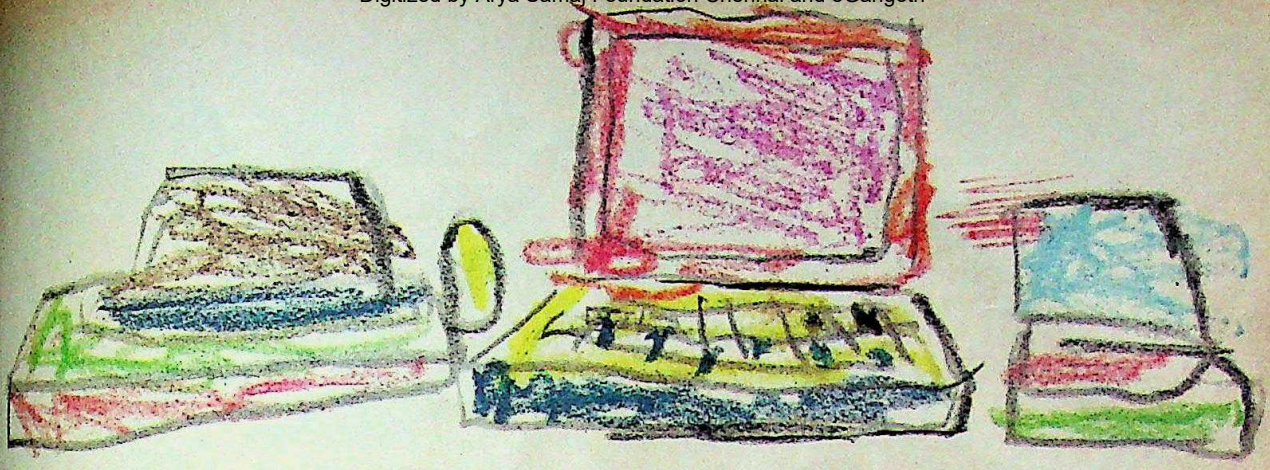

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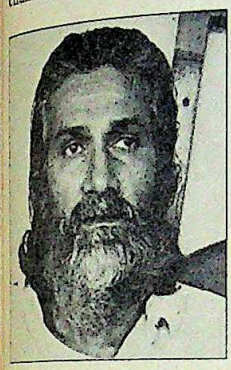
had appeared on the invitation card as a sponsor, announced her resignation saying that she was not informed about the function. The secretary hit back, accusing Gupta of misusing her position for personal gains and neglecting academy affairs. Even Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey came under scathing attack from Singh for forgetting that he was to have inaugurated the function.

But Singh's main targets were the two politicians who dominate the academy—Bandhu Mahto, MP, who is the chairman and Gupta—and who are primarily responsible for



Singh (left) and Gupta: slanging match

the appalling state of affairs. Besides, the organisation's functioning has suffered because its grants depend on the whims of the state Government.

Minister of State for Culture Arjun Vikram Shah attempted to set the record straight, saying: "Singh is an artist and so spoke out his mind. It is however wrong to say that only sycophants are getting patronage." But with all the dirty linen that was being publicly aired in the cultural arena, the academy only lived up to its well-known image of not being a particularly cultured set-up.

Trading Punches

IN an unprecedented move last fortnight, the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly decided to summon Union Industry Minister J. Vengala Rao before its Privileges Committee. The move came after Vengala Rao reportedly made cavalier remarks about an assembly resolution "admonishing" him for suggesting that entrepreneurs deal directly with the Centre for licensing of units.

The industry minister had earlier made this suggestion on discovering that the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation (APIDC) and the Andhra Pradesh Electronics Development Corporation (APEDC) indulged in "favouritism and nepotism" at the behest of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao. This had led to his admonition.

Vengala Rao: angry

However, Vengala Rao—also the state party president—reportedly said the resolution was a ploy to cover up the favours shown to Naren Rajan, NTR's youngest son-in-law, by giving licences for a Rs 3.12-crore telephone project and a Rs 1.14-crore electronic project. NTR denied the allegations and also appointed a House committee to investigate licences issued in the last 15 years.

Reacting to the resolution against him, Vengala Rao said angrily: "The assembly resolution is of no consequence as it was passed on the strength of the Telugu Desam majority in the House. We can also pass a resolution against NTR daily in Parliament where we have a majority."

The state Revenue Minister, Srinivasulu Reddy, however, alleged that Vengala Rao had said that the Centre would not take note of the resolution. He persuaded the Speaker, G. Narayana Rao, to refer the issue to the Committee of Privileges. Whatever the outcome, Vengala Rao is bound to continue his conflict with NTR on some other front.

Explosive Revelation

WHEN a bomb inadvertently went off recently in Wankaner, in Gujarat, it succeeded in drawing attention to the flow of illegal arms into the country from across the border in Pakistan. Manzoor Hussein Pirzada, 41, Congress(I) leader and a former MLA, his 11-year-old son Parvez and three other persons were killed when a bomb exploded in Pirzada's house. The incident has baffled sleuths of the state police's crime branch who were reluctant to comment since Pirzada, apart from being a powerful politician of

Pirzada's house after the blast: incriminating evidence

the area, was also the son of the religious head of the Momin sect of Muslims.

However, subsequent investigations revealed that Pirzada himself was involved in the trade. Said Shivlal, special inspector general of the crime branch: "We don't have any doubt that the bomb was brought to Pirzada by an auto-rickshaw driver— one of those killed—for his approval. It accidentally went off, killing all the five present in the room." Among the articles recovered from his house were some 100 files, most of them containing copies of letters written by Pirzada to state government officials recommending jobs for his supporters. Raids carried out in Sandawadar, Pirzada's native village, also yielded gun-powder and ammunition for 12-bore guns.

A group of Pirzada's supporters called on Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary last fortnight and urged him to get the police cases—under the Anti-Terrorist Act and the Explosives Act which were registered posthumously against Pirzada—withdrawn. They claimed that the police had falsely incriminated him and demanded a CBI inquiry. But Chaudhary told the delegation that he could not interfere in the working of the police.

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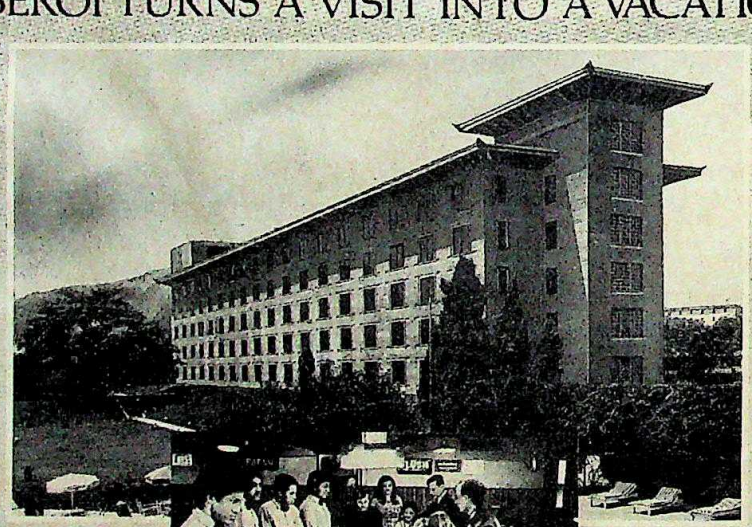

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MADHYA PRADESH

Above the Law

A police officer brazenly defies court orders

WITHOUT the least trace of shame, the Madhya Pradesh police have demonstrated that they are above the law. A court has held 40 hearings and issued 15 bailable and one non-bailable warrant for the arrest of a "missing" officer, wanted in connection with a criminal case. Asked to execute the warrant, the police have told the court that the warrent can't be served as Inspector Abdul Hafeez Sheikh cannot be located.

During the last four years, Sheikh, 36, has been transferred several times, promoted once, and been paid his salary regularly. Though his seniors are trying to shield him, investigations show that the wanted man is performing normal police duties as the station officer at Khachrod police station in Ujjain.

On the night of June 10, 1982, Sheikh, then a sub-inspector at Amlai in Shahdol district, had summoned a pregnant woman, Shyamvati, for questioning in connection with a theft case. The woman aborted at the police station and told doctors that Sheikh had kicked her in the abdomen.

The incident caused an uproar in Amlai and next morning, a crowd marched to the police station to demand Sheikh's arrest. Kamta Prasad Gautam, a local BJP leader and lawyer from Budhar, near Amlai, recalls that he had gone to the police station to lodge an FIR against Sheikh when the sub-inspector opened fire, killing one and injuring three others. The officer stated in a subsequent magisterial inquiry that he had fired in self-defence.

The public agitation that followed forced the authorities to arrest Sheikh. He was booked for culpable homicide not amounting to murder and causing the death of an unborn child by an act amounting to culpable homicide. If found guilty, he could have been jailed for 20 years. But the police withdrew the case from court without even framing the charge-sheet. "We took the view that the officer had fired in self-defence while discharging his official duty. For this, there is protection against legal action under the Constitution," says Director-General of Police (DGP) M. Natrajan. But Gautam says: "The entire police administration is trying to shield a murderer because he is in uniform."

"The entire police administration is trying to shield a murderer simply because he is in uniform."
KAMTA PRASAD GAUTAM
BJP leader

"The officer fired in self-defence while on duty. For this, there is protection against legal action."
M. NATRAJAN
director general of police

The case records, however, reflect the police's protective attitude. Although Sheikh was arrested, he was kept in hospital and not produced before the magistrate. The chief judicial magistrate of Shahdol had noted at that time: "Although the charges against the accused are very serious, the investigating officer has acted in an arbitrary and illegal manner." The court also issued a show cause notice to the investigating officer.

After the police withdrew the case, Gautam, alleging that the shots had been aimed at him, filed a private criminal complaint against Sheikh, accusing him of attempt to murder and criminal intimidation. To prosecute Sheikh, he sought government permission which is mandatory if the public servant is accused of a crime committed in the discharge of his official duty. The state's home secretary, to whom the application was sent, is yet to react to the application. The Budhar court, though, took the view that the alleged offences were not committed in the course of duty, and went ahead with the case. Said the First Class Judicial Magistrate of Budhar, Jaswant Singh Verma: "There are conflicting views about government sanction, but I feel that a judicial magistrate is empowered to take cognizance of an offence after informing the Government."

But in Sheikh's continued absence, nothing moved. In fact Verma, 31, recently wrote to the state's home secretary on how the department was protecting its officer and sought the Government's help to compel the the accused to appear. Sheikh, applied for anticipatory bail in the Shahdol district court. Though his application was rejected he was neither arrested nor did he appear in the Budhar court on the scheduled date of hearing, July 7.

Police officials in Bhopal have no explanation as to why none of the 16 warrants could be executed, though they concede that "at some level someone must have tried to protect the officer". Says Natrajan: "We are looking into why the warrant could not be served." Last month he also ordered the inspector to present himself in court. But Sheikh did not obey even his orders. Inquiries reveal that the DGP's office too has been guilty of throwing out 11 warrants.

Senior officials are also guilty of having disrupted the process of justice. After his transfer from Shahdol, Sheikh served in Sehore, Bhopal and Rajgarh districts and in each case the warrants were sent to the superintendents of police. But not one of them could apparently trace a subordinate.

The case has evoked a sharp response from lawyers and civil liberty activists. Said Verma: "Records of the case show that the accused is trying to evade arrest and the police is not executing the warrant." People's Union for Civil Liberty activist Hariar Chaturvedi says: "Policemen think that they can get away with anything. The judiciary should make this a test-case." Rarely has police insolence been exposed in such a striking way.

—N.K. SINGH in Shahdol and Budhar

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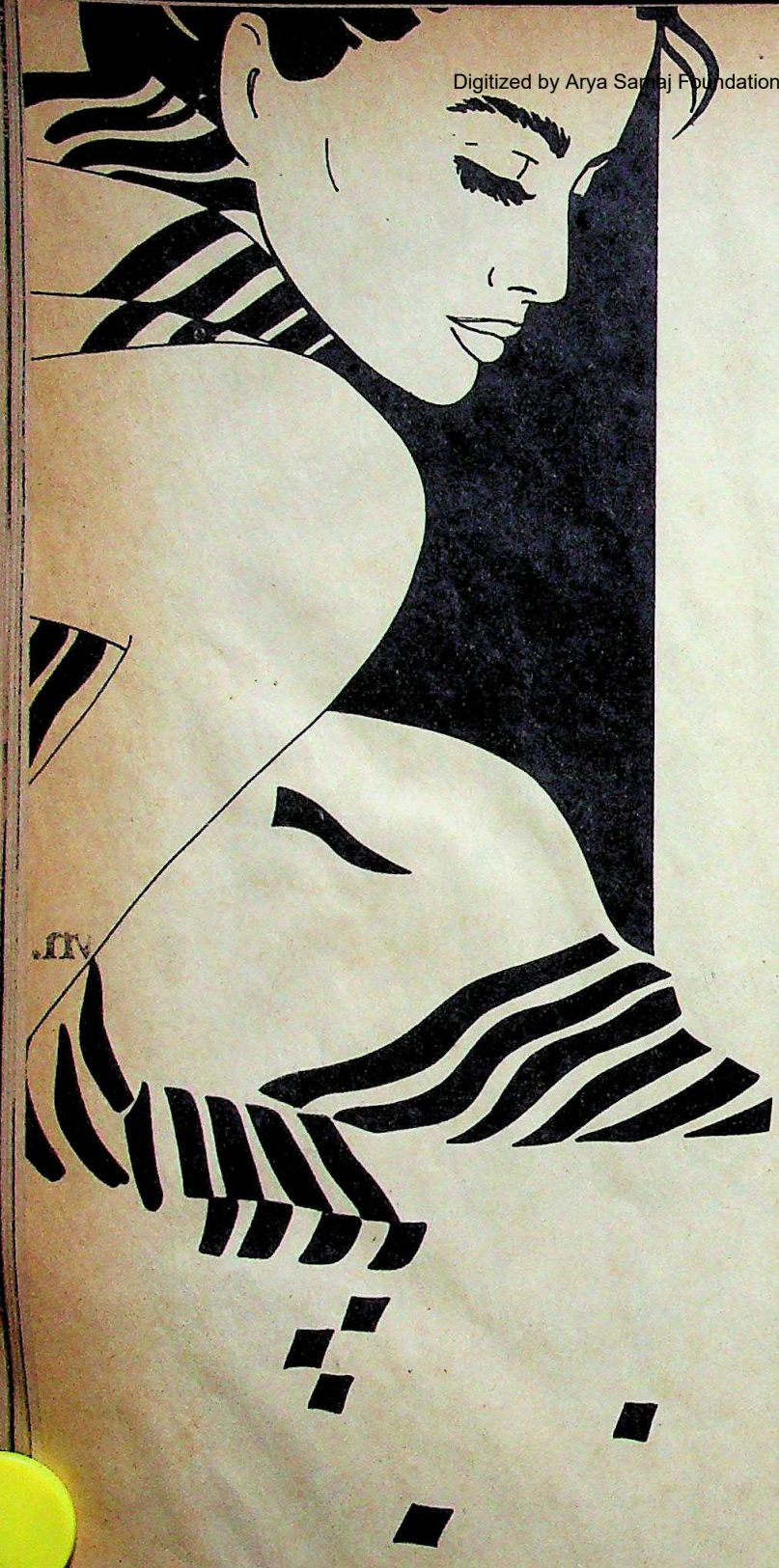

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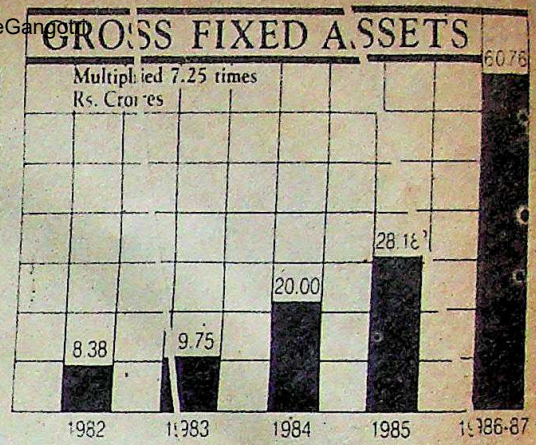
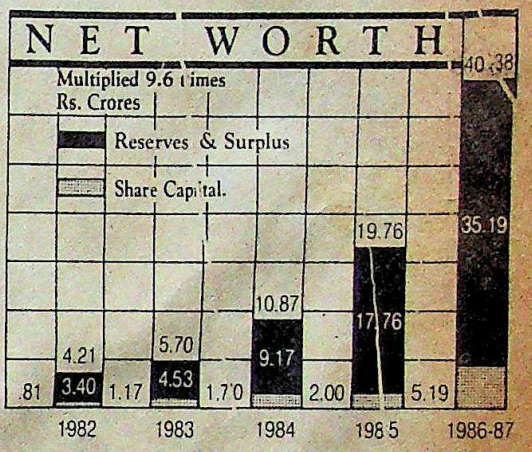
ISSUE OPENS FOR
NON-RESIDENT INDIANS:
SEPTEMBER 5, 1987
INDIAN PUBLIC:
SEPTEMBER 7, 1987

HIGHLIGHTS

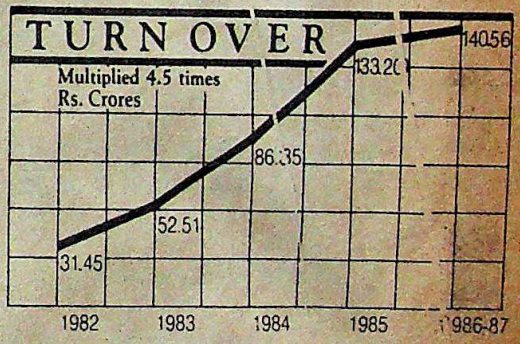
- Assured Dividend of 25% on Equity Shares for the year 1987-88.
- Accumulated Free Reserves of the Company amounted to Rs.32.85 crores as on 31st March, 1987 (after adjustment for Bonus Issue).
- Earning of Rs.21.29 per share of Rs.10 each for the year 1986-87 (after adjustment for Bonus Shares).
- Gross Block increased from Rs.8.38 crores at the end of 1982 to Rs.60.76 crores as on 31st March, 1987.
- Rs.85 out of a Debenture of Rs.185 will be converted into one Equity Share of Rs.10 at a premium of Rs.75 per share at the close of business on 31st March, 1988.
- Facility to small investors for consolidation and sale of their odd lot shareholdings.
- Unsuccessful applicants are offered the option to transfer their Equity Share application money to Debenture application money.
- Major expansion-cum-modernisation project under implementation.
- Listing of Equity Shares and Convertible Debentures on Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras Stock Exchanges.





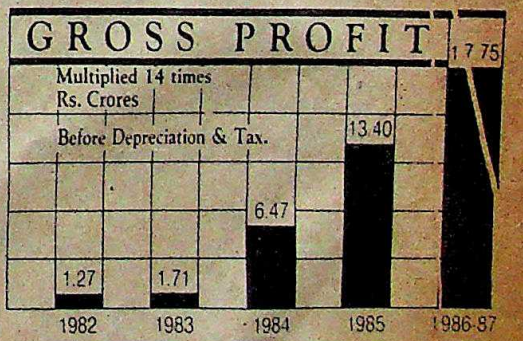
As on 31.3.87	Vareli Textile Industries Ltd.	Garden Silk Mills Ltd.
Net Worth	Rs. 18.19 cr.	Rs. 40.38 cr.
Book value	Rs. 25.23	Rs. 53.55*
Profit after tax	Rs. 5.64 cr.	Rs. 16.05 cr.
Earning per share	Rs. 7.82	Rs. 21.29*
Market price as on 13th July 1987**	Rs. 102.00	!
Price earning ratio	13.04	!

* After adjustment for Bonus Issue.
** As quoted on Bombay Stock Exchange



Managers to the Issue
Merchant Banking Divisions of:

The Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India Ltd.
Industrial Finance Corporation of India Ltd.
Bank of Baroda
Allahabad Bank
Bank of India
Can Bank Financial Services Ltd.
V.B. Desai Financial Services Ltd.



Garden®

THE ISSUE OF OUR TIMES

Garden Silk Mills Ltd. Regd. Off.: Garden House, Ramnagar Tonk, Sura 305003

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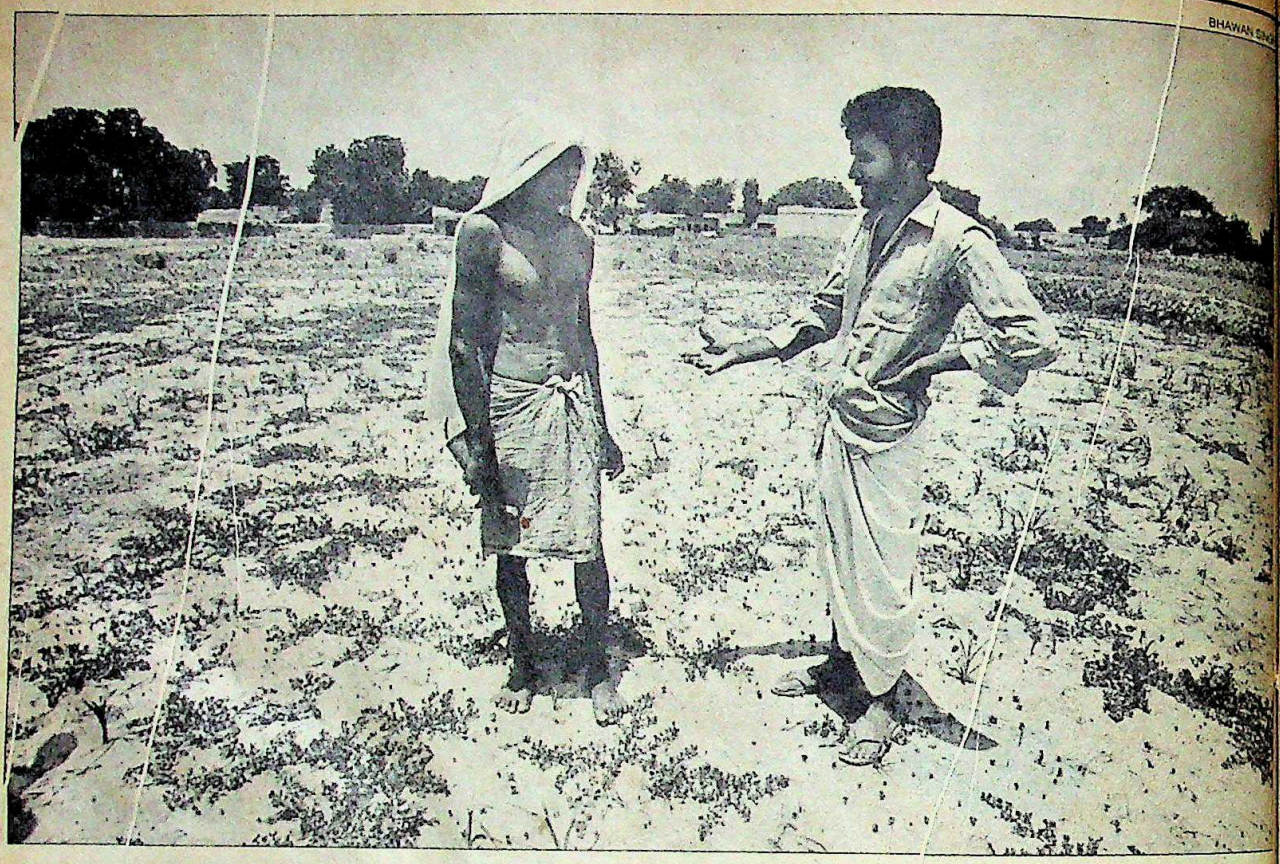


MONSOONS

Heading for Calamity

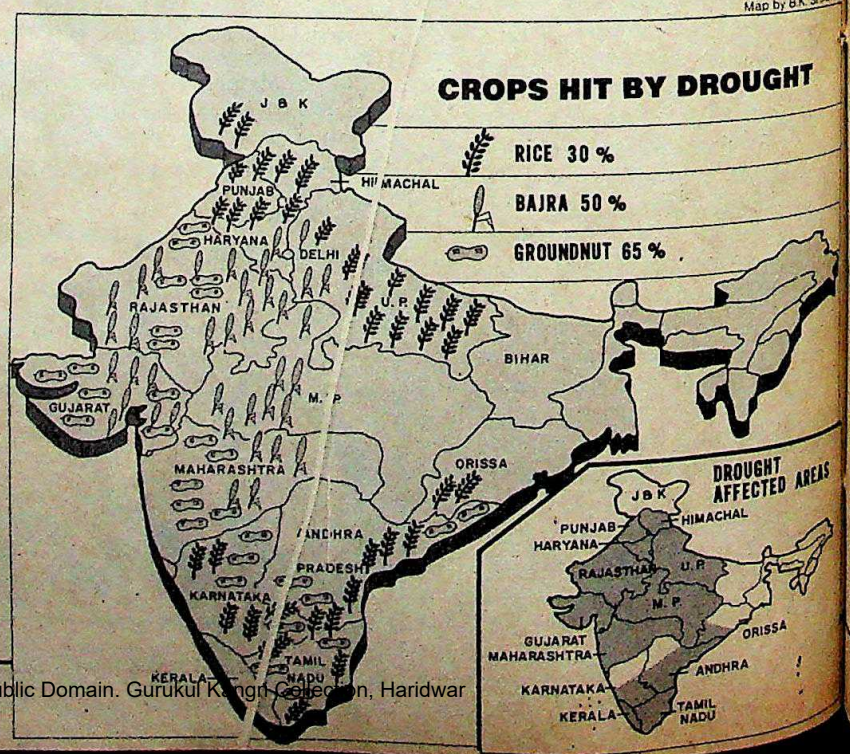
The century's worst rainfall means withered crops and parched lips

WITH the monsoon failing in over two-thirds of the country, India faces a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. As the great dry progressed, crops withered, drinking water sources dried up and cattle starved. Massive drought relief measures have been taken up. More resilient crops are being planted in dry areas, power to industry is being diverted to agriculture, and tankers are heading towards the villages to provide drinking water to parched lips. But if the rains continue to fail, the misery will only worsen. A report:

YOGENDRA Makwana stepped into his study last week, grumbling to himself. While bathing that morning, the water had suddenly stopped. The Union minister of state for agriculture scarcely glanced at the giant poster of a palm-fringed beach on the wall. And as he picked up a sheaf of charts on his desk, his countenance turned grimmer.

"It's the worst monsoon of the

Map by B.K. SHARMA



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century," said Makwana, peering at a coloured map of India. "Rainfall has been either deficient or scanty in two-thirds of the country." Pushing his files aside, he added simply: "We are in deep trouble." Then quickly, as if to reassure himself: "But we will tide over the crisis."

Makwana, his ministry and the country are deeper in trouble than he is willing to admit. And the statistics are as grim as the bare swathes of land stretching endlessly across the country. So devastating has been the progress of India's great dry that as many as 21 states will need Central assistance for drought relief, twice the number last year. Kharif crops have been seriously hit. Rice production could drop by 20 to 30 per cent, and groundnut by an alarming 65 per cent. The bajra crop and pulses too are faring badly.

WITH a buffer stock of 23.5 million tonnes of grain—a sixth of the total annual production—the country will certainly be able to "tide over" the food crisis till the next sowing season. But four states—Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra—face a severe drinking water shortage. And most states, barring the eastern ones, face a fodder shortage too. In many Gujarat villages, for instance, farmers just put a red tilak on their bulls' foreheads and set them free to fend for themselves.

There may not be a repetition of the Bihar famine of 1966, as the economy is now more resilient and the governments are better equipped to handle a crisis. But, in the coming weeks, there will be long fodder and water trains moving from one state to the next, as the basics of life become scarce in steadily growing pockets of parched earth. And millions will seek out sustenance on mammoth drought relief works.

Ironically, in the east, it was not a lack of rain that was causing havoc but too much of it. By last week, the death toll due to flash floods in West Bengal, Bihar and Assam had risen to 103. Some three million people were hit, and vast areas of standing crops destroyed. Air force helicopters had to be used to airdrop food to the stranded people of Kathiar and Purnea districts of Bihar.

But it was the devastating drought that caused the greater concern. As the state relief commissioners started sending SOS messages to New Delhi, a cabinet subcommittee on drought relief, headed by the prime minister, was formed. The government also set up special task forces. One was a crisis management group which meets daily to "take relief

RELIEF AID

Huge Expense

DROUGHTS are beginning to be the rule rather than the exception. Five states— Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—are suffering their third consecutive drought this year. Eight others are experiencing drought for the second year in a row. And eight more states have been added to the drought-hit list this year.

That makes a total of 21 drought-hit states, out of the 25 states in the country (the remaining four, as it happens, are instead reeling under flash floods).

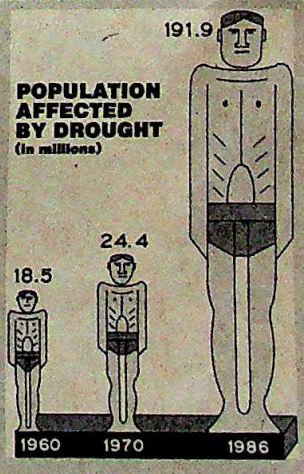
According to the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, the number of people affected by drought has gone up from 18.5 million in 1960 to an alarming 191 million last year, or a fourth of the population. At least 50 normally fertile districts have joined the growing drought-hit list in the last seven years.

Inevitably, as the problem has grown, the expenses on drought relief have been mounting rapidly. The average annual Central assistance for drought relief programmes has grown from Rs 100 crore per annum in the fifth plan to Rs 272 crore in the sixth plan, and is now nearing Rs 1,000 crore. Expenditure, in the past two years, has almost equalled that of the five years of the sixth plan (1980-85).

But the states want much more than that and, increasingly, their annual drought relief demands exceed their annual plan outlays! Andhra Pradesh, for instance, wanted Rs 1,226 crore as drought relief last year, as against a total plan outlay of Rs 1,000 crore. Rajasthan wanted Rs 865 crore to tackle the drought, while the annual plan was only Rs 500 crore. The Centre, of course, does not meet these demands in full. The total drought relief, asked for by all the states last year, amounted to a mammoth Rs 4,650 crore. The Centre, however, only released Rs 609 crore.

Meanwhile, floods have been playing havoc too. The area affected by floods went up from 23 million hectares in 1970 to 59 million hectares by 1984. States like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Gujarat, which earlier never suffered from floods, have now joined the list. And oddly enough, the expenditure on flood relief during the sixth plan (Rs 1,190 crore) was much greater than the expenditure on the planned flood control works (Rs 767 crore). Astoundingly, 80 per cent of the world's victims who are affected by natural disasters like droughts and floods are Indians.

The stunning increase in expenses towards drought relief has already shaken the Government. The Union Agriculture Ministry, apart from sending an expert teams to assess the situation in the states, now also insists that at least half the expenses go into building long-term assets. Building bunds and minor irrigation tanks are now insisted upon. Meanwhile, studies are being done to see what is the best cropping pattern for dryland farming. More resilient varieties of cereal are being tested too.



But clearly, drought is such a rapidly growing problem only because of the progressive destruction of the environment, like deforestation, over-exploitation of both groundwater and grazing lands. Without these problems being addressed, the human suffering as well as the annual bill for tackling the effects of the problem will continue to grow.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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action on a war footing". Already the Finance Ministry has released Rs 200 crore towards drought relief works, and it estimates that expenses might touch Rs 1,300 crore by the year-end (*see box*).

Meanwhile, reports from the states spoke of extensive damage. In Uttar Pradesh—where 50 of 57 districts were hit—sowing was not done in almost half the area under cultivation. An estimated 40 per cent of paddy seedlings were still in their nurseries. A quarter of the irrigation tubewells had dried up. The state Agricultural Department estimates that rice production will drop from the normal 11.2 million tonnes to 5 million tonnes this year. And 19 districts are reeling under a severe drinking water shortage. Says Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh: "We have never had such a bad dry spell."

In Gujarat, the situation was even more pathetic. Facing its third consecutive drought, the state was beginning to look like its neighbour, Rajasthan. In Saurashtra, the state's groundnut bowl, hardly a quarter of the area was sown and groundnut production is expected to fall sharply from the normal 13.3 lakh tonnes to a shocking three lakh tonnes. Hardly any cotton, the state's other major crop, could be grown. Drinking water is scarce and 1,711 villages are now being supplied by tankers and bullock carts. As many as 4.47 lakh cattle had to be fed in emergency camps. Efforts to induce rain by artificial cloud seeding met with little success.

OTHER states had equally grim tales to narrate. In Rajasthan, which is suffering its fourth consecutive drought, 90 per cent of the crops have been wiped out. In Maharashtra, groundnut and bajra crops have been hit badly. West Madhya Pradesh is seriously affected too. Even states like Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, which initially reported good rainfall, started moving onto the drought-hit list. As crops began to wither, Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde remarked: "I shudder to think of the consequences."

Several states have already taken contingency measures. In Gujarat, groundnut farmers are now growing the tougher sunflower. In Uttar Pradesh, farmers have been advised to go in for greengram, maize, cowpea and sorghum. In the unirrigated tracts of Haryana and Punjab, oilseeds like mustard are being planted.

Power meant for industry is now being diverted to the six million power-driven agricultural pumpsets across the country. In Uttar Pradesh, the Government has imposed power cuts on the cement, arc furnace and fertiliser industries, diverting electricity to rural feeder units. Diesel is also being supplied on a priority basis to feed the five million diesel-

THE FARMER

A Desperate Struggle

ON the first Sunday of August, a desperate Rishi Pal Singh, along with other farmers, distributed *kheer*, not only to the poor, but also to the monkeys and dogs of the village. But the rain gods were not flattered. The week, like the month before it, went without rain. It made Singh lose all hopes of salvaging his bajra and jowar crop sown on three little plots at the edge of village Nangla Chamru, on the border of Ghaziabad and Bulandshahr districts in Uttar Pradesh.

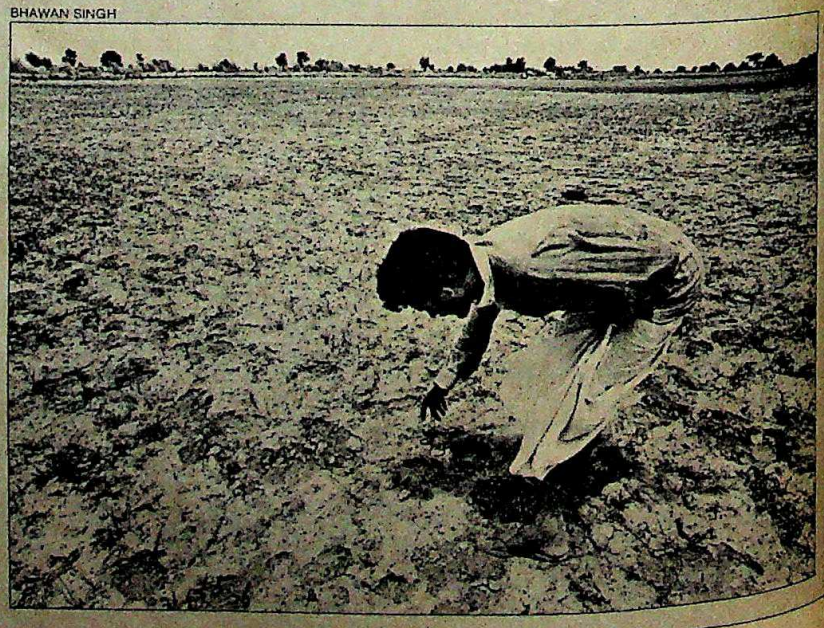
The despondent, 21-year-old wiry farmer, who has been waiting for the monsoons to break for the last one-and-a-half-month, is now trying to come to grips with the fear that "this year, the cattle will die and we will starve". His plots, which add up to just over an acre, are unirrigated though they are located in the heart of the Doab, the fertile land midway between the Ganga and the Jamuna. There are no tubewells as no electricity has been allocated to the village for the purpose, and the residents are yet to see the benefits of the canal that is supposed to bring them irrigation.

And last fortnight, as the normally rain-soaked lunar month of *Sawan* came to a parched end, Singh's labour had become even more pitiable, though he still continued to toil for four to five hours every day, weeding and hoeing his plots. Even if it did rain now, it would be too late for the kharif crop. The ground has a dry, white look, and is patchy where the seeds have not sprouted. The few stalks that have managed to withstand the fury of a blinding sun have a decidedly wasted look. They are barely a couple of feet high as against the head-height they achieve normally at this time of the year.

The crop on the land that Singh has rented from the village Pradhan, Mahendra Singh Bhatia, is in an even worse shape. It wears a dull brown, scorched look. There will be nothing to harvest and Singh's labour and inputs will be a complete write-off. The loss for the pradhan will not be so much, for the labour is entirely Singh's and only the inputs and the produce are shared by the two.

For a marginal farmer like Singh,

BHAWAN SINGH



Singh on his land: ruined

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PRASHANT PANJIAR

Relief work: facing the crisis

s not just a set-back. Even in normal es, there is not enough to sell. The ent is just enough to feed the large ng round the half a dozen head of cattle. e second of eight brothers, Singh g with an unmarried sister and ers, lives with his ageing father in a e mud and brick house near the e of the village. His wife and that of elder brother bring the number of s to a round dozen, without ding his brother's three-month-old

There is air of quiet despondency e house even as the normal ge continue. In the large courtyard, 's sister-in-law and sister sit pro- ng flour through a machine which s long strands of vermicelli, that t on a wire across the yard, like th ragged brown washing. In a room on one side of the yard, a e of kids play together.

he family knows it is in trouble. e few extra sources of income. milk from the two cows, Singh's uses the bullock cart to transport and other goods. In winter, the generally cuts nearby trees to fodder. Now, since that will have to their own animals, even this e of income will dry up. Singh's brother makes Rs 15 a day as a er on a privately-run tempo Secunderabad and Dadri. It is a but not sufficient to feed all the mouths.

year, not only is the barn empty, there are debts to be paid. Just a fortnight ago, when the lone monsoon shower of the season brought a surge of hope, Singh had sprinkled 100 kg of fertiliser. However, in the absence of water "it is poison", feels Singh. Even if he could harvest a sack or two of grain, it would be useless. The possibility of the fertiliser being absorbed in dangerous quantities cannot be ruled out.

In all, he estimates, he has spent Rs 2,000 on this crop, roughly half of which came through a bank loan. By the year-end, the loans will have multiplied. On Singh's mind is the desire to buy a pump with a bank loan. Though he acknowledges the possibility of being cheated in securing the loan he is determined to go ahead. The ground is so dry, he says, that even the rabi will come a cropper unless it is irrigated. And at this rate, the bullocks or even the buffalo might have to be sold, if only to save them from starvation.

Normally, if pests or disease destroy one farmer's crop, neighbours rally around to help see the family through that season. But this year, all the farmers are in the same boat. In village after village, the story is identical: the crop is a complete write-off and there is no sign of relief. In Bulandshahr district, one of the seven Uttar Pradesh districts that has been declared drought-hit, a government representative is yet to make a formal appearance. All that the farmers have left now is faith in fate.

—DAVID DEVADAS

run pumpsets. These steps will, at least, help tap groundwater effectively.

But as the days wore on, the Meteorology Department continued with its depressing forecasts—the latest is there may be no late revival of the monsoon. For the past fortnight, two anti-cyclone cells, or areas of high pressure, have developed over north-west India and the Indian Ocean, preventing the monsoon from moving across the country. Says meterologist P.K. Das of the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi: "I have never seen anything like this for 30 years. It's an extremely peculiar and worrying phenomenon."

If there are no further rains, even the coming winter rabi crop could get affected. Soil moisture levels have already reached an all-time low in many states. And initial reports by the Water Resources Ministry, in its annual review of water levels in reservoirs, are depressing. Half the 47 major irrigation dams have water levels well below normal: in some, like Pong and Bhakra, as much as two metres below normal. Water Resources Secretary Naresh Chandra says: "The situation is pretty bad, but it could improve if we have a couple of good rains."

In a bid to conserve water, states have been advised to release it to farmers only once a month instead of every fortnight. Chemicals like setyl alcohol are being sprinkled in irrigation dams to reduce surface evaporation. And in Gujarat, water for farming is being discouraged in order to ensure sufficient drinking water.

What is crucial now is how successfully will drought relief measures alleviate rural miseries. Indeed, relief operations will become the single most important activity for virtually every state government. Gujarat, for instance, already has 1.7 million people on drought relief works (like building roads, storage tanks or school buildings, in return for some money and food). Countrywide, the number of people dependent on drought relief could reach a staggering 20 crore.

The situation could still improve if the rains come pouring down next month. And in at least some of the affected areas, shorter maturing crops could be grown. The soil moisture level would also ensure a more resilient crop during the coming rabi season. But the Indian Meteorological Organisation is far from hopeful. And for once, everyone is hoping that the weatherman is wrong.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with DILIP AWASTHI and UDAY MAHURKAR

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BACKACHES

A Spreading Malady

Striking the young and afflicting people from all walks of life

THEY are glistening white, have pulpy nuclei, are slightly larger than rupee coins and weigh no more than a toffee each. Yet inter-vertebral discs, as they are called, are the best shock absorbers the world has ever known. Carrying an average man's weight is routine stuff. They can even withstand pressures equivalent to the weight of two refrigerators.

But an increasing number of Indians are realising that they can be frail too. No one really knows whose discs are going to wear thin and when. But when they begin to lose their springiness or simply give way, especially in the lower back region, the agonising aches begin.

For television actor Mohan Bhandari—of *Khandaan* fame—it began when he was doing yoga one morning. All he heard was a sudden 'click' and the next moment a spasm of pain shot through his back. The pain subsided, but struck four weeks later when he was sleeping. He woke up and found he couldn't move. In great pain and perspiring profusely, he turned sideways, fell out of bed, crawled into a taxi and headed to a hospital. There for the first time he heard the words "lumbar discs". It wasn't going to be the last time either.

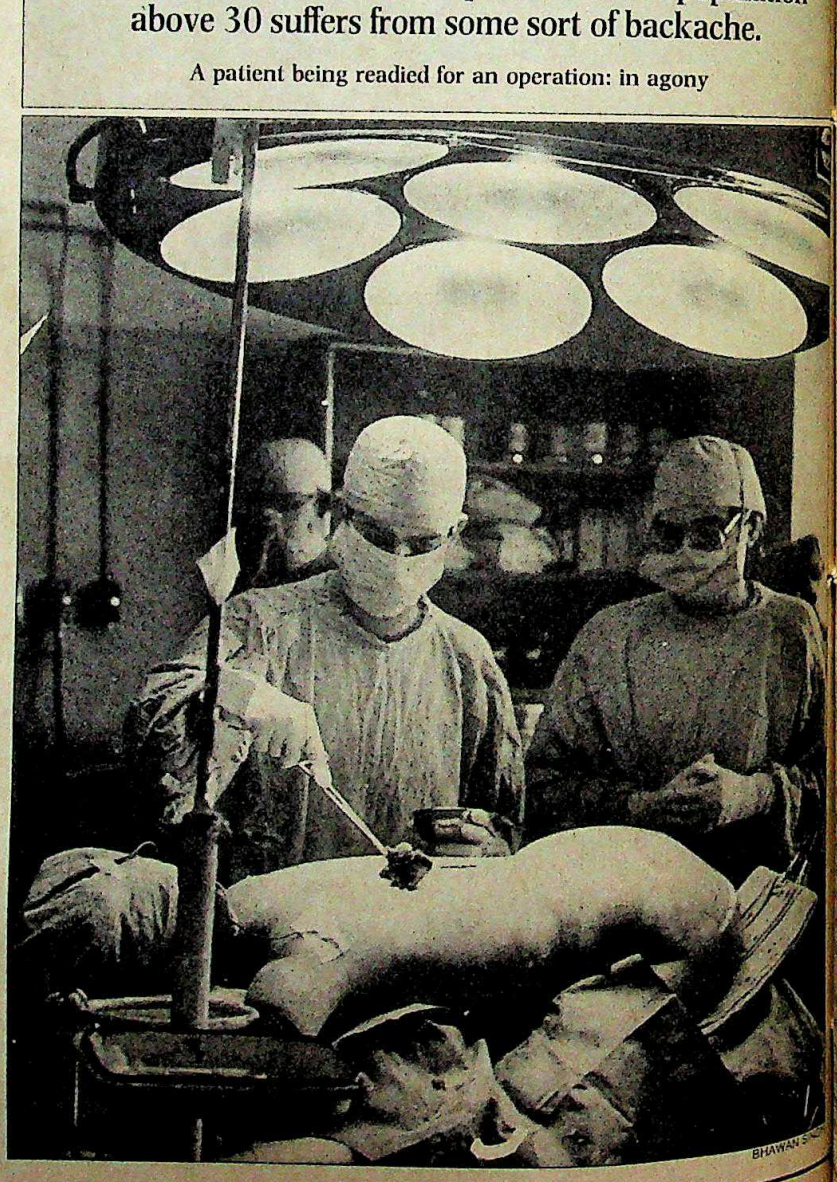
Like Bhandari, more and more people are becoming aware of the aches and pains their lumbar-spinal region can produce. Orthopaedists, usually busy setting fractured limbs or deformities, suddenly find patients with low backache complaints occupying most of their time. At the crowded orthopaedic outpatient wing in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, Professor P.K. Dave says: "Every second patient we see has a backache, and we treat more than 40 patients a day."

Doctors across the country report the same trend. In Bombay's Sion Hospital, which caters to people in the city's industrial belt, backache cases were a rarity just 10 years ago. Today, every fifth patient at the orthopaedic ward has a bad back. The number of orthopaedists in the country too has grown, from barely 600 in 1970 to over 6,000 now, and many of them concentrate exclusively on backache treatment. Bombay-based orthopaedist V.T. Ingalhalikar has even opened an exclusive "back clinic" to educate people on how to prevent backache.

With medical records in the country notoriously inadequate, there are no national figures of the number of people actually suffering from serious backache. The Spine Society of India, which has most of the top orthopaedists as members, estimates that at any given time 10 to 15 per cent of the population above 30 suffers from some sort of backache. That means that currently an estimated 14 million people experience periodic backache, ranging from mild attacks to an excruciating month's lay-off in bed. As Delhi orthopaedist J.S. Arora wryly comments: "It's becoming the

At any given time 10 to 15 per cent of the population above 30 suffers from some sort of backache.

A patient being readied for an operation: in agony



BHAWAN S

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...mber one ache."

Doctors think the dramatic increase in the number of ...ients coming for treatment is a result of a rising "back ...sciousness", and also simply because more people have ...kache than before. There is a definite shift too in the kind of ...ients coming for treatment. "Now I'm getting mothers and ...r daughters as well," says Professor Dave. Earlier, it was ...ple usually above 50 who were afflicted, but the age group ...w varies from 30 to 45, and some are even below 30. And ...men constitute half the patients.

There is increasing evidence too that backaches are not just a ...dy of the affluent. As Professor T.K. Shanmughasundaram, ...paedic chief at the Madras Medical College, says: "Back-...hes have become the great leveller." Factory workers, auto-...kshaw drivers, clerks, salesmen and typists form an equally ...ge chunk coming for treatment. The Bombay-based Central ...ur Institute, for instance, estimates that around 12 to 15 per ...t of industrial workers suffer from backache. And doctors are ...ting a large number of what they call the "drivers syndrome". ...rticularly vulnerable are auto-rickshaw, taxi and lorry ...ers, who put in long hours on the road.

The backache hit list has people from literally all over. ...rnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, opposition lead-...r Atal Behari Vajpayee and Madhu Dandavate suffer from bad ...ks. Film stars Dharmendra, Raj Babbar and a host of others ...e had back problems. Even cricketers Dilip Vengsarkar, ...tan Sharma and Mohammed Azharuddin have missed Test ...tches because of backaches. Industrialists, air hostesses, ...hitects, engineers, police officers, armed forces personnel ...d ironically enough, surgeons (especially orthopaedic) are ...t immune to its clutches.

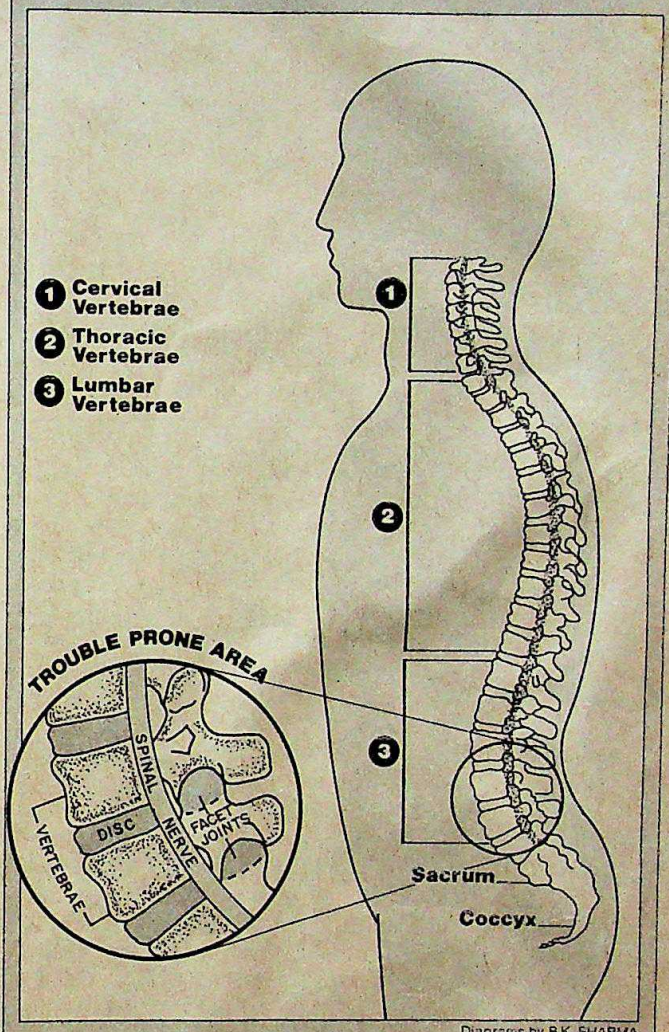
MOST backaches last for three to four days and heal spontaneously. But they tend to recur, striking at odd moments and can even incapacitate a person for two ...nths. Even a minor attack can be debilitating. For those few ...e the victims' lives tend to revolve on their lower backs. Every ...vement is agonising, lifting a glass of water is an achievement ...d going to the toilet a major expedition. As Assam business-...n Ramesh Jain, who suffers from a chronic backache, says: ...e pain is so intense that you feel like killing yourself."

...r each victim, the pain and its incapacitating effects are ...rgettable experiences. Hegde remembers that the trouble ...e when his speeding car hit a road hump in Delhi two years ...o. The same evening, while attending a political rally in Patna, ...e felt agonising pains shooting through his lower back. He ...shed to his hotel, where doctors put him on a bed without a ...ces for 24 hours. Delhi, doctors diagnosed the problem as a ...pted disc". He spent two weeks in bed to rest his back.

The pain persisted and Hegde flew to Bangalore, where for six ...ks he was laid up in bed. Says Hegde: "It wasn't a generalised ...e, like a headache. It was a sharp, pointed ache in the lower ...k and every movement was a strain. You feel utterly ...pless." Fortunately he recovered, but Hegde has done away ...h easy chairs and now sits on a simple straight one that puts ...e strain on his back. He also does some back-bending exercises ...d says jovially: "I don't bend backwards politically."

...t for others like R. Mehta, 37, a Ghaziabad salesman, ...backaches could have serious effects. The pains began one day ...n Mehta lifted his daughter. It became so intense that he ...ldn't sleep for two nights. Even coughing was painful. ...ctors couldn't diagnose the cause and the attacks kept ...curring with painful frequency. He lost as much as six months ...work. Finally doctors told him to stop riding his scooter, which

The Spinal Column



Diagrams by B.K. SHARMA

SHAPED like a double S, the spinal column, consisting of 33-vertebrae snaking through the middle of the body, is one of nature's marvels. It serves several crucial functions. It is the body's principal scaffolding and acts as an anchor for the bones and muscles of the limbs, contributing to all major body movements. It also provides a protective, and mobile, conduit for the vital spinal chord.

But, in reality, there are only two parts of the spinal column that are in constant motion, and these are most vulnerable to damage: the seven cervical vertebrae in the neck, that allow its rotational movements, and the five lumbar vertebrae in the lower back, which enable the body to swivel in any direction and flex backwards and forwards. The knob-shaped joints of these vertebrae hold them loosely in place, the discs interspacing them provide a shock absorbing capacity and the powerful muscles that engulf the spinal column ensure smooth action. In fact, people are an inch taller in the morning because during the day the spinal column compresses to take the strain of standing up. The cause of most low backaches is the defects that develop in the lumbar vertebrae. The fourth and fifth lumbar vertebrae are trouble prone.

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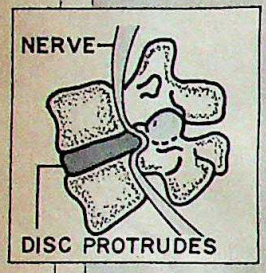
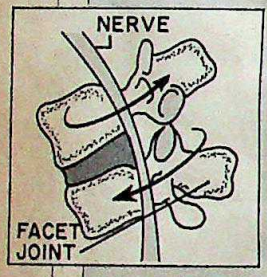
Why the Aches

Diagnosing the cause of backaches is difficult. But orthopaedists are able to pinpoint several major factors:

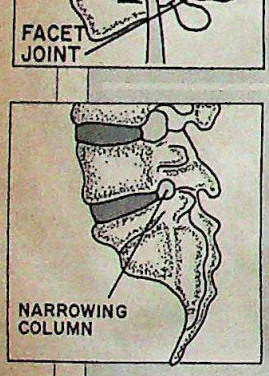
MUSCULAR SPRAIN: The powerful muscles supporting the back go into a spasm and become extremely painful. A majority of patients suffer from this malady and, although relief comes within a week, it tends to recur.



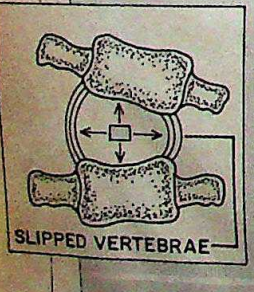
SLIPPED DISC: Actually, this is a misnomer. Under constant pressure, the disc doesn't slip, it herniates or protrudes. Sticking out like a tube in a worn out tyre, it tends to press on the translucent spinal chord and the nerve roots. This leads to excruciating pain and immobilises the victim for weeks. Sometimes, it causes a pain in the leg, commonly called sciatica.



FACET JOINT SYNDROME: The joints joining the vertebral column wear out and develop what is called "a car door rattle". The worn out bones tend to create imbalances and even grow new bones, called osteophytes. Sometimes they slightly dislocate, exerting pressure on the spinal column. All this can lead to dull, nagging aches in the lower back.

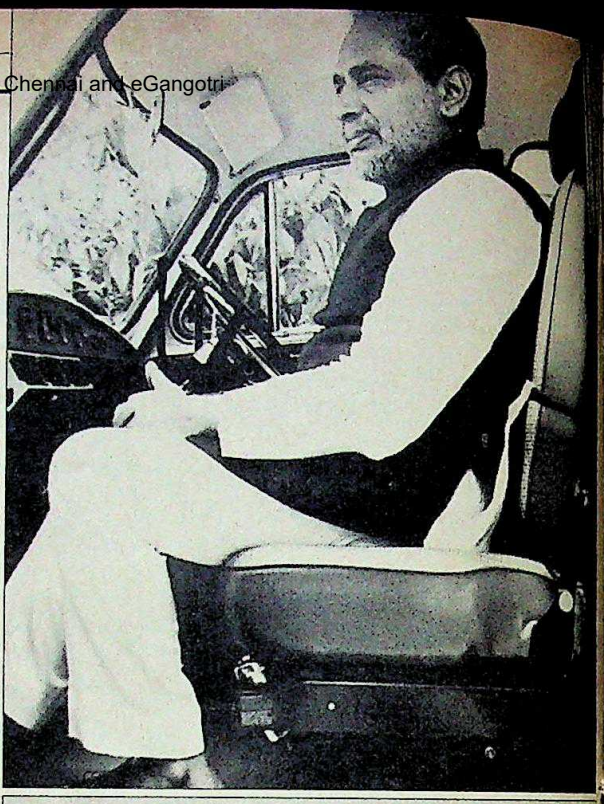


SPINAL STENOSIS: A defect that is caused either genetically or because of aging, in which the vertebral pipeline begins to narrow, exerting pressure on the spinal chord and nerve roots. Walking long distances becomes difficult. Relief comes when the person bends forward or rests. An operation to relieve the compression on the spine may be necessary.



SPONDYLOLISTHESIS: A defect in one of the vertebrae causing it to slip forward. Can be discerned by a dimple formation in the middle back and causes sciatic pain too. Another syndrome called *ankylosing spondylitis* is a degenerative change in the spinal column leading to its stiffening. It usually affects men between 20 and 40 years of age and causes a "ramrod back".

OSTEO ARTHRITIS: A general degeneration of the bone structure, discs and joints. It is known to be the cause of most backaches. But while it's easy to diagnose it's difficult to treat. Cancerous tumours and tuberculosis are also known to either put pressure on the spinal column or eat into the bone structure, resulting in bad backs that need early diagnosis.



Karnataka Chief Minister, Ramakrishna Hegde's backaches began after his speeding car hit a road hump. He was in bed for more than two months before the pain eased. Hegde now sits on chairs that put less strain on his back.

meant giving up his sales job. He now works as an accounts officer in a factory—but his backache hasn't gone.

Women too are extremely susceptible to backaches, especially during pregnancy, when the lumbar vertebrae loosen out to accommodate the foetus. But most problems tend to show up much later in life. For Suhas Kannamwar, 50, a Bombay housewife, her aches began while shopping one day. "It was so bad I couldn't even stand," she remembers. For eight days she couldn't move out of bed. "I had to be carried to the toilet," she recalls. After two weeks the pain eased, but she is still scared. She now exercises regularly and avoids too much cooking.

So widespread is the problem that Bombay-based orthopaedic surgeon K.V. Chaubal says: "There are basically three kinds of people. Those who have had backaches, those who have backaches and those who will have backaches." In fact, backaches have afflicted man ever since he started walking upright, instead of on all fours. Since then the strain on his spinal column—the 33-vertebrae stacked like bricks, the discs that interspace them and the powerful muscles that hold them together and ensure smooth action—has been a constant source of problems (*see box*). The Hatha Yoga even evolved specific *asanas* to correct postural defects and strengthen the back muscles, something that modern-day orthopaedists advocate.

But if backaches are getting commoner, it is, as orthopaedist P.S. Maini says, "the price we pay for modern living". The stress and strain of today's life-style seems to tell more on the back than anywhere else. A whole range of causes can put you on your

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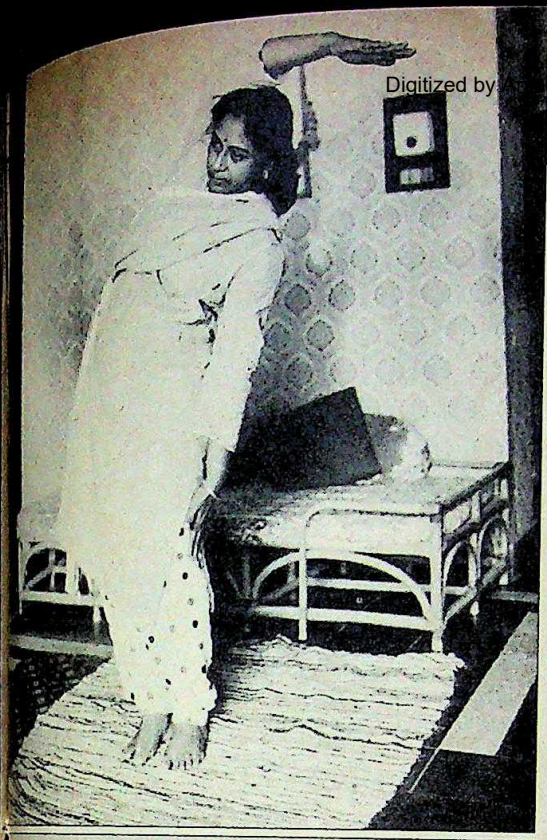

NAMAS BHOJANI

For Bombay housewife Suhas Kannamwar, the ache was so bad that she even had to be carried to the toilet. The pain eased after two weeks but she is still scared. Every morning she does exercises to strengthen her back.

BHAWAN SINGH

Assam businessman Ramesh Jain suffers from a chronic backache. He is forced to lie for hours on end on a bed with a hard back. And when he walks he has to use a walking stick. His business has been seriously affected.

...k for a while.

...Doctors say that bad posture is probably one of the major ...ses of backache. Mama's advice to keep your back straight ...e walking is right, but very few people observe such rules. ...r posture is also caused by the range of modern furniture that ...ishes most houses and offices in urban India. A deep-set ...may look good for your living-room, but it's lousy for your ... Squatting on the ground and eating may be native, but ...rtainly why villagers have stronger backs. Soft, springy ...mote backaches as well. And high heels for women look ...t, but they are torture for the back.

...cess weight and lack of exercise also contribute to what ...rs call "growing back abuse." Doctors have a term for those ...develop paunches: "Lordosis". A paunch tends to increase ...mal curve in the lower back, putting excessive pressure on ...rvical discs and joints. As one doctor says: "Excess weight ... carrying a 20-kg suitcase 24 hours a day. Sooner or later ...back is going to protest."

...increasingly motorised society is also bringing about a ...exercise that weakens the back. Given a chance, people ...want to drive their vehicles right into their offices. Doctors ...gest that the emphasis is on mental development and little is ...to equip the body physically to face the quickened pace of ...Prakash Chandra, an AIIMS professor emeritus: "People ...burn the candle at both ends, eat snacks in-between ...to bed at 2 a.m. and get their whole system imbalanced. ...back is the most vulnerable."

Ironically, even when people do exercise they tend to overdo things. Doctors are treating an increasing number of what they call "Jane Fonda backs". Plenty of young women have come in with sprained backs after trying to emulate the Jane Fonda workout, or following Doordarshan's *Das Kadam*. And men who go on sudden bursts of jogging in a bid to get into shape are, in reality, putting their backs in a bad shape. Says orthopaedist A.V. Bavadekar: "They start crash exercise programmes and their backs go crash."

But what few people seem to realise is that stress and strain contribute largely to what doctors call the psychosomatic or pyschological backache. Studying 175 people who had developed backaches without any obvious physiological signs, doctors at Bombay's Sion Hospital found that 69 per cent suffered from anxiety and depression. A fourth had marital tensions at home. Half of them had financial problems. One tenth of them were unemployed. Says Ingalhalikar, who co-authored the study: "Their backaches were an outward manifestation of an inner feeling of depression and lack of success."

However, diagnosing the causes of backaches is not easy. Says orthopaedist M.L. Saraf: "It's usually a combination of complex factors. We might think it's the disc that is causing problems when, in reality, it could be the joints." Most patients are puzzled and disillusioned when doctors are unable to give them definite answers about their aching backs.

On their first visit, doctors usually ask the patients to take a walk in their rooms and bend a bit. Says Dr Maini: "Many times

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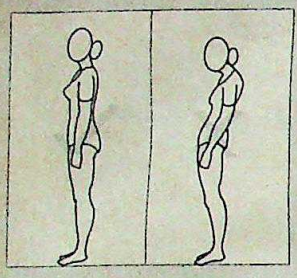
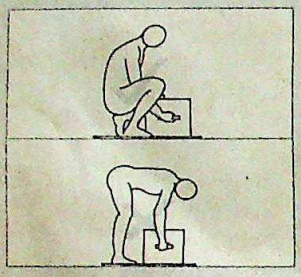
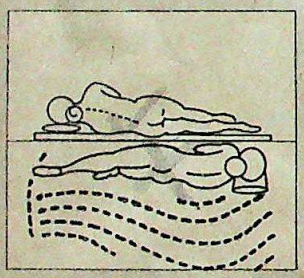
Dos and Don'ts



Don't stand in the same position for a long while. During cocktail parties or standup affairs circulate around. While ironing, washing up and cooking—activities that cause the back to be bent forward—shift your position often. While standing, keep the body relaxed but erect.

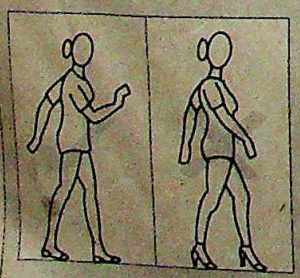


Don't lift heavy weights by just bending your back. This puts extreme pressure on your spinal column. Its better to bend your knees and lift objects. While removing articles from a lower drawer, get down on your knees. Sudden twisting and jerking movements can cause backaches.



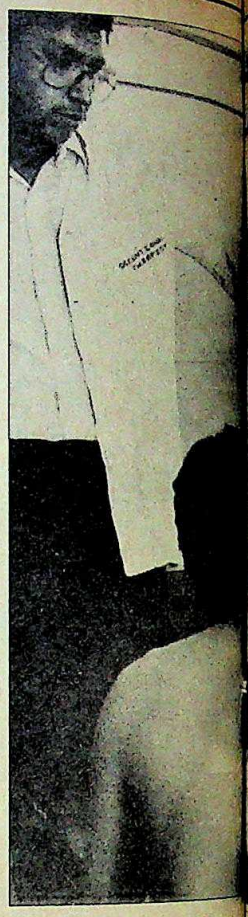
While sleeping, it's okay to use a mattress but always use a bed that has a hard back made of wood. Avoid soft, springy beds. Mattresses soft enough to take your contours are fine. While sleeping, it's better to lie with your knees slightly bent. And don't read in bed propped up with three pillows.

While sitting, avoid deep set sofas that provide no support for your lower back. Office chairs that prevent slouching are the best. Get up every hour or so and walk around. While driving your car, make sure that you are neither crouched forward or bending too far backward.



Avoid wearing extremely tight fitting clothes, especially around the waist. They tend to weaken the abdominal muscles that prop up your spine. High heeled shoes put an extra strain on the back and it's better to avoid them. Wear comfortable shoes that are roomy enough for the toes.

their postures tell us where the problem lies." A conventional X-ray of the spinal column is also taken that shows up any obvious structural defects. If doctors feel a disc has slipped, then they ask patients to have a myelogram. In a process that can be painful, a puncture is made in the lumbar region and a dye is introduced into the spinal column. As it travels up, an X-ray catches its pathway and obstructions are clearly revealed on film. But, with advances in medical equipment, diagnosis is getting more accurate. The computer axial tomography, or CAT scan, is becoming a common tool. It gives a cross sectional view of a vertebra, helping doctors to locate the exact cause of the problem.



Despite these improved diagnostic methods, getting rid of a backache is a difficult business. The best cure is complete bedrest. But what few patients realise is that while rest may ease the strain, there is actually no cure for a bad back. As Arora says: "People want one-day cures for backaches. They don't accept that a bad back is like greying hair or failing eyesight."

The result: a whole host of cures is coming up. Patients are willing to try anything: from whirlpool baths, mud packs, acupuncture, bone manipulations and even kicks on the back to set it right. Most doctors advocate the conventional methods of treatment. To relieve the pain, patients are put on thermal therapy using microwave, shortwave, ultra-sound or simply hot bags. Tractions that gently stretch the spine are also used.

But the best way to prevent backaches from recurring is exercises designed to strengthen the muscles surrounding the vertebrae. As Bavadekar says: "Muscles are like policemen. Making them strong would prevent the vertebrae or discs from terrorising the body." But doctors face a problem. As long as the memory of the pain remains, patients exercise enthusiastically.

For those who do follow the doctors' advice religiously, recovery rates tend to be good. Delhi housewife Neeru Kapur is successfully treating her nine-year-old back problem by doing yoga. After her aches became recurrent, she enrolled for yoga classes. She now does *asanas* to strengthen her back for half an hour every morning. Says Kapur: "I can feel the difference now. I feel relaxed and comfortable."

Others take their own precautions to avoid an aching back. G.S. Agarwal, managing director of Birla Yamaha, who had just two attacks, decided to stop jogging and lifting any heavy objects. Delhi architect Upal Ghosh gave up sleeping on a foam mattress, and when he feels that he is going to get a backache, he stops everything and heads home for two days' rest. Kannamwar slips on a lower back brace whenever she has to do heavy work. A senior Bombay police officer first knocked his excess weight down and now maintains a strict vigil on his diet. Most suffer slightly from "a backache neurosis": they get paranoid about

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Bio-feed-back treatment (left) and patients undergoing traction: difficult cure

Patients are willing to try almost anything to cure backaches: whirlpool baths, mud packs, acupuncture, bone manipulations and even kicks on the back.

...ying backaches.

...ries advocate surgery only if the backaches recur ...ently, are extremely painful and, in some cases, lead to ... paralysis of the limbs. Typically, last fortnight, AIIMS ...paedic surgeons, headed by Professor Dave, were operat... a 30-year-old housewife who had a combination of a ...ed disc and narrowed spinal column. After being ...nitised, she was made to sit in a crouched position. This ...ked her vertebral column and gave doctors a few more ...metres of operating space. Incisions were done swiftly on ...r back, the muscles were sliced through, revealing the ...ic vertebrae. Using a chisel-shaped tool and a synthetic ...er, Dave calmly chipped off a section of the vertebrae ...ing the chord. He then pushed the spinal chord gently ...and with crocodile-mouth forceps, snipped away the ...ing portions of the disc.

...operation was through in two hours, but the patient will ...e in bed for four weeks. Amazingly, she can do without a ...of backbone fins. The tissue protecting the area is good ...n. For a slip disc, the patient needs to be in bed for hardly a ...Next doctors can remove the whole disc without any ...ms to the body. For facet joint problems, either the excess ...is chipped off or the bone from the hip is taken and "welded" on the back to prevent the rattle. And doctors can reposition a slipped vertebra too.

Those undergoing surgery usually find immediate relief. Bhandari remembers that he wavered for a while before agreeing to have his slipped disc removed. Before he went into the theatre, he had all sorts of fears about being paralysed for life. But once he came out he was amazed to find that not only had his backache gone, but he was absolutely normal and could even do stunt shots in his films. Yet, doctors caution that surgery only relieves the compression on the spinal column, it doesn't prevent further discs or joints from degenerating. That can only be done by making sure that the back remains strong.

Doctors are beginning to advocate preventive methods instead of treatment as the best way to check the rise in backaches. Orthopaedist Shanmughasundaram advocates starting "back schools" to educate people on the best postures, exercises and furniture to use to prevent backaches. Members of the Bombay Orthopaedic Society now hold regular public lectures on backaches. Ingalhalikar, who has given several such talks, usually ends up by saying: "Preventing backaches is like being a lawn tennis champion. You can be a winner only if you maintain your form."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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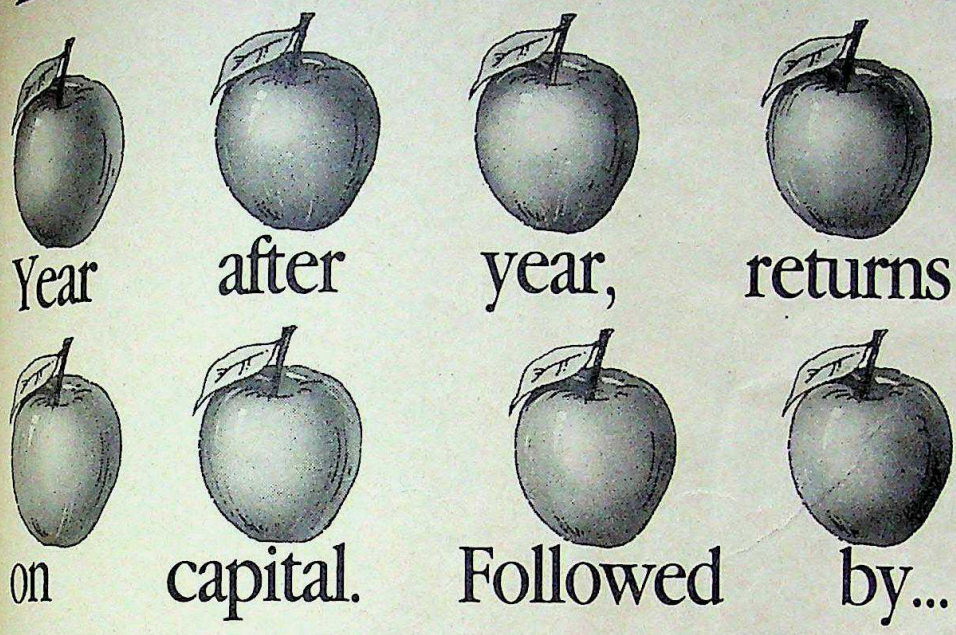

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BHOJPURI FILMS

A Glum Picture

A silver jubilee is greeted with scant enthusiasm

AUGUST will mark the silver jubilee of Bhojpuri cinema but few people in the industry are celebrating. Twenty-five years after *Ganga Maiyya Tohe Piyerie Charahibo* became a runaway hit and raised visions of the flowering of Bhojpuri cinema, the mood among producers and directors, distributors and actors, is one of gloom. The spark that promised to energise Bhojpuri cinema spluttered out somewhere along the way.

Initially, the optimism had not seemed misplaced. Bhojpuri has not only six crore speakers in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, but is also used in Mauritius, Fiji and Surinam.

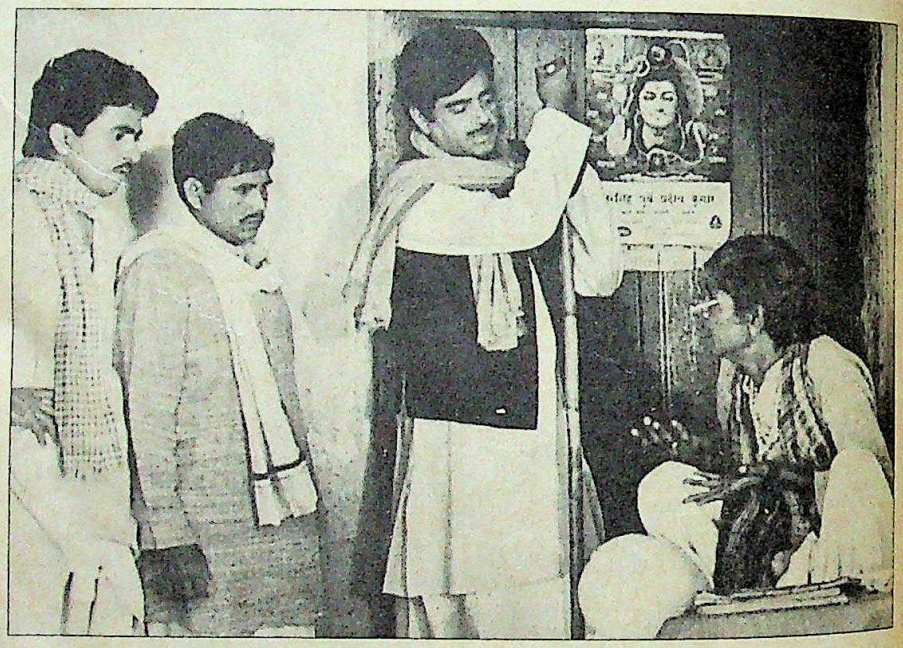
The formula for failure is a familiar one. Says Salil Sudhakar, a rising star: "Bhojpuri films have been ruined by formula film makers. They are neither aware of the delicacy of the language nor the ethos of the region. This has spelt disaster for the industry and frustration for the audience." Adds Bachubhai Shah, the maker of the successful *Bidesia*: "People who could not even spell 'Bhojpuri' started directing these films. I am told there are 42 films lying in the cans which nobody wants to buy."

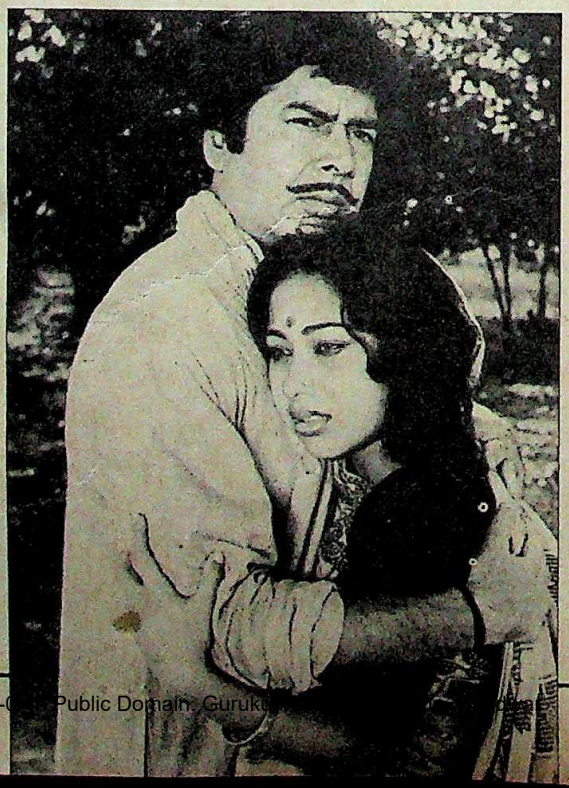
The tragedy lies in the bitter struggle that Bhojpuri film makers originally waged to find a cinematic niche for the genre. When Vishwanath Shahabadi made *Ganga Maiyya* 25 years ago with the late Nazir Hussain, the veteran character-actor, they found no takers and Hussain had to run from pillar to post to ensure its screening. However, it ran to packed halls the moment it was released in 1962. Its songs took the place of folk songs in rural areas; Kumkum, who played the lead, became a household word; and the audience identified with Hussain—immersed in his earthen cup of toddy—who reflected the agonies of the rural poor.

If this success made producers sit up, the performance of *Bidesia* soon after seemed to confirm that there was a pot of gold waiting at the end of the Bhojpuri rainbow. Shah, who made the film which starred Sujit Kumar, Naaz, Jeevan and Padma Khanna, recalls that he shot *Bisdesia* in 45 days on a budget of just Rs 3.85 lakh. Says he: "It still runs to full houses wherever it is screened."

The success sparked off a deluge: *Mitwa, Bhauji, Vidhna Nach Nachave, Loha Singh, Nag Panchami, Jekra Charanwa Mein Lagale Paranwa, Saiyan Se Neha Lagaibe, Saiyan Se Bhaile Milanwa, Solah Singar Kare Dulhania, Balma Bara Nadan, Naihar Chhutal Jay* and *Aayil Basant Bahar*. But nearly all of these flopped and by 1966, the Bhojpuri film industry was in danger of extinction.

The blame lay with film makers who, trying to cash in on the boom, made no effort to understand their audiences.





Shatrughan Sinha in *Bihari Babu*; (left) Sujit Kumar and Bandini Mishra in *Paan Khaye Saiyan Hamaar*: sorry state

Says film critic Mithilesh Sinha: "The invasion by outside directors, even big names like Pramod Chakravarty and Shakti Samanta, affected audience acceptability. Whatever the film makers' technical abilities, people were unwilling to accept what was portrayed on the screen as Bhojpuri culture."

The film makers' confidence was so badly shaken that no Bhojpuri films were made between 1967 and 1976. Finally, Shah mustered up the courage to make the hit, *Dangal*, the first Bhojpuri colour film. With Hussain's super-hit *Balam Pardesia*

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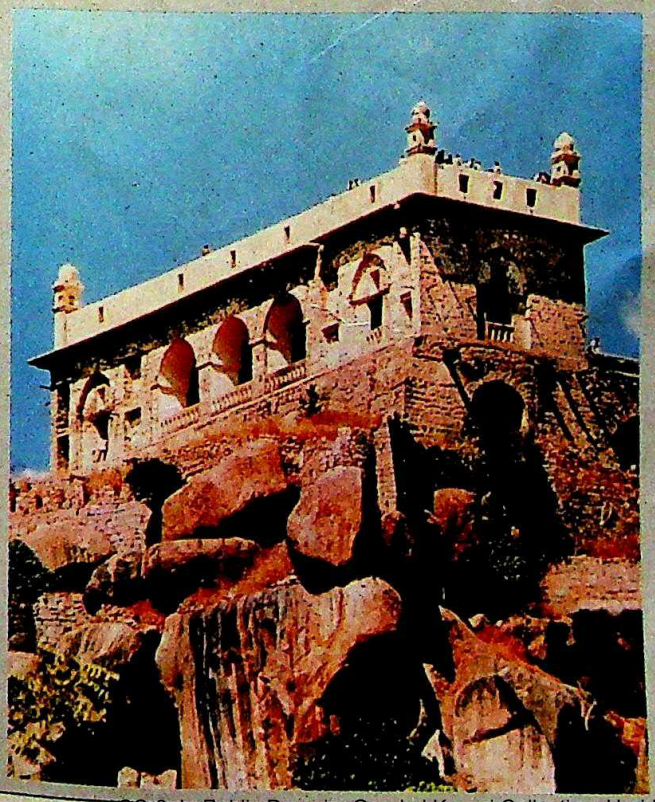

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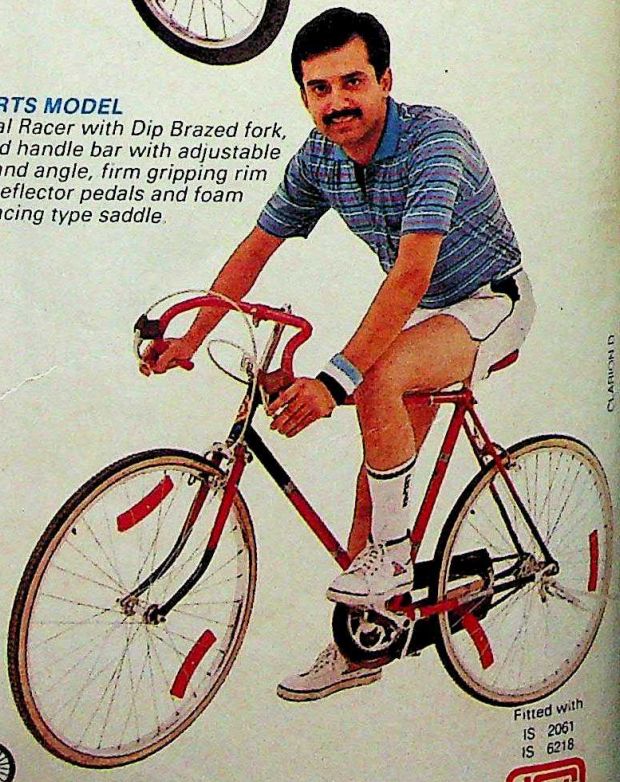

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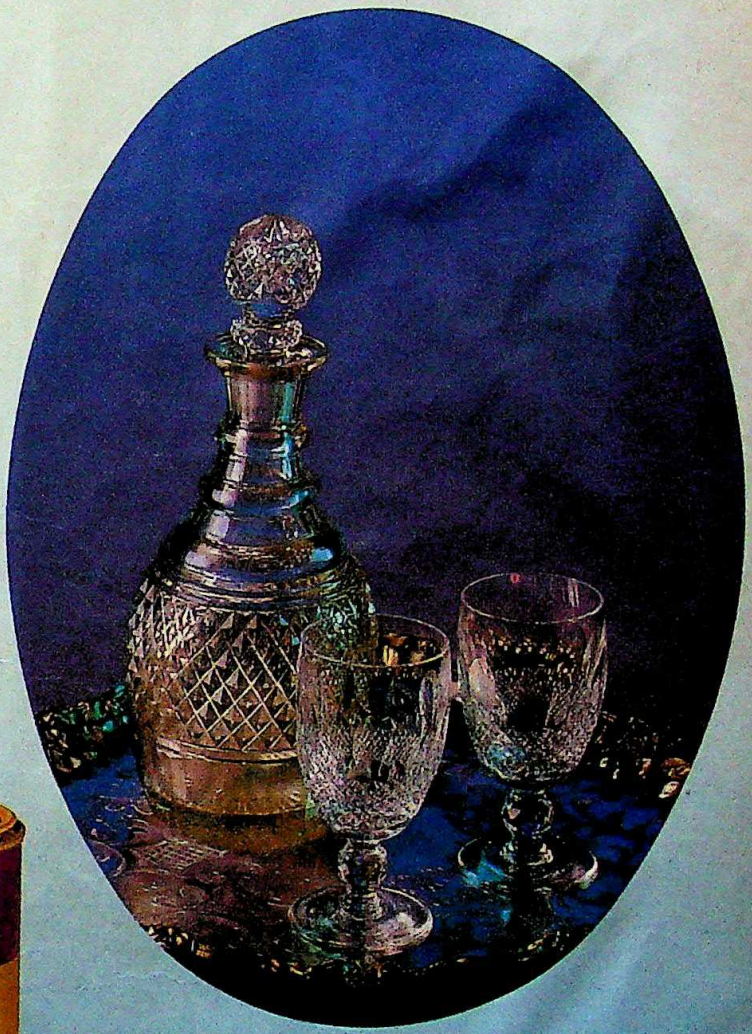

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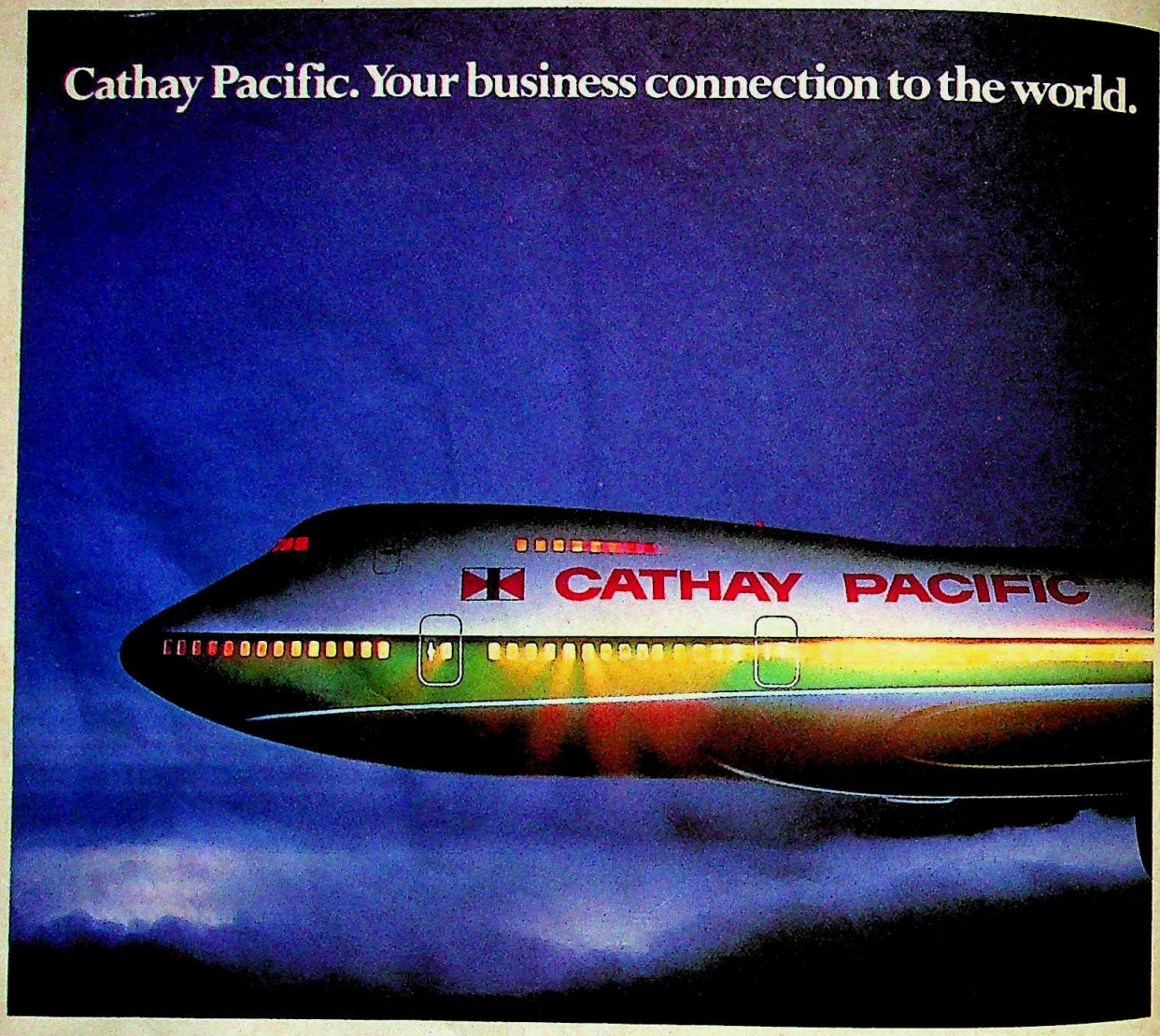

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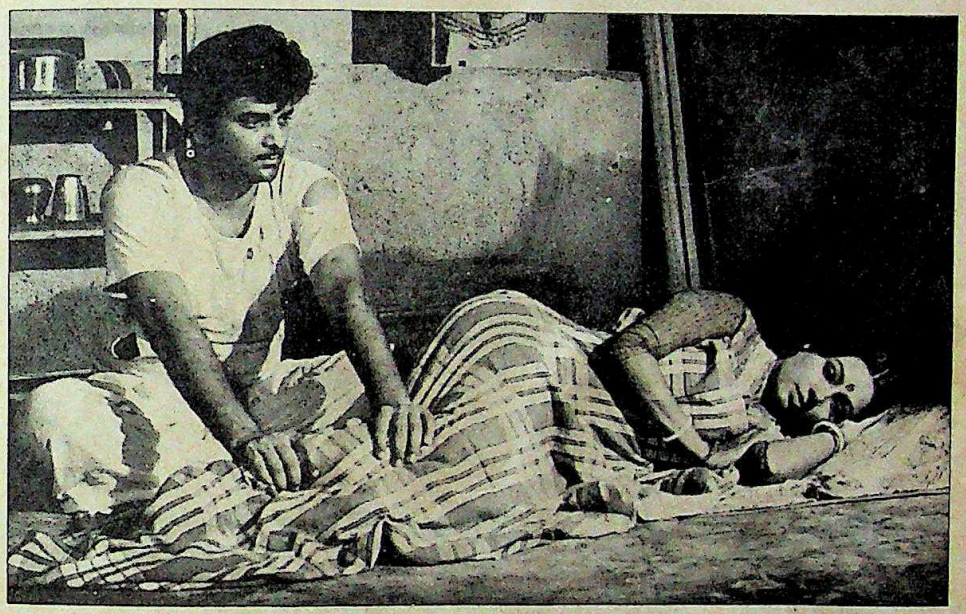
which followed, the industry was officially revived. Other films came in their wake and distributor Ashok Jain made a mark with *Dharti Maiyya* in 1981, followed by *Ganga Kinare Mora Gaon*, a jubilee hit in which the lead was played by Kunal, a Bihari youngster.

The revival also attracted well-known Bihari actors and artistes, including Shatrughan Sinha, who starred in Dilip Bose's *Bihari Babu*. The film did only moderately well but earned the star his popular name—"Bihari Babu".

But the lessons of the '60s and '70s had not been learnt. Bombay film makers flooded the market again to take advantage of the new boom and fell back on the often crude—Hindi commercial film formula.

Says Shatrughan Sinha: "There were so many bad films flooding the market that the initial respectability that Bhojpuri cinema had acquired was lost." He recalls, with a disbelieving laugh, that one film even carried a disco sequence. Caught in the crush, even an otherwise serious film maker like Sujit Kumar had to use guest appearances by Amitabh Bachchan and Rekha for his *Paan Khaye Saiyan Hamaar* in 1985—which didn't help in making it a success.

A prime reason for the failure of Bhojpuri cinema to come into its own like the Telugu, Tamil or Bangla industry is that most directors continue to be Bombay-based. And says Salil Sudhakar: "It is not just a question of someone being from outside the region. The person has to be at least sincere to succeed." Patna-based critic Kumar Dinesh points that in the absence of well-made films, only one of 13 releases in 1986 did well.



Kunal and Padma in *Dagabaaz Balma*

But Shatrughan Sinha says that the cinema also has to be able to compete with Hindi films. He says that "when a good Bhojpuri film comes along, people do flock to see it". Moreover, though there are several rising Bihari actors, among the actresses, Padma Khanna alone continues to dominate the scene. Consequently, there have been few fresh local faces. Limited resources also mean that the films are technologically limited: the budget rarely exceeds Rs 12 lakh and is sometimes as low as Rs 3.5 lakh.

Besides, there has been little attempt at change in Bhojpuri cinema which has been greatly dependent on dance and good music. "The love for melody is typical of the area," says Padma Khanna. Although the region suffers from stark poverty, casteism and atrocities against the poor, there has been no attempt to follow in the footsteps of Prakash Jha's *Damul*, which looked into the bonded labour situation in Bihar, or Gautam Ghose's *Paar*, which portrayed the agony of being a Harijan.

On the contrary, everything has been made to fit the Hindi *masala* film structure because even dubbing and patchwork are done in Bombay: there is no studio in the region. However, Kunal reasons that a film like *Damul* will not be accepted by the public. Sujit Kumar feels that such a film is possible only if the financier has an assured financial return. Says he: "It will be very difficult for Bhojpuri cinema to survive without government protection."

Many agree that it is this sense of insecurity, born out of government apathy, which has retarded progress. Says Aslam Sheikh, who has directed two films: "If a director were to make a hit film in Tamil or Telugu, the Hindi film industry would immediately pick him up. But not from Bhojpuri." He accuses the National Film Development Corporation of having the same bias.

The state and Central governments have both been guilty of indifference. The Bihar Government has forgotten its promise, several years old, to set up a studio to encourage regional cinema. When, eight years ago, the Bihar Film Development Corporation was set up, it turned into a playground to accommodate politicians. Initially, Kamalnath Singh Thakur, MLC, who had some exposure to the film industry, was chosen to head it but he did nothing significant. In any case, political rivalry soon led to his replacement by Taneshwar Azad, a senior Congress(I) leader, who didn't have the remotest experience in art or films. Azad has now given way to Parasnath Pathak, a Congress(I) worker whose only qualification is his closeness to Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey.

The Centre's attitude has not been less unkind. The main problem springs from the Government's refusal to accept Bhojpuri as anything other than a broken form of Hindi. This stand has ensured that Bhojpuri cinema is not a separate category in the national film awards. Again, on television, for instance, Padma Khanna points out: "Bhojpuri films are not shown in the regional slot because they are considered to be Hindi films. And they are not shown in the Hindi cinema slot because Bhojpuri is not Hindi." Argues Sujit Kumar: "The language and its cinema should be given its due."

It is to fight what they see as discrimination that the Bhojpuri Chalchitra Sangh was formed in April this year. Following its inception, office-bearers met Dubey who gave them the usual assurances, but it is hard to see the Government recognising Bhojpuri as a separate language. And, going by the Government track record, it is easy to understand the scepticism with which people in the industry view the future.

—FARZAND AHMED and M. RAHMAN

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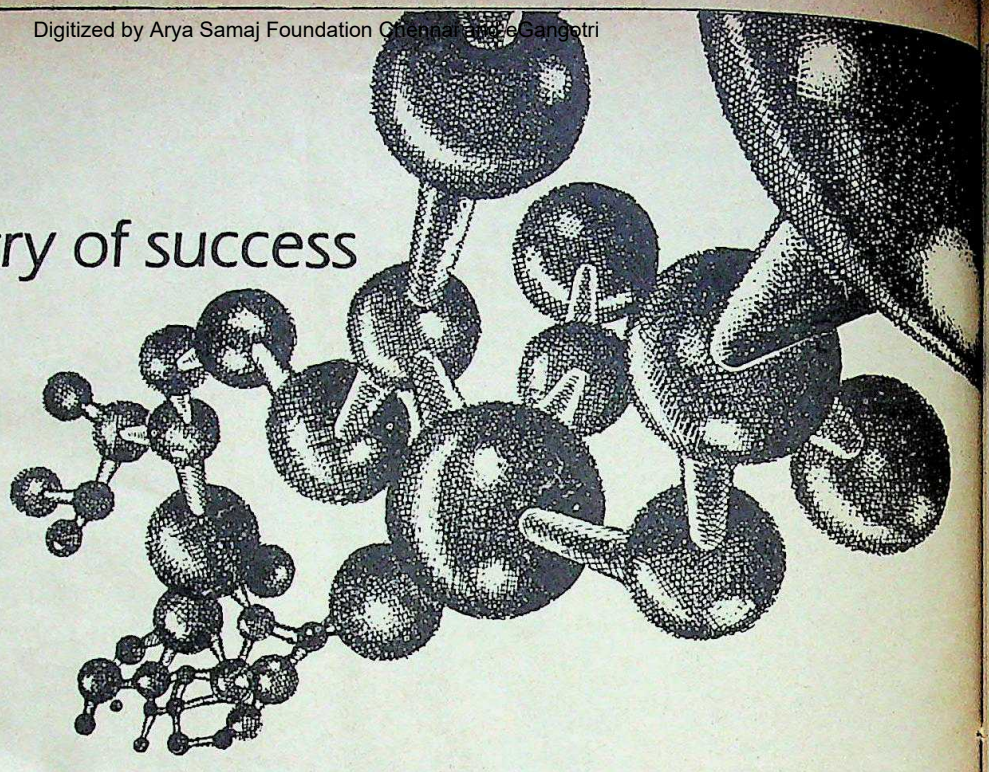

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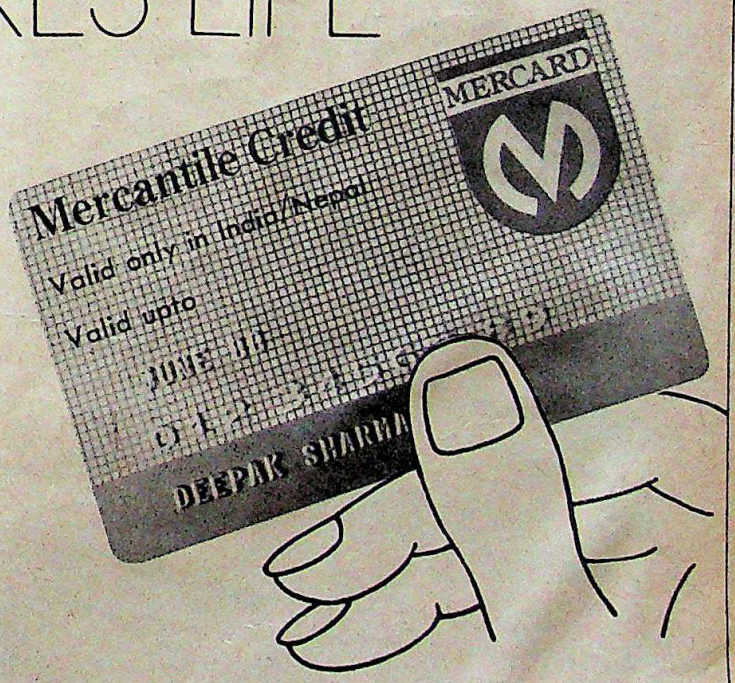

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CHESS

Star of the Squares

Anand wins world junior chess title in the Philippines

HE rattles his better-known opponents by responding, within seconds, to their early moves on the chessboard. Looking at him, it is hard to believe that he is capable of doing this. But even international masters and grandmasters have wilted under the blitzkrieg of this cherubic young maestro from Madras. Last fortnight, Vishwanathan Anand, yet to celebrate his 18th birthday, crowned his early promise by becoming the first Asian to be crowned world junior chess champion.

Anand's win in the Philippines was no flash in the pan. He faced a field of 51—including two grandmasters and 12 international masters—from 41 countries. He won seven times, including five in a row, drew a half-dozen and didn't lose once in the 13-round Swiss system championship. Suddenly, India had a sports superstar in the making, though chess ranks somewhere between kabaddi and softball in terms of popularity.

Perhaps because of this, sports officials treated the chess crown prince's return to the country as a non-event. Anand flew in to New Delhi on the morning of August 6, at about the same time that Geet Sethi landed at Bombay's Sahar Airport after winning the world billiards title. While Sethi was met by journalists, Anand picked up his bags and made a dash for a connecting flight to Madras, where only his parents received him. Apparently, motorcades and public receptions are only for cricketers and the occasional badminton player. Sports Minister Margaret Alva did not even send him the customary congratulatory message, though Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran did announce a Rs 50,000 award.

Though he was not an early leader at the championship—he had three draws in the first four games—Anand showed his superiority when he scalped the top-ranked Norwegian grandmaster, Simen Agdestein. He seized an opening advantage and forced Agdestein to resign in the 38th move. At this stage, the end of the seventh round, Anand and Josef Klinger of Austria were joint leaders. They met in the next round, where the Austrian squandered the early advantage that normally comes with the white pieces. He paid the price for passive play in 40 moves when his exposed king was pounced upon by Anand's rook and three pawns.

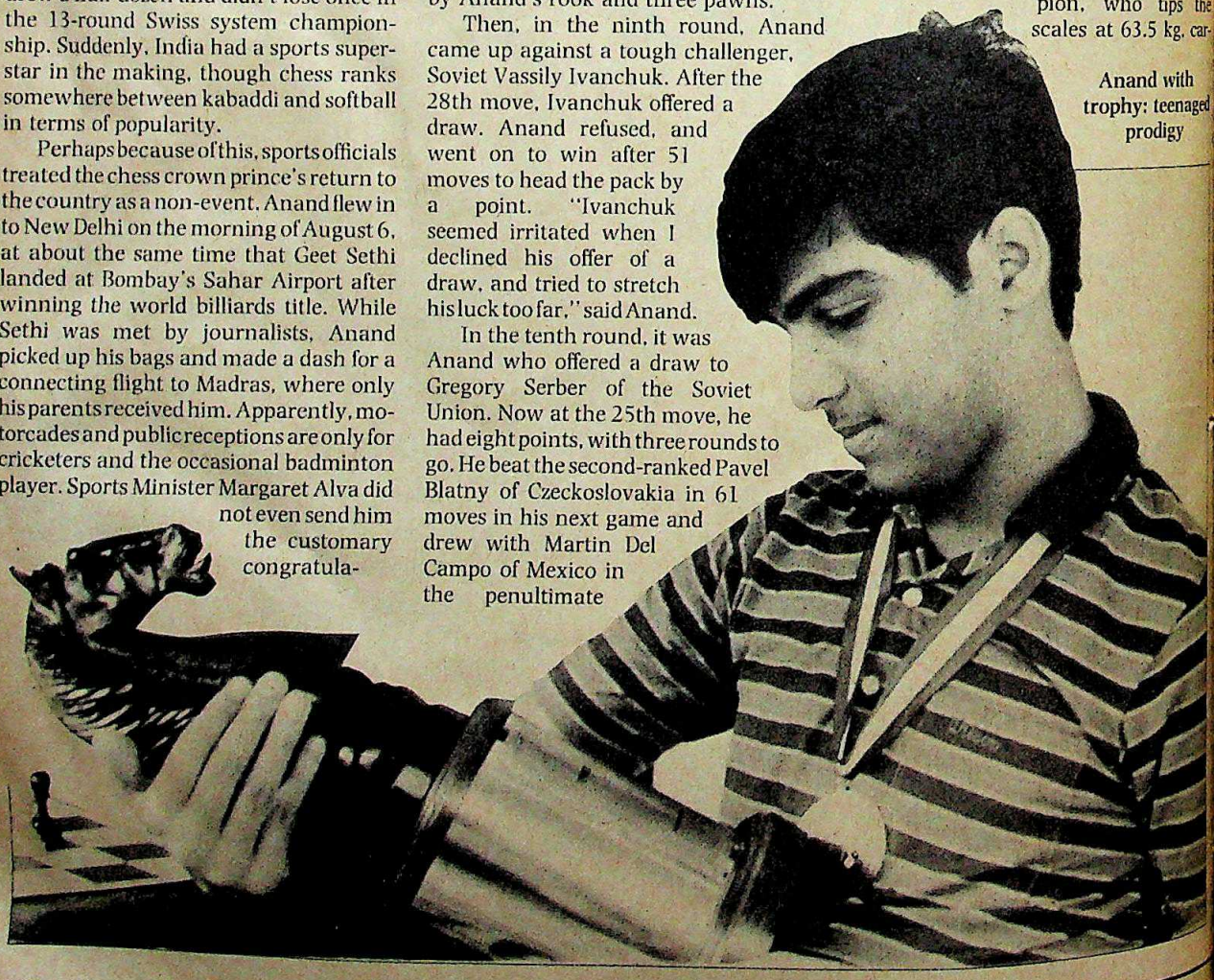
Then, in the ninth round, Anand came up against a tough challenger, Soviet Vassily Ivanchuk. After the 28th move, Ivanchuk offered a draw. Anand refused, and went on to win after 51 moves to head the pack by a point. "Ivanchuk seemed irritated when I declined his offer of a draw, and tried to stretch his luck too far," said Anand.

In the tenth round, it was Anand who offered a draw to Gregory Serber of the Soviet Union. Now at the 25th move, he had eight points, with three rounds to go. He beat the second-ranked Pavel Blatny of Czeckoslovakia in 61 moves in his next game and drew with Martin Del Campo of Mexico in the penultimate round. His tally of 9.5 points, just one point ahead of Russians Ivanchuk and Serper kept the contest alive until the end.

Back in Madras, he admitted that at this stage, he was nervous. He needed only a draw to emerge a clear winner. He did that against Israeli Gad Rechlis on the 49th move, only two moves after Rechlis missed a possible winning line. "Since I knew a draw was enough, I was making passive moves," he admitted. His final tally of 10 points got him the trophy and 30,000 pesos (approximately Rs 20,000).

"Chess is not everything in life, but it is very important for me," he says. His ambitions are apparently as well planned as his games: in two years, he hopes to become the first Indian grandmaster. The title comes by scoring a minimum number of points in tournaments of a specified stature. And in six years, Anand wants "to become a top- ranking world class senior player". He has plenty of time. In fact, he will be attending college for the first time only this month.

The gangly 177.5 cm tall chess champion, who tips the scales at 63.5 kg, car-



Anand with trophy: teenaged prodigy

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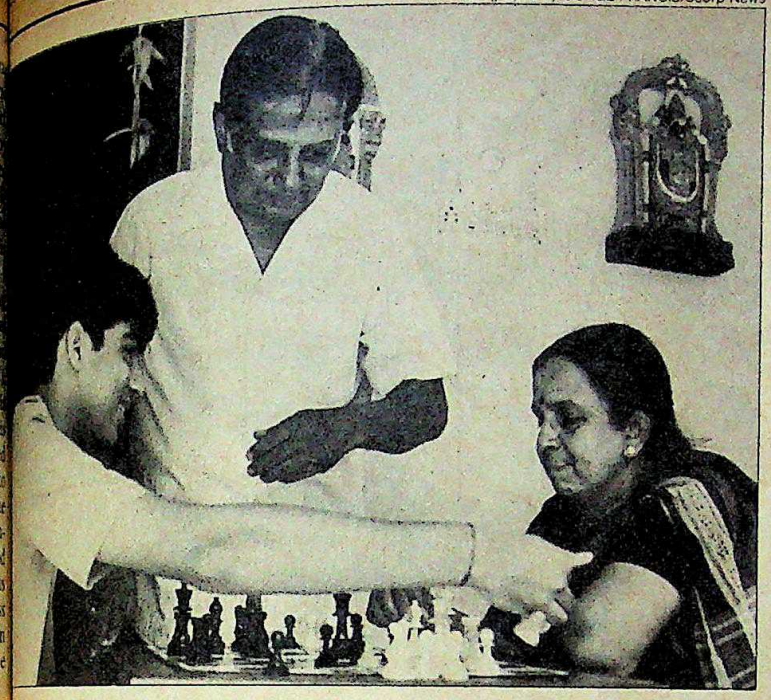

Anand with parents: early help

his new glory lightly. "I was only ing for third place, which would have e an improvement on my perfor- at the world junior championships er," he says. He finished tenth in the junior championship at Kiljava, d in 1984. He moved up to the fifth at Dubai the next year, but slipped to th at Gausda, Norway, in 1986. Anand is in exalted company— Spassky, Gary Kasparov and Antoly ho were all world junior chess cham- s before becoming top-ranking masters and world champions.

Anand had a chance to move towards grandmaster norm this month itself, failed to make it to England in time for British International Chess Cham- ship, which began at Swansea on st 3. The All India Chess Federa- refused allowed him to fly only on Air- for which he had to wait for three at Manila. As he would have missed early rounds, Anand decided instead turn to Madras and attend the Lloyds ourship in London, beginning on st 22. As former national Nasseruddin Ghalib, himself a administrator, said in disappoint- "The fact that he was going fresh the world junior championship have given him a tactical advan- at Swansea." But Anand is sure that portunity will come.

the most stars of the squares, Anand young. His mother introduced the game when he was still a toddler. "He took great interest in chess when he was only five," recalls his father K. Viswanathan, who retired as general manager of the Southern Railways last year. It was during Viswanathan's stint as a consultant with the Philippines Railway in 1978-79 that the young Anand sharpened his skills. He would stay virtually glued to the local TV lunch hour chess shows and picked up a few prizes in local chess contests.

BACK in Madras in 1981, the 12-year-old Anand—now a seventh class student at the Don Bosco Matriculation School—claimed a double in the local Kasturi Cup Tournament, winning the regular and lightning contests. He then went on to win the national sub-junior, national junior, national senior, the Asian junior and the Lloyds Bank junior titles twice each. In his earliest international competition, the world sub-junior championship in 1984, Anand managed to finish third even though he came down with hepatitis halfway through the championship. Later that year, he finished tenth in the world junior championship.

These contests gave him such immense confidence that two years ago, he became the youngest Indian to become an international master. There are 11 international masters on the Indian chess scene, and four of them are in the race for the holy grail of all chess players—the grandmaster title: Anand, D.V. Prasad, Dibyendu Barua and Pravin Thipsay. The player who bags the title first has been promised a special award of Rs 2 lakh by the minister of sports.

"Anand can clinch it by a placing in the top three or four against higher-rated players in another international tournament," said Erlito Lluch, chief arbiter of the world junior chess championship, at the end of the contest, in Baguio City, Philippines. And Soviet grandmaster Vladimir Tukmakov, who lost to Anand in the third Bhilwara International Chess Championship in New Delhi last year, said: "He is very good and may well be the first Indian grandmaster." And as for Anand, he replied: "The encounter with Tukmakov is the most memorable game I have played so far."

Ghalib says: "Anand's attributes are a remarkable memory, intuition, temperament and ambition, and his advantages are his incredible range of approaches and strategies to the game. He is equally hard-working, and this is the stuff of which world class players are made." Perhaps his weakness is that he plays too fast, but he relies heavily on his memory and Anand can quote the Sokohoski Informator—the chess player's bible—with page reference and opponents' names, and use it effectively to ward off any early challenge in the game. This has earned him the tag of the "lightning kid".

Psychological studies of the qualities that make a good chess player show that imagination and vision are as important as memory and concentration. Anand has shown that these qualities help in school too. Says his mother Sushila: "Though he attended classes for only 42 days in the final year at Don Bosco, he passed the twelfth class examination with a first class, and scored more than 90 per cent in his optionals and 199 out of 200 in mathematics." Anand, the youngest of three children, has joined a B.Com. course at Loyola College, Madras.

To Benjamin Franklin, chess taught "foresight, circumspection, caution and the habit of not being discouraged by our present affairs". For Lenin, it was "the gymnasium of the mind". For Anand, who has built a rich collection of chess books and spends more than an hour a day playing and practising without the help of a coach, except for his mother who is an occasional opponent at the board, the game is "simply a passion". No wonder, the passion of this teenaged prodigy has brought the first internationally acknowledged honour in the game to the land where, chess historian H.J.R. Murray says, the game was "the conscious and deliberate invention of an inhabitant of north-west India about 600 A.D."

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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CRICKET

Selection Politics

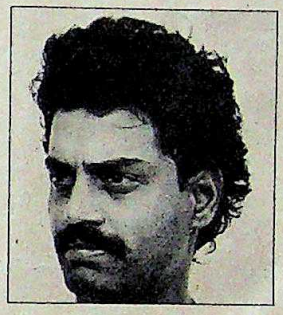
The issue of captaincy divides the board

INDIAN cricket captains are traditionally sacked if they lose a Test series to Pakistan. First Bedi, then Gavaskar. But Kapil Dev had committed a worse offence: he had lost a series to Pakistan on home ground last season. This time, however, the axe fell on the five-member selection committee.

More than anything else, that was another manifestation of the byzantine politics of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Factional tussles within the board delayed the announcement of the new selection committee and caused needless tension among the leading players on the captaincy issue. Finally, the decision was left so late that the selection committee had no choice but to retain Kapil Dev. Said Bapu Nadkarni, former Test spinner who chaired the committee: "We felt a new incumbent would not be able to take the pressure." (*see interview*).

Although there was a substantial lobby building up for star batsman Dilip Vengsarkar, with less than two months left for the Reliance Cup, it would have been too severe a test for someone who has not even led a Ranji side. Instead, he was chosen to be Kapil's deputy. The message was that if Kapil failed again, Vengsarkar would become the choice for the West Indies series to follow.

The team itself had few surprises. As Kapil had said earlier, eight or nine players chose themselves, and the remaining 16 or 17 probables were mainly youngsters being groomed for the future. But there was surprise over the dropping of the 1983 star performer, Mohinder Amarnath, and big hitters Raman Lamba and Kirti Azad.



Kapil (left) and Vengsarkar: leading duo

The real action, therefore, was behind the scenes, in the faction fighting. The old selection committee—led by Hanumant Singh—was due to stay in place till September, but was summarily bundled out last fortnight because of manoeuvres by Reliance Cup Committee Chairman N.K.P. Salve and Coordinator A.W. Kanmadikar. Another player in the game was prominent Vengsarkar-backer Kishen Rungta of Rajasthan, who was earlier expected to be on the new selection panel and who had invited Vengsarkar to take over Rajasthan's captaincy.

But there was a tussle between Rungta and former Test player Chandu Sarwate over who should represent Central Zone on the new committee. Finally, Raj Singh Dungarpur came in as a compromise candidate, although he was in London. He was not present at the new selection committee's meeting but was apparently consulted over the telephone.

But before that the kingpins of cricket in the country did put up an unedifying spectacle as India announced its probables for the Reliance Cup well after the August 1 deadline. And now that the knives have been sharpened, they might be used after the Reliance Cup, depending on how India performs under Kapil Dev.

—M.RAHMAN with bureau reports

BAPU NADKARNI

Clear Choice

SOON after the Cricket Board's selection committee met in New Delhi last week to choose the captain and name the players, Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA interviewed its chairman and former Test player Bapu Nadkarni, 54. Excerpts:

Q. *Why did you decide to select Kapil Dev as captain again?*

A. Because he has been there. We don't think he has done badly. Why should we go for someone new unless there is something seriously against Kapil Dev?

Q. *What about Vengsarkar?*

A. There was no question of a second name coming up. There's too short a time for the Reliance Cup and there is too much pressure. We felt a new incumbent would not be able to take the pressure.

Q. *What factors did you keep in mind while choosing the players?*

A. We have chosen those with proven capabilities. There is hardly any time left and there is no time to experiment. We kept the forthcoming West Indies series in mind too, and we have taken a couple of youngsters.

Q. *How do you rate India's chances in the Reliance Cup?*

A. Looking at the draw, I don't think it will be difficult to reach the semi-finals. The real hurdle is going to be after that.

Q. *Who do you think are India's toughest rivals?*

A. West Indies and Pakistan. But one-day cricket is a funny business. Anything can happen.

Q. *Where does India's strength lie?*

A. Our batting strength is tremendous. Till number nine we can bat; if we can hit 300 runs it will be difficult to lose a match.

Q. *What about bowling?*

A. Well that's been our problem. Especially after 30 overs, we don't have bowlers to restrict the runs. They just don't come up to our expectations. The time has come to look for replacements. We have included several new names and let's see how they perform.

Q. *And the spinners.*

A. Well, we have Ravi Shastri, Maninder Singh, Shivlal Yadav and Sivaramakrishnan. I think they have a crucial role to play in one-day matches too. And I'm not saying this because I'm a spinner.

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LENTIN COMMISSION

The Merchants of Death

An investigation exposes corruption in drug control in Bombay

FOR more than a year now, an extraordinary legal drama is being enacted in courtroom number 37 on the first floor of the imposing high court building in Bombay. A stream of doctors, politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats has testified here to the cavalier and criminal manner in which persons in authority have allowed dangerous or substandard medicines to be sold openly in the market.

From health ministers to bureaucrats, there has been a shocking conspiracy to flout every conceivable regulation aimed at protecting people from unscrupulous drug manufacturers. The message to businessmen from the Maharashtra Health Department has been clear—make money in any way possible; the problems of public health can wait.

At the centre of this rotten state of affairs is the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), the main licensing and regulatory authority. And just one official, Joint Commissioner (Drugs) S.M. Dolas, who enjoyed the patronage of a succession of health ministers, contributed greatly to reduce the FDA—once regarded as the best in India—to a den of intrigue and corruption. Dolas "caused a reign of terror amongst subordinates and kept his superiors in his pocket", said former FDA commissioner N.C. Venkatachalam..

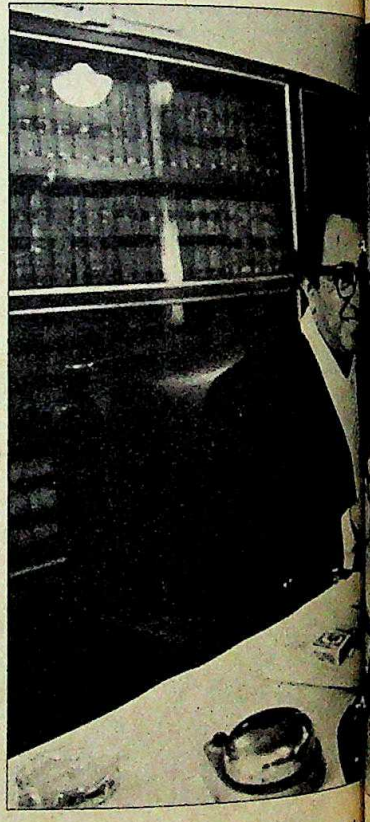
The Justice Bakthawar Lentin Commission was appointed on February 21, 1986—and began proceedings four months later—to inquire into the spate of deaths at the government-run J.J. Hospital in Bombay. In January and February 1986, 14 people died in the hospital after being given glycerine (or glycerol), a routine anti-oedema drug used to combat swellings. The glycerine had contained diethylene glycol, a chemical which k quickly by attacking the kidneys. The f of seven other patients, discharged a similar treatment, is not known. T commission's terms of reference cover just the purchase and handling of drug

JUSTICE LENTIN

"If you think this commission of inquiry does not include ministers, you have missed its whole purpose....This is not merely an inquiry into the deaths of those unfortunate 14 people at the J.J. Hospital. This inquiry is looking into the probity of public office."

"Profiteers who dealt in death in czarist Russia were sent to Siberia. Or were shot. We only hold inquiries."

"We do not know how many have died, how many are crippled for life. We are just playing with people's lives."



"Of all the specimens we have had, he is the most miserable—and he is the joint commissioner."

JUSTICE LENTIN ON S.M. DOLAS, *Joint Commissioner (Drugs) (1985-87)*

the hospital but also the workings of th government drug control machinery.

Lentin, 60, an astute judge known f his trenchant observations, has ruled many crucial cases, including that former chief minister A.R. Antulay. H has turned the inquiry into an exception investigation into the sabotage of th public health system by the very peop appointed to safeguard it. Four witnesse including Dolas and Baliram Hiray, m ister of health from 1980 to 1982, fac perjury proceedings.

But the commission—which has re ived five extensions—has faced seve obstacles: from barefaced lies and con nient memory lapses by politicians a

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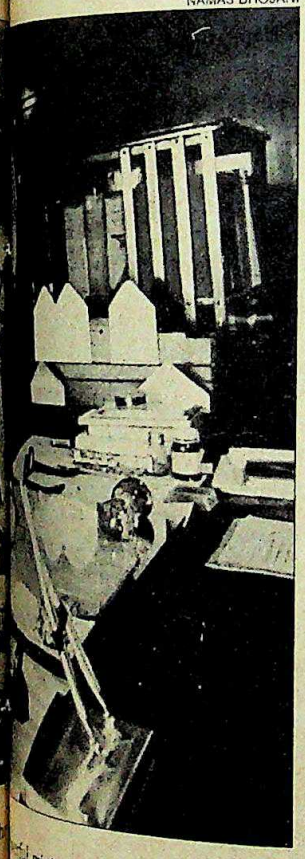
bureaucrats, to a bomb scare, threatening
ers to the counsel, missing files, a pri-
e notice in the Assembly and reported
ngts by Health Minister Bhai Sawant
pose the commission's extension in
next meetings earlier this year.

In fact, when Sawant was faced with
ence of his own complicity in the FDA's
se, he angrily proclaimed from the
ess box that the Government did not
d it as "an inquiry against minis-
Lentin's response was memorable.
u think this commission of inquiry
not include ministers, you have
d its whole purpose," he told the

NAMAS BHOJANI



ed minister, adding: "This is not
y an inquiry into the deaths of those
nmate 14 people at the J.J. Hospital.
inquiry is looking into the probity of
e office and administration in high
s. Sit down, minister!"

es Sawant and Hiray, five former
ers, including the redoubtable Sha-
and ex-chief minister Shivajirao
Nilangekar appeared before Lentin
ver for their patronage of Dolas or
nterference in FDA functioning. The
mission, assisted by counsel Navnit
and I.P. Devadhar, finally finished
ing nearly 4,000 pages of evidence
55 witnesses last month. Often the
was electrifying, receiving detailed

media coverage and packing the court-room to capacity day after day. It was clear that though the glycerine deaths occurred in Bombay, the impact of the FDA's criminal negligence could extend beyond Maharashtra as the state accounts for 40 per cent of the country's annual bulk drug production of Rs 2,139 crore and more than 50 per cent of formulations worth Rs 458 crore.

The FDA violated seven rules under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act to grant a licence in record time to Alpana Pharma Pack, the Nanded-based company which supplied the killer glycerine to J.J. Hospital. Alpana exercises clout with the FDA since behind its small-time owner lurked the figure of Ramanlal Karwa, a well-connected businessman. Large sums of money had even been deposited by Aarti Chem, Karwa's Pune firm, in a bank account operated by R.D. Kulkarni, head of J.J.'s Pharmacology Department and a member of the drug selection committee.

Alpana Pharma had repacked the glycerine to be used medically from drums clearly marked "IW" (industrial white) and "not for medicinal use". Glycerine, a byproduct in soap manufacture, must be 98 per cent pure for medicinal use. But the drums contained just 12 per cent glycerine—the rest was sorbitol and the deadly di-ethylene glycol, used as a drying agent for ink by pen and textile producers. Alpana disregarded the warning on the drums as it is routinely stamped by manufacturers even on pure glycerine containers to avoid stringent Drugs and Cosmetics Act laws. Alpana also had the glycerine certified from Chem Med, an FDA-approved analytical laboratory.

The drums had come to Alpana Pharma through three intermediate suppliers, none of whom has been prosecuted. One supplier admitted that he felt no shock when he heard of the deaths, provoking Lentin to complain: "Profiteers who dealt in death in czarist Russia were sent to Siberia. Or were shot. We are too civilised. We only hold inquiries."

The commission's investigations have uncovered the horrifying spectacle of a watchdog health agency totally surrendering to the manipulations of people like Dolas. As a result of his political patronage, Dolas has managed to remain posted in Bombay for the last 20 years; normally officials get postings for just three years. And the FDA has continued its lawless reign even after agencies from other states like Gujarat and Tamil Nadu complained

The Lentin Commission inquiring into deaths in a Bombay hospital found that:

- The laboratory which passed the glycerine had been warned for false analysis of drugs, but it figures on the approved list.
- The FDA found 5,000 formulations substandard, but they were sold.
- Blank licence renewal forms for drug manufacture had been signed by Dolas, a powerful FDA official.
- 250 drug manufacturers operate without analytical laboratories.
- Dolas compelled FDA officials to collect donations for a trust with which he was associated.
- Another health minister's trust received donations from drug firms.
- An FDA official was transferred four times in a year for pursuing two erring manufacturers.
- An FDA inspector was involved in manufacturing and smuggling a banned drug, but he has been suspended.

"There is no spectacle more ridiculous than an ex-minister mounting a sepulchre of hypocrisy?"

JUSTICE LENTIN TO B. HIRAY, *minister of health (1980–82)*

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about the quality of drugs emanating from the FDA's fiefdom.

Some of the more amazing facts uncovered by the Lentin Commission are:

► Besides Alpana Pharma, 250 other drug units in Maharashtra operate without analytical laboratories. A health secretary forced the FDA to issue notices after the hospital tragedy. But the units continue to manufacture, regardless. An FDA commissioner admitted in court that the agency's inaction was illegal, but justified it as a "policy decision".

► Between January and September 1986, the FDA found 582 formulations sold in the market were substandard, including 119 life-saving drugs. No action has been taken against manufacturers and the formulations continue to be sold in Maharashtra. Some of the guilty are reputed pharmaceutical firms, including multinationals.

► Though 300 formulations were found substandard between February and July 1987, no action has followed. Nearly a quarter of the 5,000 formulations found substandard are still sold.

► Blank licence renewal forms for manufacturing drugs, signed by Dolas, were produced in court.

► In rare instances where the FDA did enforce the law, ministers stepped in to save manufacturers. The Bombay-based Cyma Pharma was charged with making substandard drugs—chloramphenicol used for treating typhoid, and cymastrep for diarrhoea. Two show-cause notices to the firm, followed by the cancellation of its licence were simply ignored. Later, the FDA mysteriously qualified its orders, prohibiting Cyma Pharma from manufacturing only the two substandard drugs. But after the firm appealed to Sawant, even this order was cancelled, as the firm had "suffered enough punishment".

► An FDA assistant commissioner alleged that the agency's officials were forced by Dolas to collect donations for the Rural Upliftment Organisation, a trust with which Sawant is associated.

► Another assistant commissioner earned the wrath of Govind Sarnayak—health minister in the '70s—and was transferred four times in one year for pursuing two manufacturers who violated the law. In one case, oxytetracycline vials meant for animals were passed off for human use by changing the labels, while in the other, spurious Novalgin tablets and sulphadiazine—a life-saving anti-bacterial drug—were supplied. Confronted with evidence, Sarnayak's standard response was: "I remember nothing."

► Prosecution of a manufacturer for selling substandard tetracycline and zinc oxide powder was withdrawn after Hiray's intervention. A trust run by Hiray, who was at different times both health and prohibition minister, received donations from beer bars, liquor vendors, distilleries and many drug companies, including multinationals.

Faced with evidence of his complicity in the FDA's collapse, Health Minister Sawant has reportedly opposed extension to the Lentin Commission.

► The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence found an FDA inspector involved in making and smuggling Mandrax, a banned drug. The inspector was close to a minister—he has only been suspended.

► Chemists of Apex Laboratories, a government-approved unit, complained to the FDA that the public analytical laboratory issued reports without testing drugs. Investigations by the assistant commissioner in charge of the state's 30 analytical laboratories revealed that Apex had given "false, incomplete, misleading and imaginary reports" relating to 23 drugs. But the official sheepishly told the court that Apex had not been prosecuted since "there was no precedence (for prosecution) even in cases of serious offences endangering lives".

► Before the tragedy, Chem Med, the laboratory which had passed the deadly glycerine, had been warned five times for false analysis. In two instances where it passed life-saving drugs, complaints were received from government analysts in Calcutta, Madras and Srinagar. Yet Chem Med remained on the approved list, with the owner confessing he kept FDA officials happy by "inviting them for dinner parties or by giving them presents".

► Dolas' family procured interests in drug firms and approvals to make new drugs. But the Government was not informed as required. While his daughter Anuradha was made a partner in Ferrico Laboratories, Panvel in 1979, Dolas' father became a partner in Ferrico Pharmaceuticals, Bombay, in 1970. This share was inherited by Kalpana, another daughter, in 1984. The unlimited powers of patronage Dolas enjoyed in the FDA provoked Lentin to dub the agency the "Father Dolas Administration".

No less scandalous has been the state Government's lackadaisical response to the plethora of charges. Sawant continues as health minister. And though following protests, he transferred Dolas, it was to an equally powerful post, as the joint commissioner (food).

That the FDA hasn't reformed its ways was brought out dramatically when Lentin visited its offices and laboratory last fortnight. He found that scores of companies, including habitual offenders, are allowed to sell substandard drugs. Cyma Pharma's name appeared again in the FDA's register—described by Lentin as the "murder book"—for substandard products. As late as July 7, streptomycin samples were found to be sub-therapeutic, and a risk to patients' lives. Another habitual offender, Deen Pharmaceuticals, was registered in the FDA's book for supplying intravenous glucose and eye drops containing visible suspended matter.

"What the devil is the Government doing? What is the FDA up to? How is Cyma Pharma still in business? This whole commission of inquiry is a waste of time," remarked a despairing Lentin. "We do not know how many have died, how many hundreds are crippled for life. We are just playing with people's lives." Shockingly, in spite of Lentin's dogged pursuit, it has begun to seem that the merchants of death will remain free to play their diabolical games.

—M. RAHMAN

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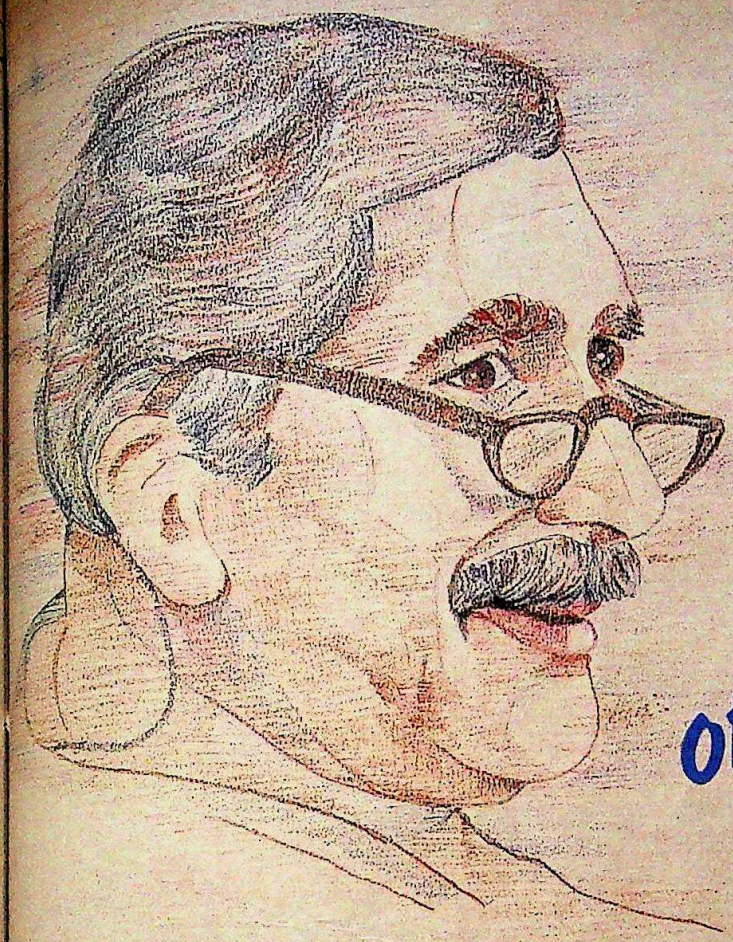
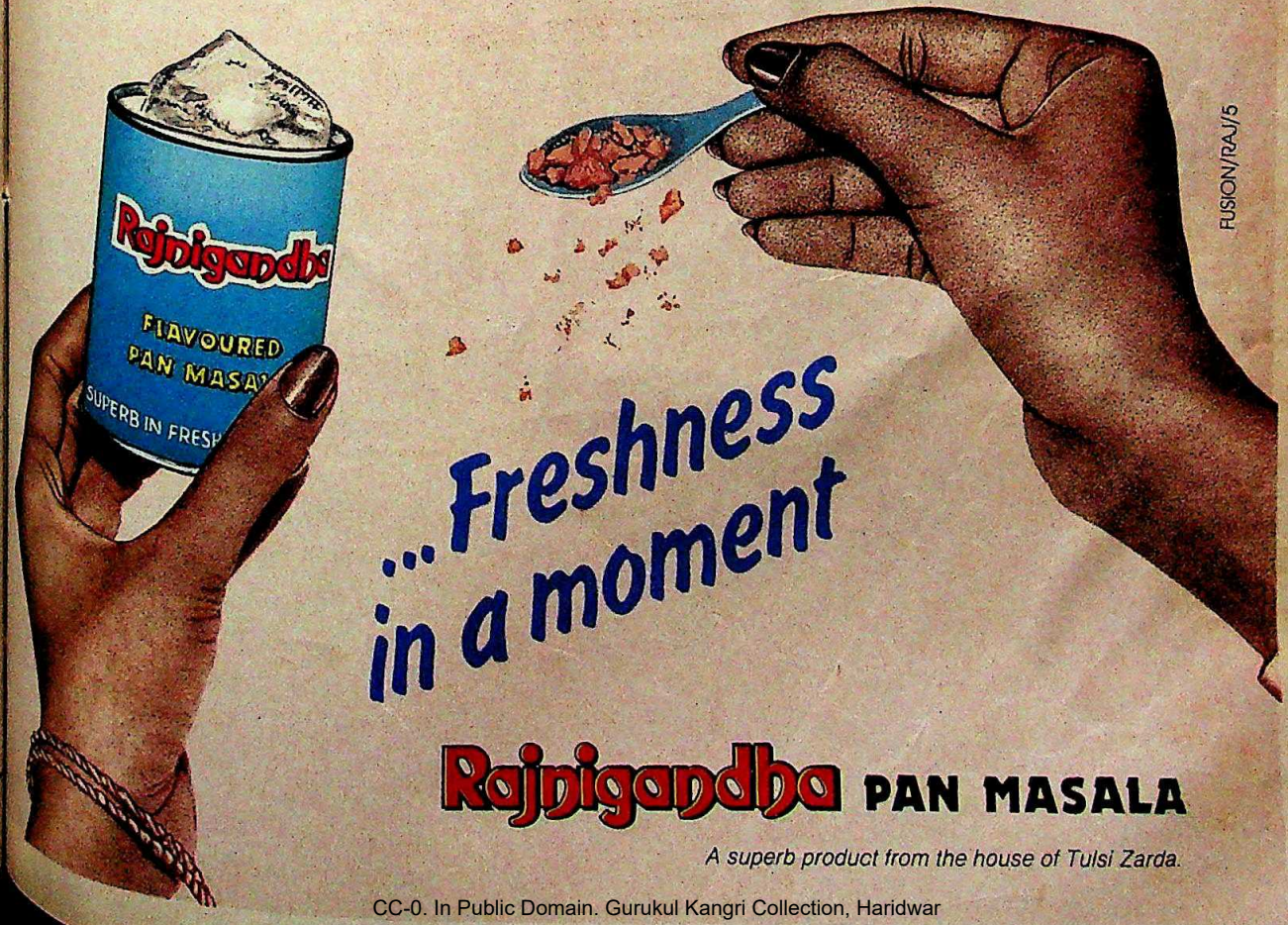


A moment of freshness...



...Freshness in a moment

FUSION/RAJ/5

Rajnigandha PAN MASALA

A superb product from the house of Tulsi Zarda.

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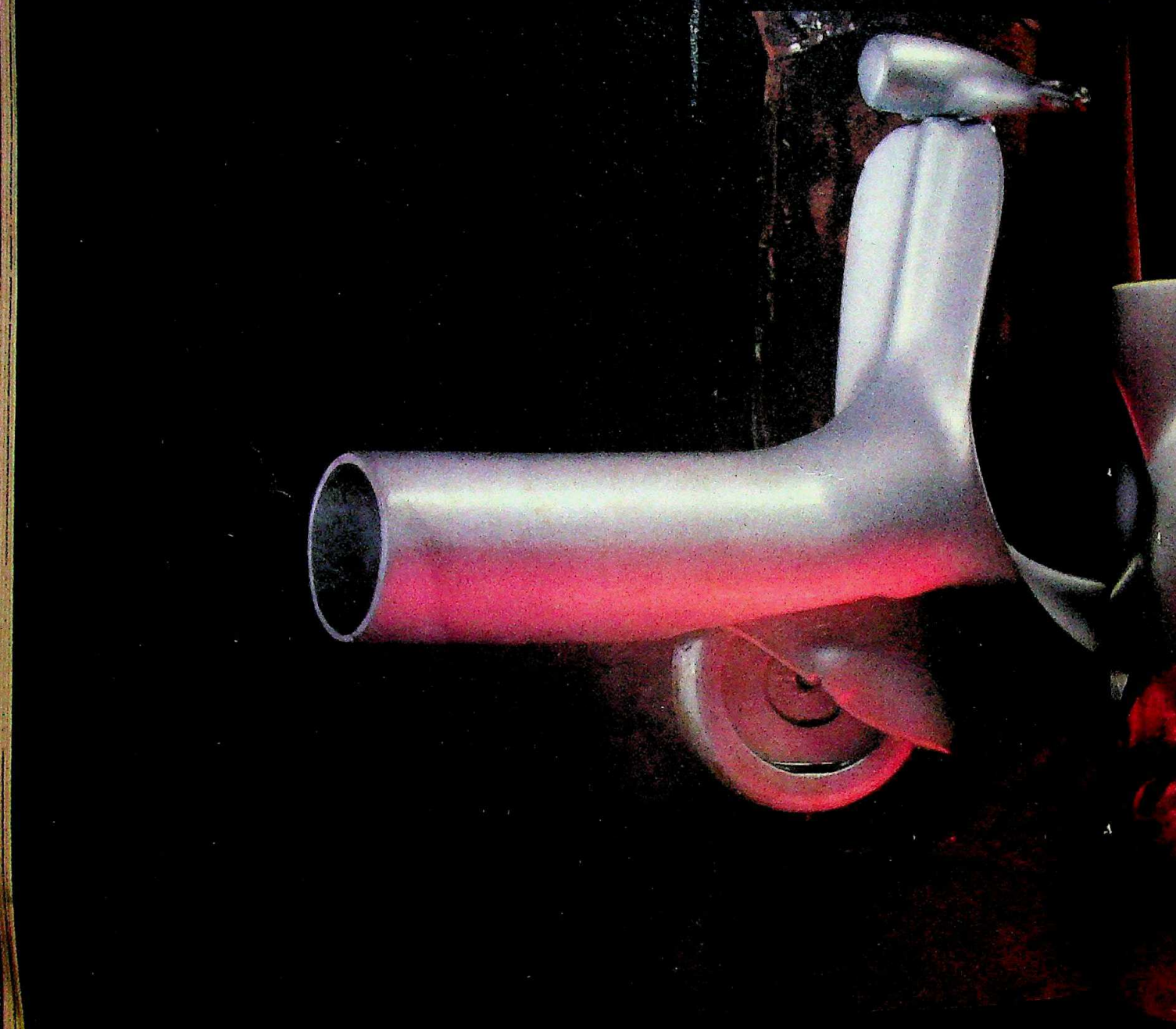
FROM A STEEL TUBE CAME S
THE VEHICLE OF TITUR



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FROM A THE

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ichkar: rare degree

le and, as he saw it: "To me a great politician you to be well informed about spects of life."

e scholar-politician's for knowledge" has ea- him degrees as diverse as BBS, MD, MBA, LLM, and s ranging from Sociology Sanskrit—with first class ts in eight of them—all m Nagpur University. "I only in the process of ac- iring the essence from a itless ocean of knowledge," says. That's really qualify- g to rule with a vengeance.

◆ Life is now, well, a desi baret. Spelt with a K. From t lady *Evita* to the perky oner of pre-world-war-two rlin—penned by Christo- er Isherwood and now apted from the Broadway hit adman husband **Alyque Pa- nsee—Sharon Prabhakar** ll have a short break indeed. t to have a baby. The hus- nd-wife duo will deliver *Ka- baret* a few months la- ter. Meanwhile, Pa- damsee (with his 60th play, and his long *desi*-musi- cals trail: *Jesus Christ Super- star, Evita, Tarantula Tanzi*) will

write the songs. "It will different from the Broadwa version... it will be given Indian touch—with humo and sex-appeal," he says. Mo ey—and sex-appeal—mak the theatrical world go round

◆ At 48, **Dr Subramania Swamy** was a politician search of a cause. He had r out of parties to hop to: from true saffron Jan Sanghwa to an errant Janata Pa member, to Ajit Singh's tu bledown Lok Dal. He had r out of constituencies: he lo his deposit in the 1984 Lo Sabha elections from Bombay. Then, he found his cause: th injustice of the Muslim killings in Meerut. So, Swamy lay o New Delhi's Boat Club lawns with a table fan for company and went on a hunger strike— unto death—to demand Central inquiry into the affair.

For five days, the shepherd

BHAWAN SINGH

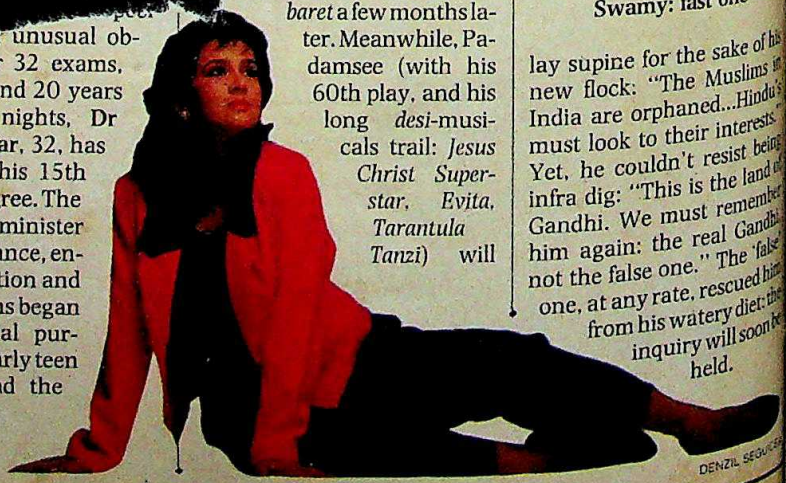
Swamy: fast one

lay supine for the sake of his new flock: "The Muslims in India are orphaned...Hindu must look to their interests." Yet, he couldn't resist being infra dig: "This is the land o Gandhi. We must remember him again: the real Gandhi not the false one." The 'false' one, at any rate, rescued him from his watery diet: the inquiry will soon be held.

◆ Who'd imagine that a name like that would have a body like this? She was named Bhaktawar Khan when born. But it's as **Sonam** that she plans to conquer the silver screen. Discovered by Yash Chopra, the 14-year-old baby doll, bountifully endowed, is Bollywood's current rage. "What impressed me most was her hard-working nature," gushed Chopra, about her less obvious attributes.

Sonam has 15 films on

an unusual obsession. After 32 exams, 135 papers, and 20 years of sleepless nights, **Dr Srikant Jichkar**, 32, has now earned his 15th university degree. The Maharashtra minister of state for finance, energy, information and public relations began his intellectual pursuit with an early teen dream to lead the



Prabhakar: crooning on

DENZIL SEQUEIRA

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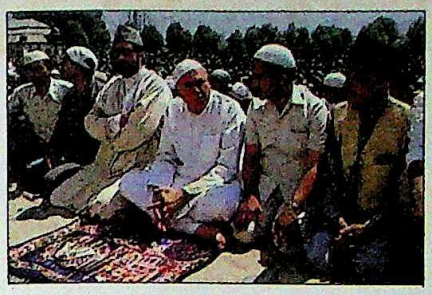
Devastating Drought

Despite last fortnight's rainfall, the devastation caused by the failure of this year's monsoon is horrific and unprecedented. In 21 states, the drought has ruined the kharif crop and affected the livelihood of millions of peasants struggling for survival.

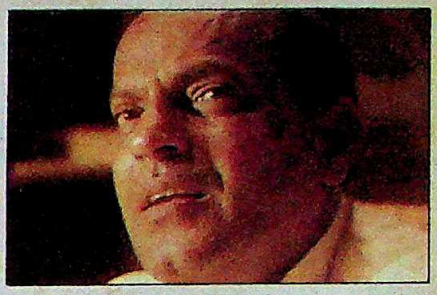
COVER STORY 28



Farooq Under Fire

Farooq Abdullah's coalition government has begun to show dangerous signs of wear and tear barely five months after being voted into power in Kashmir. Its failures and charges of corruption are causing new political tensions and realignments in the state.

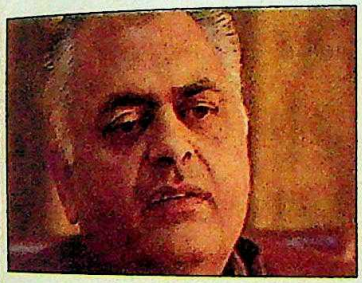
SPECIAL REPORT 42



Shock and Resignation

With the resignation last fortnight of Sanjay Singh, Uttar Pradesh government minister, dissidence in the state came out into the open. The rebellion strengthened the position of the V.P. Singh faction, while it weakened the Bir Bahadur Singh Government.

SPECIAL REPORT 74



Unresolved Tangle

Though the Government tabled its correspondence with Bofors in Parliament, the investigation ordered in Sweden promises further revelations. Meanwhile, the Swiss Government appears more willing to cooperate—if the Indian side makes the right moves.

SPECIAL FEATURE 80

Coping with Peace

As Sri Lanka's northern province returned to normalcy last fortnight, there were scenes of jubilation and relief. But four years of strife has taken a terrible physical and psychological toll and many hurdles still remain in the way of the implementation of the accord.

NEIGHBOURS 126

Political Potboilers

Art and life are crossing paths more often in today's films. Politics is the new theme that is inspiring Bombay's film producers and drawing in the crowds. The new villain is the goonda-politician. And the law is of the jungle. A report on the new formula.

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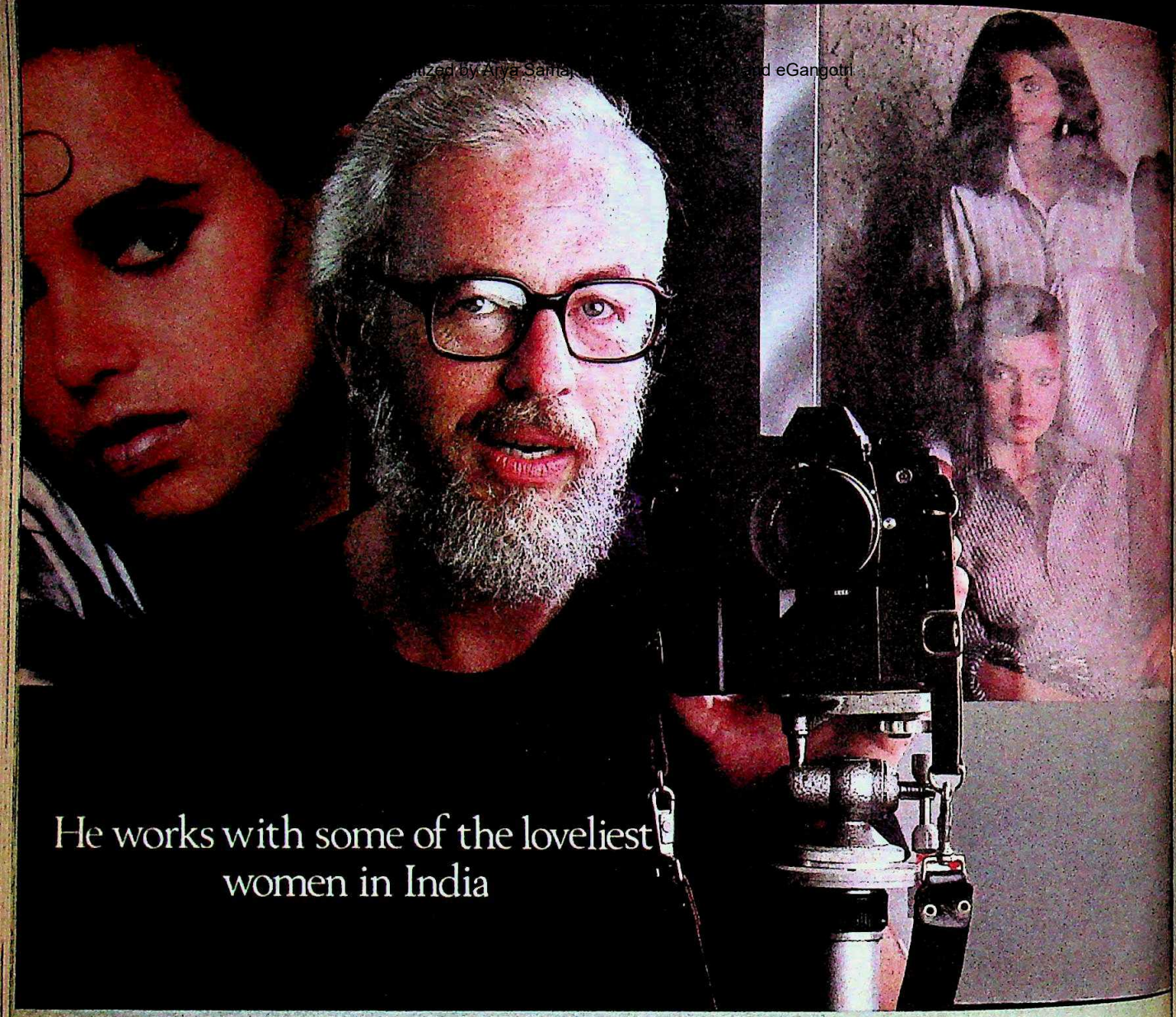

He works with some of the loveliest women in India

One photograph by Glamour Photographer Adrian Steven, says more about a beautiful woman than a thousand words.

Adrian transforms the fashion model from a mere clotheshorse to a warm, intelligent, exciting woman, one who celebrates the glamorous life. That she is beautiful to boot merely adds to her desirability.

With what does Adrian work his wizardry?

A battery of cameras, though his favourite format is the 35mm, which he says gives him the sharpest results.

I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica color film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film, Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

Konica
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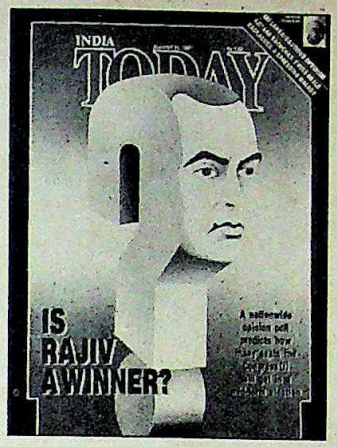

REVEALING POLL

The opinion poll on the electoral prospects of the Rajiv Government ("Battered Victor", August 31) is a clear signal that his days are limited. With the corruption issue carrying on and with further resignations and expulsions of party members, the political scene forebodes a decisive change.

New Delhi — **V. SAGAR**

■ It is incredible that despite all the scandals of the Rajiv Government, the rural electorate, by and large, still backs him. The reason is that there is no credible alternative to the Congress(I).

New Delhi — **PUNEET RAJHANS**

■ It is true that there may not be a national alternative to the Congress(I). However, much can happen before the next general elections, especially if the prime minister's credibility continues its downhill slide.

Dhakrani village, Dehradun — **J.D. DAYAL**

■ You credit V.P. Singh with making corruption the central issue in today's politics. But arms deals and kickbacks did not begin only in 1987. Yet, he did nothing about bringing up this issue in Mrs Gandhi's administration. One must not forget that he's also guided by political compulsions.

NOIDA — **RAJNI MENON**

■ This innovative poll will make a positive contribution to the cause of democracy in India. The venture was marvellously objective and above prejudice.

Kanyakumari — **G. DAVID MILTON**

UNRULY LEADERS

It is shocking to read your account of the wild charges traded by members of Parliament. ("Dangerous Decline", August 31). The disrespect for the speaker and the cacophony of debates in the nation's highest forum is distressing. Parliamentary proceedings should be immediately and strictly reviewed. The members should not be allowed to make a spectacle of themselves and our democracy.

Chandigarh — **SANJEEV K. SINGLA**

■ Your editorial is an eye-opener on the present day affairs in Parliament. The unruly behaviour of MPs is highly deplorable, and the tactics of the Opposition uncooperative. The issues arising in Parliament must be settled amicably and through proper coordination between the ruling party and the Opposition to regain its dignified atmosphere.

Hyderabad — **VIPPIN CHANDRA**

UNIVERSAL PAIN

Considering the problem of backaches is so pervasive in the country ("A Spreading Malady", August 31), concerned government departments should publish material enlisting preventive measures. This is the only way to make the public aware of the problem before it assumes dangerous proportions.

Agra — **SANJAY E. SILAS**

■ The story is well-presented and reflects the problem of the average Indian. The stress placed by you on regular, light exercise is the correct advice to all.

Kanpur — **SANJIV NAND**

IMPENDING DISASTER

The drought problem ("Heading for Calamity", August 31) must be seen from the environmental point of view, in terms of an ecological disaster that is man-made. Instead of wasting time over defence deals and other scandals, the Government must speedily try and help the victims of nature. Our opposition must send teams to their constituencies—rather than to Sweden—where their people need them most in their dark hour. After all, the Government is supposed to be FOR the people.

New Delhi — **BHARATI CHATURVEDI**

SCOPE FOR HOPE

Your article on Sri Lanka ("Cautious Optimism", August 31) made interesting reading. Kudos to both Rajiv and Jayewardene for bringing about this historic accord. Both countries must try whole-heartedly to make it work as this

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will further heighten the objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement.
Bhopal SANJEEV RAINA

CAR CRAZE

In "Driving into Trouble" (August 31) you have used interesting fuel efficiency figures to show that Indians have been bitten by the 'like foreign car' craze. But before we take the technology jump from the Ambassador/Fiat psyche into this world of fast and slick cars, we should polish up our driving techniques, which leave much to be desired.
Bhopal MAJOR SUKHWANT SINGH

FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE

Your article ("The Challengers", August 15) is proof that the magic of the Congress(I) will not work for ever. To steer his party away from the current crisis, Rajiv has to realign his priorities. And first on the list must be revelation of the truth of the Bofors deal.
Delhi NAVNEET CHAWLA

■ Kudos to Ajit Ninan on his work of art on Rajiv Gandhi. Even Picasso wouldn't have been able to put the prime minister's plight in better focus.
Pune PARESH PAREKH

■ "Anger and Confusion" (August 15), attributes to Elizabeth Kubler Ross, three extended stages in terminally ill patients. Ross, however, mentions not three, but five stages of dying. And resigned acceptance is the fifth and may be just the result of giving up. But the comparison with the present day political situation as made in the article is tenuous. One has to work it out in some detail before applying it to the present political situation. Presented otherwise, it smacks of pop psycho-journalism.
KEM Hospital, Bombay DR AJAR SINGH

RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

Your comment ("The Credibility Question", August 15) was well-timed. Though an independent press is a must for a developing democracy like ours, it is imperative that it is also responsible.
Muzaffarpur HARESHWAR SHARMA

PEACE MEASURES

Rajiv Gandhi certainly seems to have a penchant for signing accords ("Accord Discord", August 15), irrespective of their successful implementation. With the developments that have followed the signing of the Sri Lankan agreement, peace appears to be elusive in Sri Lanka.
Hoshiarpur BHASKAR RAO

CLEARING DOUBTS

"The Dragon's Teeth" (August 15) should clear the mist of disinformation created by Chinese spokesmen that there was no mobilisation of Chinese armed forces in Tibet. It is strange, that India should talk with China when this country's claim on Arunachal Pradesh is based on the treaty signed between British India and Tibet in 1914.
Dharamsala TASHI PHUNTSOK

JUST DESERVES

"Taking on a Titan" (August 15) was a story worth writing. It is only just that OTIS is not allowed to get away with the callousness it has shown to Chitra Jayaraman. Companies like OTIS must be made to take heed of the consumer.
Calcutta J. RAM

STARRY STORY

The report on the miraculous return of macho-star Vinod Khanna ("A Star Return", August 15) was interesting. Khanna's return from sanyas is timely —he can be the new super star.
Bangalore C.S. NAGESH KUMAR

■ A story on Vinod Khanna is not in good taste. He is not a fine actor, only a media-made pretender.
Calcutta RAJNISH ROY CHOWDHURY

LONE HOPE

Usha's performance ("Usha Does it Again", August 15) was heartening. But it is not fair to depend on this lone woman to bring in the laurels for the country. Once she and a few other women like her quit, what will happen to Indian appearances in international meets?
Bombay ROBIN PALARAMB

■ Regarding the article on the Asian athletics meet in Singapore you wrongly state that India won the silver in the women's 1,600 m quartet. India won the gold in the 4x400 m women's relay, and clinched the silver in the 4x100 m women's relay.
Nainital SOM PANDEY

The error is regretted. —Editor

GOOD SPORT

India's victory against Israel in the Davis Cup ("Proving a Point", August 15) is a victory for those who believe that sports and politics are different subjects. By playing, we have done our bit to make the world a nicer place than what it is being made out.
Gwalior KAMLESH PRASAD

REAL REASON

In your story ("Telephones: The Model Revolution", August 15), you have quoted me as saying that "the Centre had charged each individual Rs 1.2 lakh for the privilege of just attending an EPABX conference at a five-star hotel in the capital—and 48 people paid the money".

However, this amount was not the charge for attendance but for the first instalment towards the Technology Transfer agreement for the C-DOT EPABX design.
New Delhi SAM PITRODA, C-DOT

IN ABEYANCE

The monsoons ("The Long Wait", August 15) are still eluding us. In some parts of Maharashtra, moisture bearing clouds pass through without releasing a drop of water. Meteorologists should suggest scientific ways to make some rain possible in such parts, instead of collecting information with only academic interest.
Manmad, Maharashtra S.R. CHITALE

■ With the deluge in the North-east, West Bengal and Bihar, it is not correct to conclude that the country is experiencing the weakest monsoon in five years. The volume of monsoon clouds over the country always remains constant. Will someone please find a way to propitiate El Nino so that the clouds are spread more evenly?
Shillong S. LYNGDOH

STAR CROSSED

"The Asian Stars" (July 31), are not Asian stars, but British stars of Asian origin. Your story need not have been so sympathetic. A report packed with information on their bleak future would have been sufficient. More reports on other important issues like the north-south divide in the recent elections would be most welcome.
Birmingham, UK AJIT RAMCHANDANI

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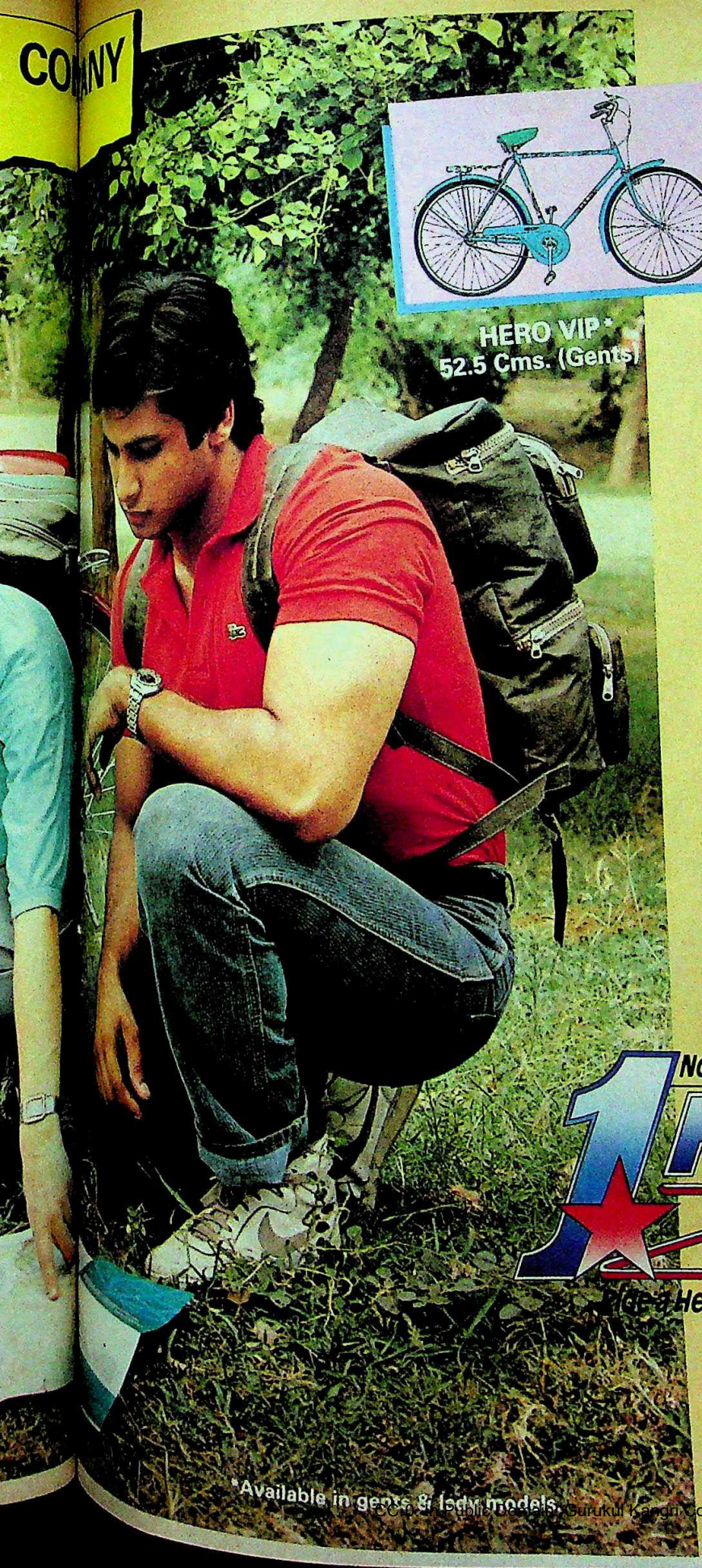

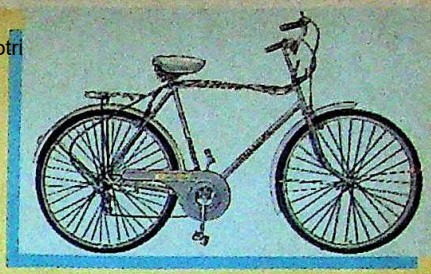

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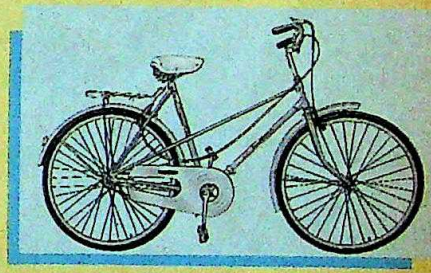

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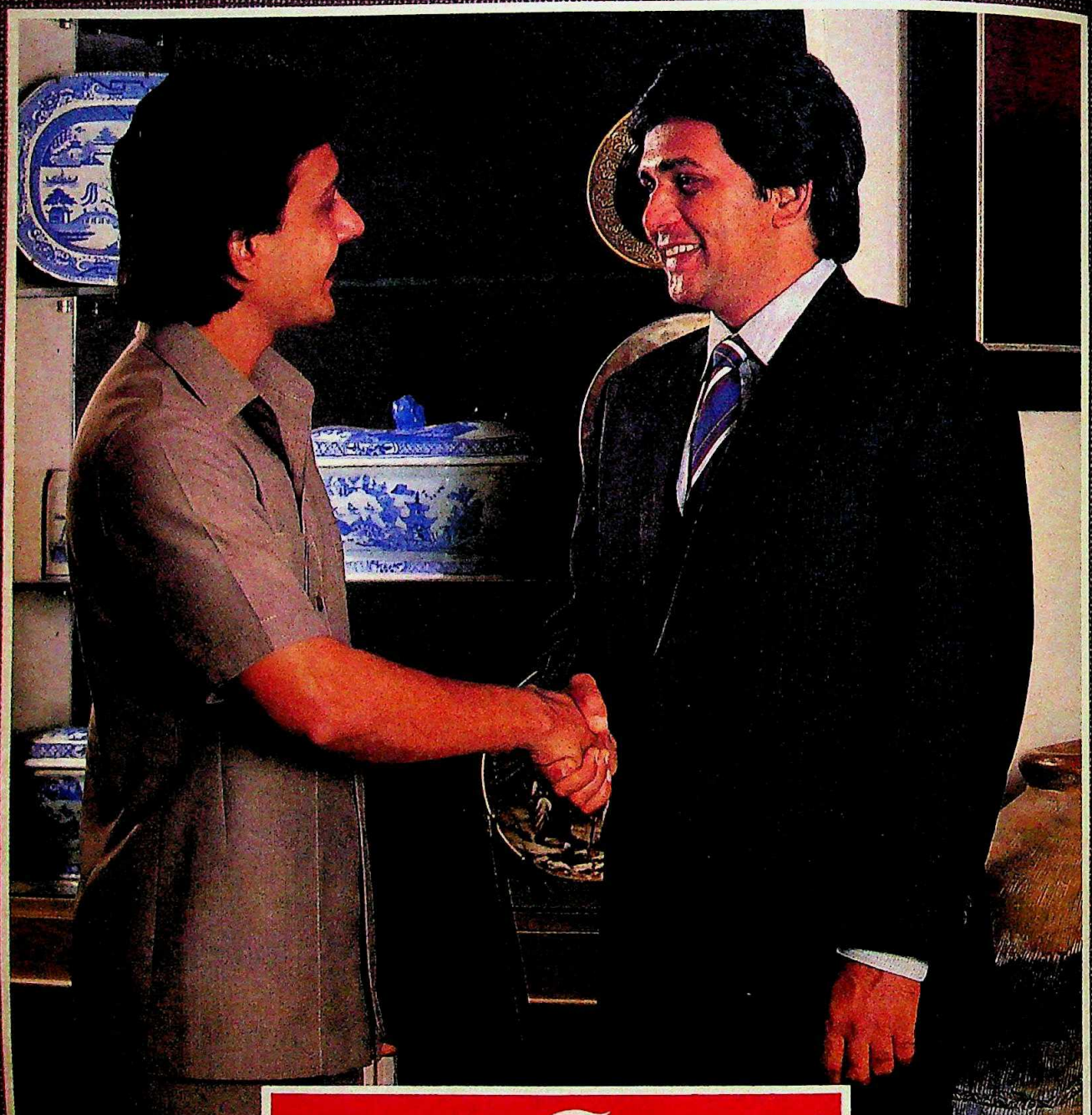

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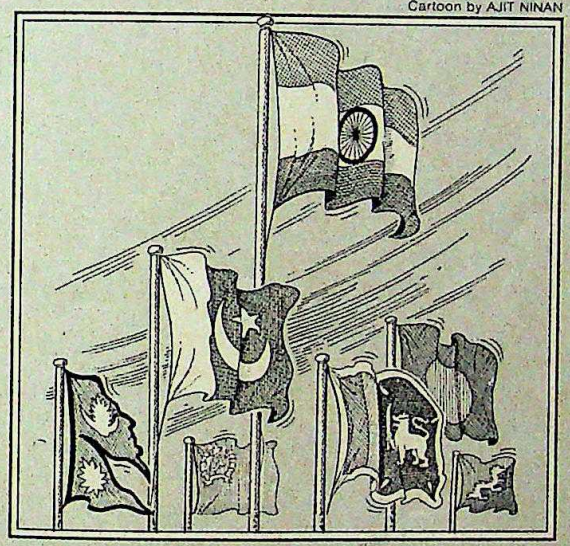
Assertive India

EVENTS of the past couple of weeks have made it clear that some of the doubts about the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, signed by Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayewardene, were well-founded. Nevertheless, the point needs to be stressed that the accord is a watershed in India's diplomatic history, indeed in the south Asian region as a whole, and should be recognised as such. Commentators have drawn parallels with the United States' Monroe doctrine of the early 19th century—when the US told the colonial powers of Europe that they should keep their hands off the Americas. Today, the accord is being seen as a signal from India to the rest of the world that it is the dominant regional power. In turn, most of India's neighbours are sure to get the message that they cannot expect to thumb their noses at India and play external powers against it—as Sri Lanka has tried to do in the last couple of years.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Viewed against the earlier backdrop of a weak diplomatic stance (Rajiv Gandhi's initial attempts at being the 'nice neighbour' were only taken advantage of), the assertion of India's size, local presence and power is to be welcomed, and was perhaps inevitable. What was seen in June as a somewhat unnecessary violation of Sri Lankan air space (for the relief mission) now stands out as a deliberate—and effective—message being sent to Colombo, that Sri Lanka would have to deal with India if it expected to solve its ethnic problem.

But any assertion on the lines of the Monroe doctrine (though Rajiv has not spelt it out in the manner that the US President James Monroe did in 1823) will have its limitations, because Pakistan will refuse to pay heed and India can do little if Pakistan chooses, for instance, to give defence facilities to the US. So the Indian doctrine will have to be moderated into a realistic policy stance that can be credibly maintained. In this context, a border pact with China (and one may well be on the cards) could significantly alter the balance of tensions and help isolate an intransigent Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the initial success has been almost surprisingly smooth in that the international response has been largely positive. Neither the US nor Britain has been critical; indeed, the US was not really critical of the air drop either. This is a significant diplomatic triumph, and reflects effective backroom diplomacy plus good timing, as with the US' preoccupations with the Iran-Contra affair and the problems in keeping the Gulf open to sea traffic, a weakened Reagan Administration may not have wanted to take on a fresh commitment. Whatever the reasons, the success establishes that the major world powers recognise India's pre-eminent position in most of the region. Afghanistan may still have Soviet forces present, and the Indian Ocean may show little promise of being a 'zone of peace', but the new plus points for India are obvious in Sri Lanka itself. Colombo's search for other allies (including Pakistan, Israel and outfits like the British Keeny Meeny Services) has ended, and it will now look to India for the help it has so far been seeking elsewhere. More important, such potential dangers as Trincomalee port coming under the control of powers from outside the region have been averted.

Nevertheless, the dangers are all too apparent. The Monroe doctrine was attractive in the Americas 164 years ago because it was seen as an anti-colonial step. The situation in south Asia today can be interpreted likewise, but if India's neighbours see it as merely an Indian gambit to establish its hegemony to the detriment of all the other countries in the region, there will be a backlash sooner than later. Bangladesh was handled badly, and India's relationship with the country it helped create has been prickly. The dangers today in Sri Lanka are even greater, because it is already a divided country and because Indian armed forces seem likely to be in the Tamil-speaking areas for some time.

Indeed, both Pakistan and Bangladesh have protested against the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. But Pakistan's pique is understandable because a developing axis with Colombo has been severed, and matters are being explained to Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the entire gameplan could come unstuck if the Indo-Sri Lanka pact fails. And clearly, matters are not proceeding as smoothly as might have been hoped.

The attack on Rajiv Gandhi at a guard of honour in Colombo, as well as the grenade attack on Jayewardene and others in the Sri Lankan Parliament building (both incidents involving security personnel) reflect the depth of feeling on the Sinhala side even as the emergency provisions have had to be extended and press censorship continued. Meanwhile, the Tamil Tigers remain reluctant participants in a situation that is not of their choosing. And if the Indian Army stays on for very long—having already stayed beyond Jayewardene's public deadline of August 15—it can quickly be criticised as an alien occupation army whose presence builds hostility.

But even if events move well in Sri Lanka, the new situation will demand a great deal more from India in terms of diplomacy, political management, sensitivity to the other countries' concerns and problems, and a specific and carefully thought out strategy to ensure that the other countries do not see India as an unwelcome Big Brother in the neighbourhood. The objective should be to be of help when needed, without being overbearing. Without effective back-up, what might be termed a Rajiv doctrine will be in no better shape than some of the domestic accords that he has signed.

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Turf Tussle

● As bureaucratic turf battles go, the most interesting one now developing is over the formation of a Communications Commission, along the lines of the Atomic Energy Commission. The two gladiators are the secretaries in the department of electronics (K.P.P.Nambiar) and commu-

nications (D.K.Sangal). Nambiar (in his previous avatar as head of Indian Telephone Industries) was under Sangal's tutelage, and now sees an opportunity to cut Sangal and his department down to size. Caught in between is Sam Pitroda, who has the prime minister's ear on communication matters and who is slated to be chairman of the Communications Commission.

Pitroda's original proposal—backed by Nambiar—was that the department of communications should be made a part of, or subservient to, the new commission. But Sangal (anxious to protect his department's stature) suggested instead that the commission should have only an advisory role, and that the department should be restructured on the lines of the railway board (which means promotions for bureaucrats in the department).

Pitroda is willing to compromise, but the two bureaucrats will not. Even a meeting called by Cabinet Secretary B.G.Deshmukh has not been able to sort out matters.

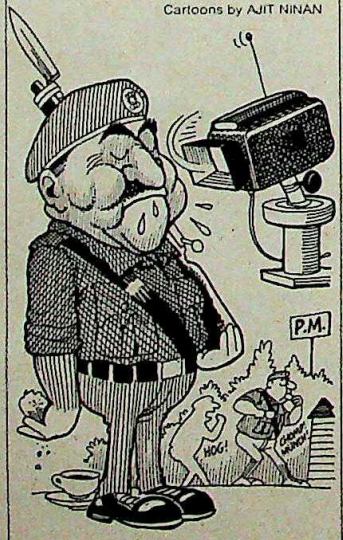
Security Snack

● The prime minister's elaborate security apparatus outside his Race Course Road residence is, after all, human and needs a tea and samosa break every now and then. But untimely snacking is a strict no-no for the prime minister's protectors who must remain unflaggingly chin-up and gung-ho throughout duty hours.

An additional deterrent is that the guards are regularly scanned by specially-installed television cameras that move left and right, relaying the action into a monitoring room within the compound of the prime minister's residence.

But some of the guards, obviously stricken by uncontrollable tea-pangs, have found a novel way to beat the tell-tale eyes of the roving cameras whose motion is visi-

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



ble from the guard posts. As soon as they see the camera lense swing away from them, they reach for their tea and samosas and begin munching and slurping. But when the camera pans back on them, they snap to attention, sometimes with bulging cheeks.

Accord Adjunct

● One of the unwritten—and unannounced—Indian imperatives behind the Indo-Sri Lanka accord was to break a budding military and commercial relationship between Colombo and Islamabad.

In the last few months, several Pakistani military advisers had been trooping into

Colombo and Sri Lankan soldiers were being trained in Pakistani camps.

But the new accord has given Pakistan's Colombo card a rude jolt. The military advisers have been sent back and in future Sri Lankan troops will be trained in India.

South Block has been quick to capitalise on the commercial vacuum created by Islamabad's over-confidence in its relationship with Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government had asked Pakistan to supply anti-riot equipment like tear gas cannisters and rubber bullets. But Pakistan had failed to deliver even four months after the order was placed. Soon after the accord, Sri Lanka asked India if it could supply the same equipment. A foreign office request for speedy delivery was honoured within 24 hours.

Similarly, a Sri Lankan requirement for 500 buses to replace those burned during the pre-accord riots may now go to an Indian company, through the Indian Government and not to a Pakistan-based company as would have been the case earlier.

Tact Act

● During the last Cabinet mini-reshuffle, Rajiv Gandhi was able to achieve one thing—end the constant bickering between ministers, Shiv Shanker and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

In their previous positions, Shanker as commerce minister and Das Munshi as his minister of state, the two had warred constantly. They had even gone to the extent of compiling secret dossiers on one another and passing them on to the prime minister. But the latest reallocation of portfolios has nipped a potential problem in the bud.

A reluctant Shanker was moved out and given three portfolios—law, planning and programme implementation—in order to placate him and to dispel the impression that he had been demoted. Das

Munshi stayed in place but in order to control him, Finance Minister N.D. Tiwari was given the additional charge of commerce. Tiwari, a known backroom operator, is now reportedly making sure that Das Munshi's wings remain clipped.

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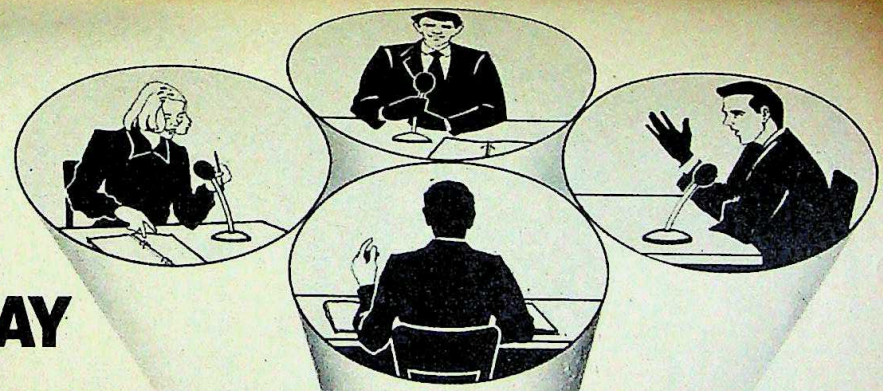

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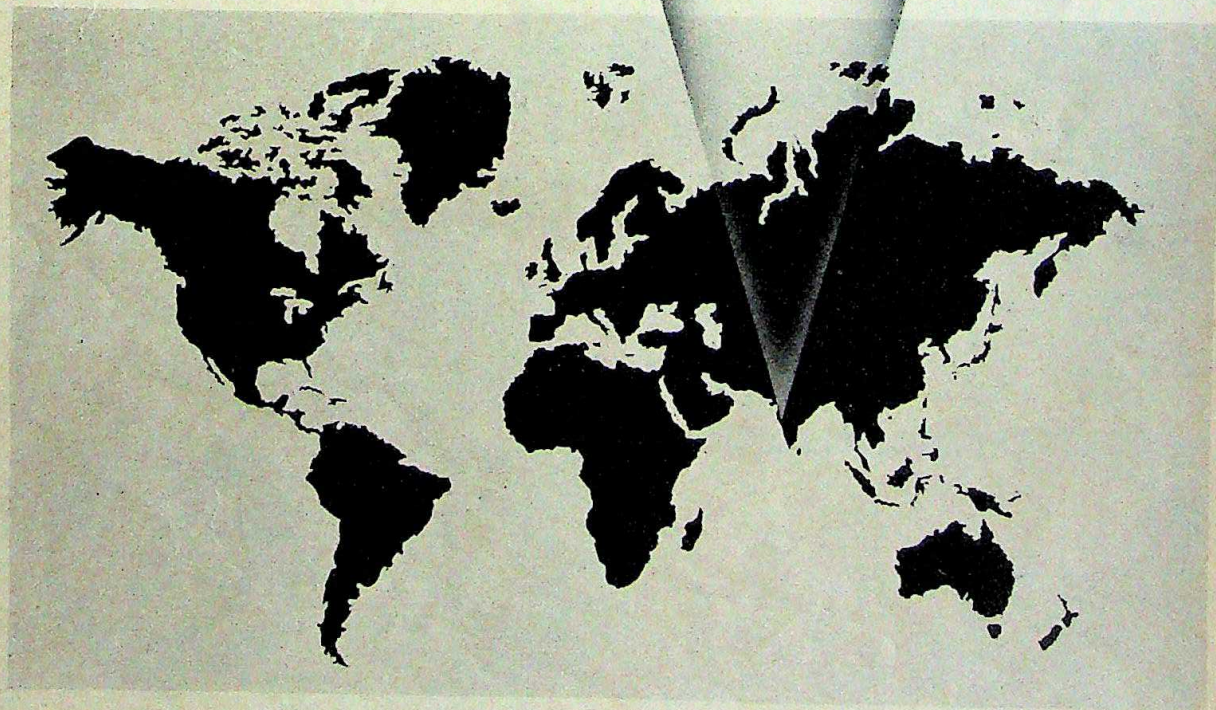

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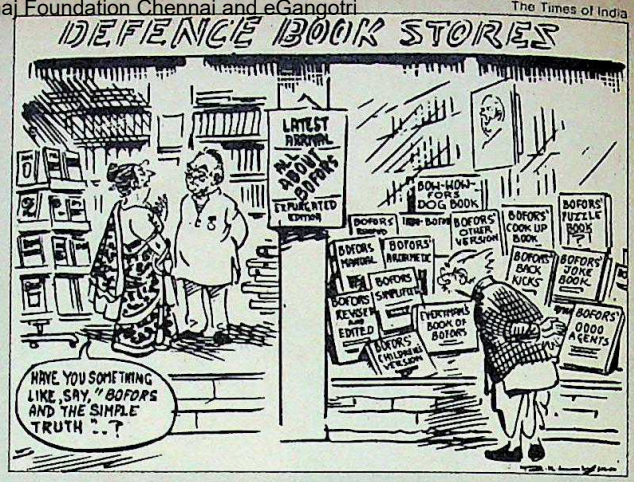

● *I had always thought that the* CPI(M) *was an ideological party. I really don't know what to say now. I do not know whether they are following V.P. Singh's economic policy or Arun Nehru's economic policy or even Arif's.*

■ Prime Minister RAJIV GANDHI in an informal chat with reporters

● *Forty years of Independence have shown not that the country is too big to be governed—only that its people are too independent to be governed badly.*

■ Cover story on India in *Newsweek*

● *They (the militants) are still young. They have not been able to tell a well-wisher from an enemy.*

■ DARSHAN SINGH RAGI commenting on why the militants turned against him in *The Sunday Observer*

● *I have blood on the left shoulder of my coat which I shall keep as a memento of an occasion on which another attempt was made to destroy the parliamentary democratic system of our country.*

■ Sri Lankan President J.R. JAYEWARDENE after the Colombo assassination attempt

● *It was wrong on their (the Bachchans) part to have involved the prime minister, to have dragged in his name. Prime ministers cannot afford the luxury of special relationships.*

■ ARUN NEHRU in *Sunday*

● *People are becoming aware of corruption at the highest level. But this awareness has to be translated into some kind of a movement.*

■ V.P. SINGH quoted in *Time*

● *The manner in which Pranab Mukherjee has now chosen to disband the organisation in the hope of being taken back into the fold that threw him out, underlines an absence of disunity that is remarkable even for opportunistic and sycophantic Congressmen.*

■ Editorial in *The Statesman*

● *Gavaskar cannot call Kapil a bad captain in his book and a good captain in his column.*

■ AJIT WADEKAR, former captain of the Indian cricket team, quoted in *Indian Express*

● *If a pilot can become prime minister, why can't a film star?*

■ SHATRUGHAN SINHA in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *In show business, you're actually paid to act like a monkey.*

■ AMRITA SINGH in *Filmfare*

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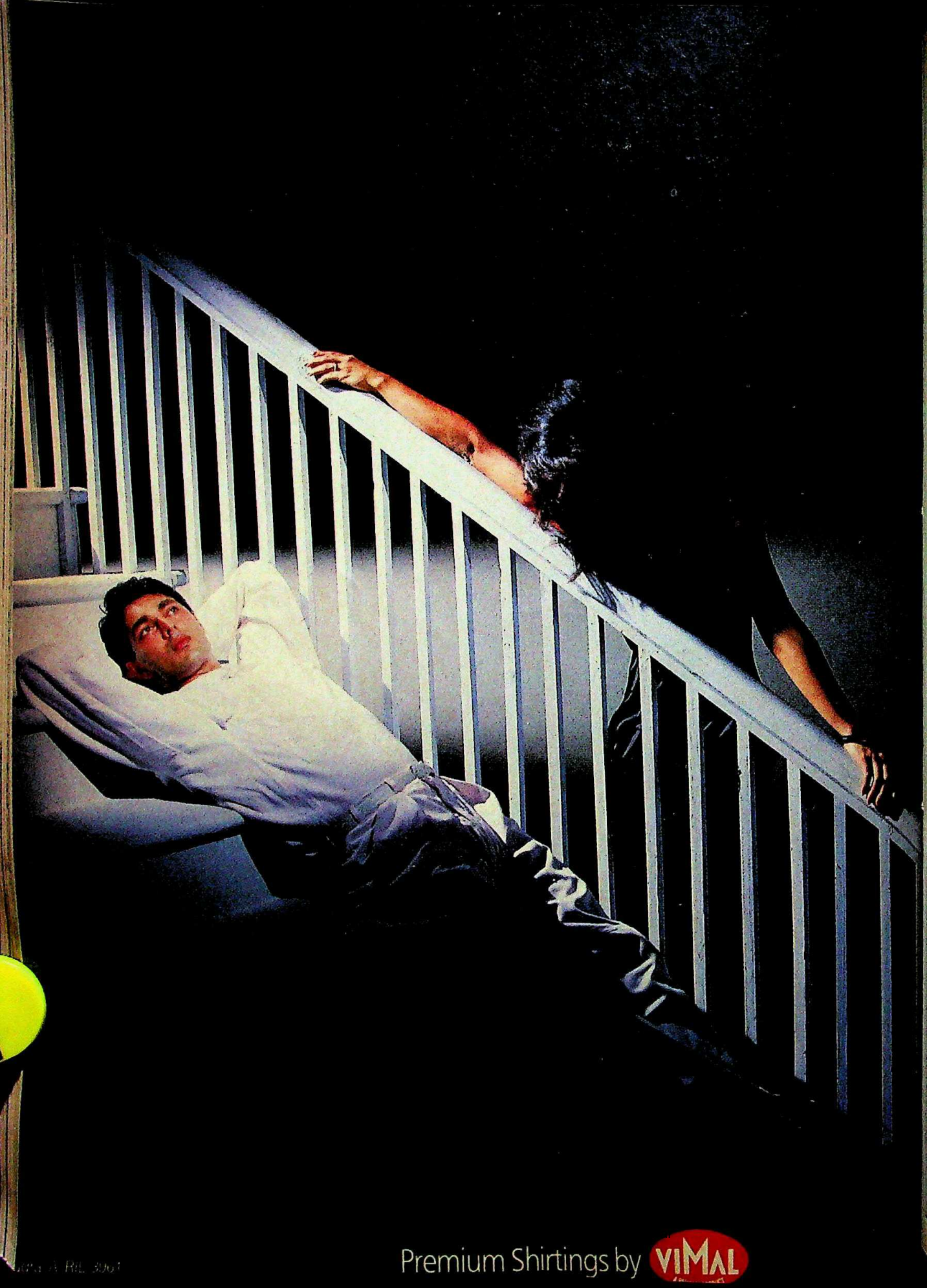

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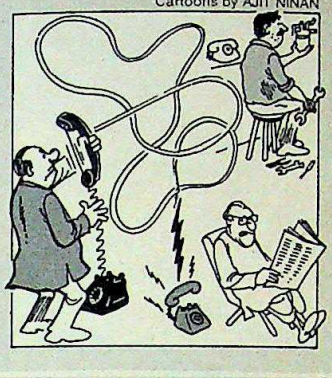
DIAL TRIAL

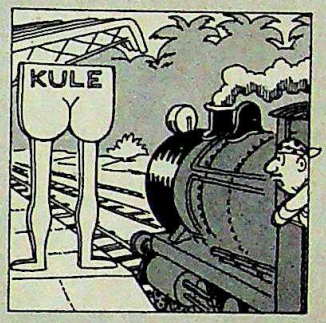


■ The telephone was invented to bridge distances and make the world an easier place to live in. But the Indian telephone system seems to have been invented by some perverse souls solely to test the users' patience. There are times, however, when the vagaries of Indian telephones can perform wonders. A resident of Calcutta spent three quarters of an hour trying to call his car mechanic in a city suburb. Each time he dialled it was a wrong number with the same person repeating monotonously that this was not a garage but a residential number. After the nth time and still no luck, the voice at the other end suggested that if the gentleman was to dial his—the wrong—number, he might by some miracle, be connected to the right number.

Game for even the most absurd-sounding scheme, the man did as suggested. And voila, he got through to his car mechanic at the first shot. Maybe there is lesson in that for telephone users.

BACK-FIRED

■ City fathers have a nasty hobby whenever they are bored—changing place names at the drop of a Gandhi *topi*. Last month, residents of Collem village in south Goa, browsing through the morning paper, were surprised to read a short news item saying that the name of the local railway station had been changed from Collem to Kule. The announcement—made by the South Central Railway—did not give officialdom's reason for the change.



The locals were shell-shocked, not by the decision to change the name, but by the choice of word. Bristling with indignation, the village gram panchayat told the authorities that they would never allow their railway station to be known by the word Kule which, in Konkani, means buttocks. The railways will have to retreat for under the circumstances, such naked defiance is completely reasonable.

DOG-FIGHT

■ For one long year, Yusuf Kutty and Aboobaker of Kodungallor in Trichur district have been taking turns to appeal for ownership of a pet dog. Yusuf set the ball rolling by filing a claim in the first class judicial magistrate's court, accusing Aboobaker of stealing his dog. The judge fined Aboobaker Rs 250 and ordered that the dog, placed in a veterinary college, be restored to the claimant.

Not one to concede victory tamely, Aboobaker filed a revision petition before the Trichur additional sessions judge. The judge directed the dog be transferred back to the veterinary college pending the petition's disposal.

Right on cue, Yusuf launched into round three in the Battle for the Dog. Justice C.S. Nair of the Kerala High Court has now granted a stay of the previous order. The dispute between the masters, it seems, might only be resolved in the Supreme Court.

SECURITY SCAM

■ Ticketless travel is a punishable offence. But this does not really deter the less public-spirited citizens from trying to take the country's public transport for a ride. Shaik Saida, a taxi-driver from Chirala, was one such individual who decided to travel sans ticket from Ongole to Madras. Realising that his was a dangerous route, peppered with zealous railway inspectors, he decided to impersonate the law on the train—the ticket checker—to avoid being caught. So, he moved freely from compartment to compartment, checking travellers' tickets and, in some instances, autographing railway passes with a flourish.

But checkers are a fairly close-knit group, and they quickly smelt out the mole in their midst. Saida was caught napping and handed over to the police. He now says, woefully, that he should have stuck to taxis.

BAG BUNGLE

■ For those in charge of security at airports, an unclaimed or unidentified bag, lying five minutes too long in one place, is enough to put the whole place on a red alert. Last fortnight, the Indira Gandhi International Airport was witness to such a now routine frenzy when an officer found a brown calfleather bag lying untended in the departure lounge. The bag was whisked away on a special trolley, and an X-ray taken. The image it revealed, however, was a let down.

Instead of a ticking time bomb, all the X-ray showed was a bag packed tight with roubles, dinar and dollar notes—Rs 12 lakh worth. The mystery of whom it belonged to was soon solved, when a harassed Afghan traveller reported the disappearance of his similar looking bag, while his back was turned to spend a penny. The moral: never ignore the lettuce for the sake of the peas.

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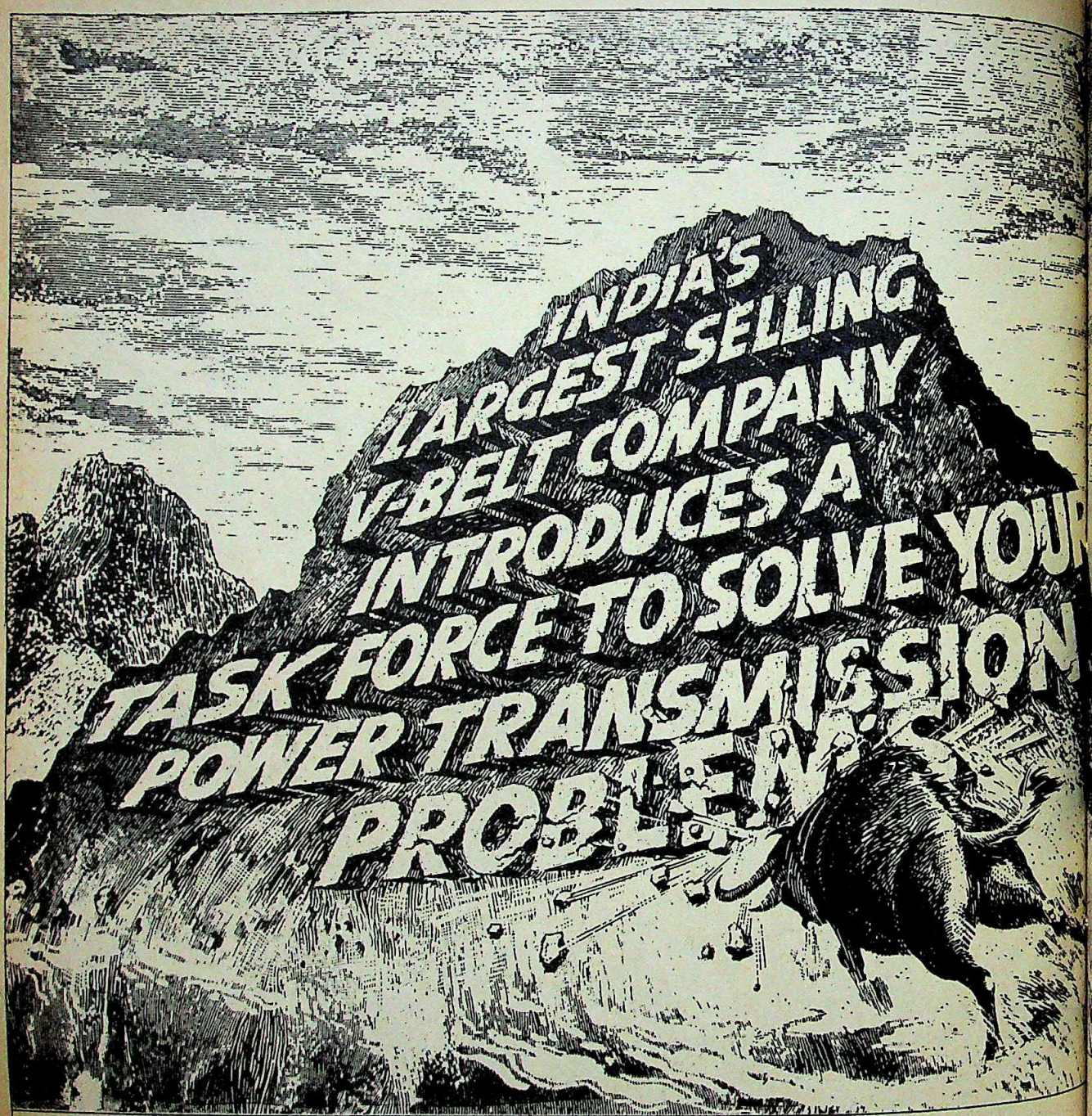

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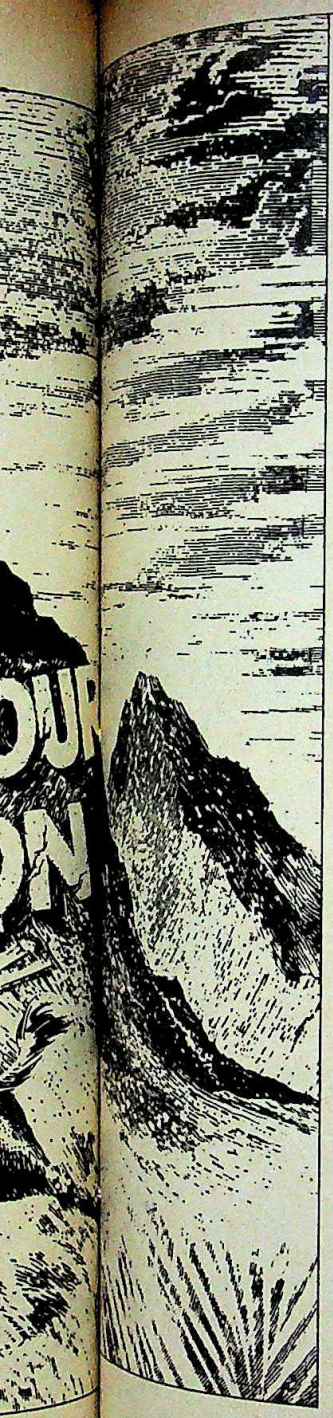

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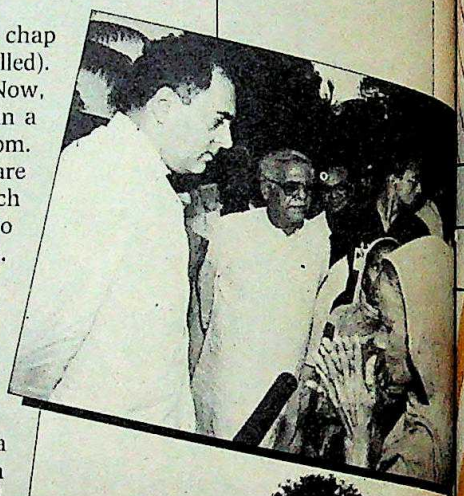
Dear Bharat,

As you recall, I had decided to return to India because of the momentous political and social transformation we had been told was taking place here. It is now a fortnight since I have been back and I must confess that I am even more confused about the Indian situation than I was earlier.

Let me explain that. Firstly, our assumption that the Mr Clean we kept reading about was Rajiv Gandhi was a bit premature. (That was before Bofors, but that is another story). Apparently, there is now another Mr Clean, a chap called V.P. Singh who was Rajiv's finance minister. Or was it defence minister? Anyhow, Singh was sacked or resigned, depending on who you are talking to. He then left the party or was expelled, also depending on whom you talk to. He is now the main opposition to Rajiv Gandhi and the ruling party though he is not in the Opposition. There also seems to be some confusion about whether the real Opposition is supporting him or not. In fact, there seems to be considerable confusion on whether there is actually an opposition. Are you with me so far?

The second Sanjay.

During the fortnight I have been here, another chap called Sanjay Singh has also resigned (or been expelled). This particular Sanjay was close to the real Sanjay. Now, the second Sanjay has considerable political clout in a place called Amethi where Rajiv won his Parliament seat from. Between the second Sanjay and the second Mr Clean, they are capable of unseating the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh which will be a real threat to Rajiv's rule. That is unless Rajiv decides to change the rules and replace the chief minister. He has, however, ruled out any such move.



The second Sanjay and the second Mr. Clean can upset the Uttar Pradesh applecart.

Alternatively, another threat to Rajiv's power stems from the barrel of the Bofors gun. Bofors has now become a national obsession and the Opposition is making a big noise about it in Parliament, though their stand is quite confusing. Every time Parliament meets to discuss the issue, the Opposition walks out. The Government offered to set up a parliamentary committee to probe the deal but the Opposition refuses to join it although they were the ones who had originally suggested it. Incidentally, the Union minister for water resources has also resigned (he has definitely not been expelled) to head the committee at a time when India is facing the worst drought of the century, but that is another story.

Getting back to Bofors, the Opposition, which includes V.P. Singh even though he is not in the Opposition, is threatening to send its own team to Sweden to get to the bottom of the scandal. But now they say that the team should not just be from the Opposition but should include the non-opposition opposition too. They also refuse to leave for Stockholm until they get an appointment with the Swedish prime minister to ask him about the Indian prime minister.

The second Mr. Clean.

Meanwhile, the villain of the Bofors piece, a chap called Win Chadha has lost himself in America and can't be traced. It now appears that he had a green card all along. The Indian Government says it will extradite him. The Americans have refused since there is no criminal case against him. The Indians say there is though they haven't actually filed one. (Heady stuff, what?).

The country is going through the worst drought in living memory, but Rajiv is more concerned about floods.

Now for the bad news. The country is going through the worst drought in living memory, though going by the television news, Rajiv seems more concerned about floods. That chap V.P. Singh I referred to earlier, got in a good dig the other day: "There is a flood of promises and a drought of activity." The newspapers are full of horror stories about the devastation but the Government seems quite unconcerned. That's the trouble about being an outsider. You tend to get a distorted view of the Indian reality.

Yours in confusion,

DILIP BOBB

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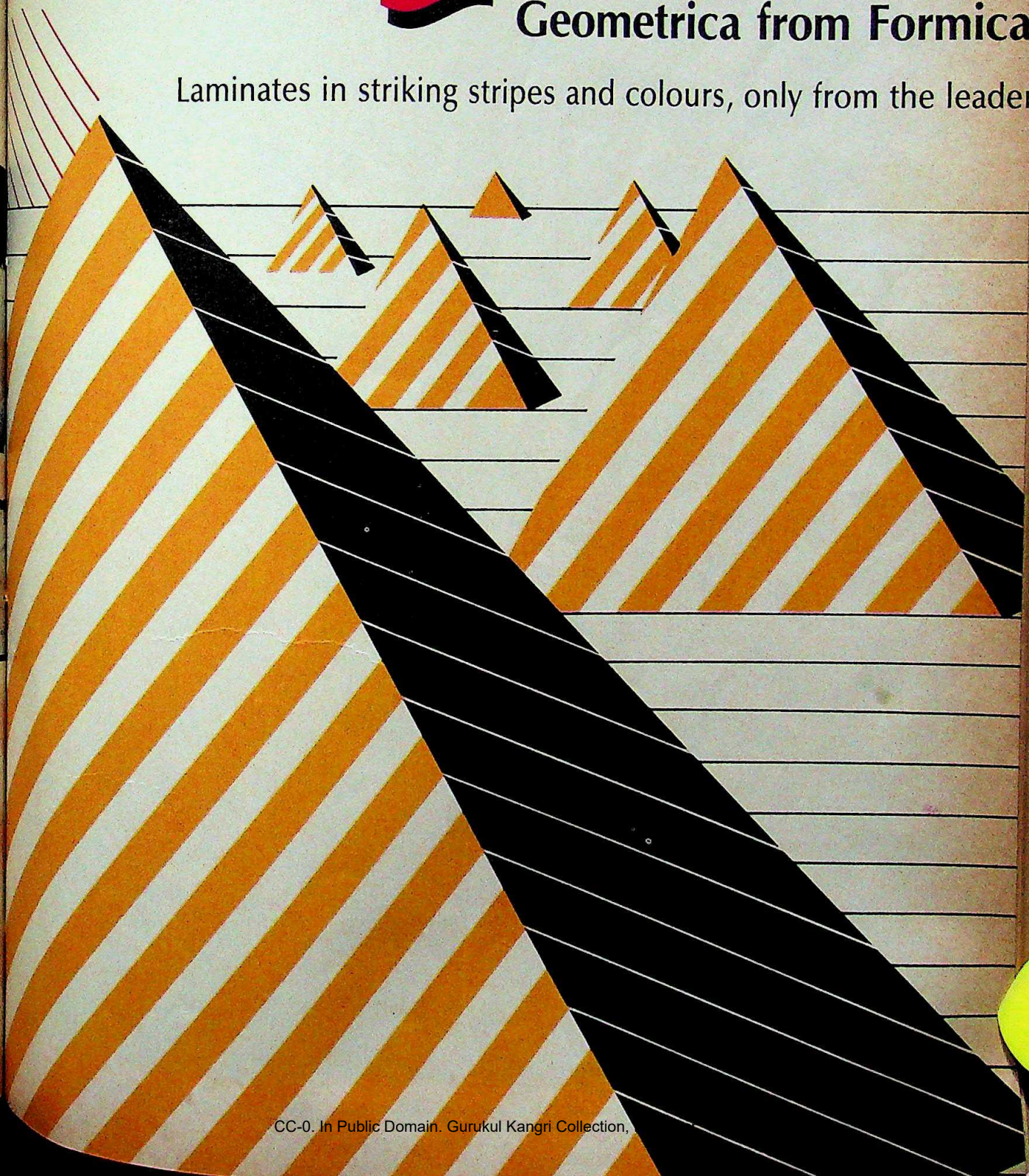

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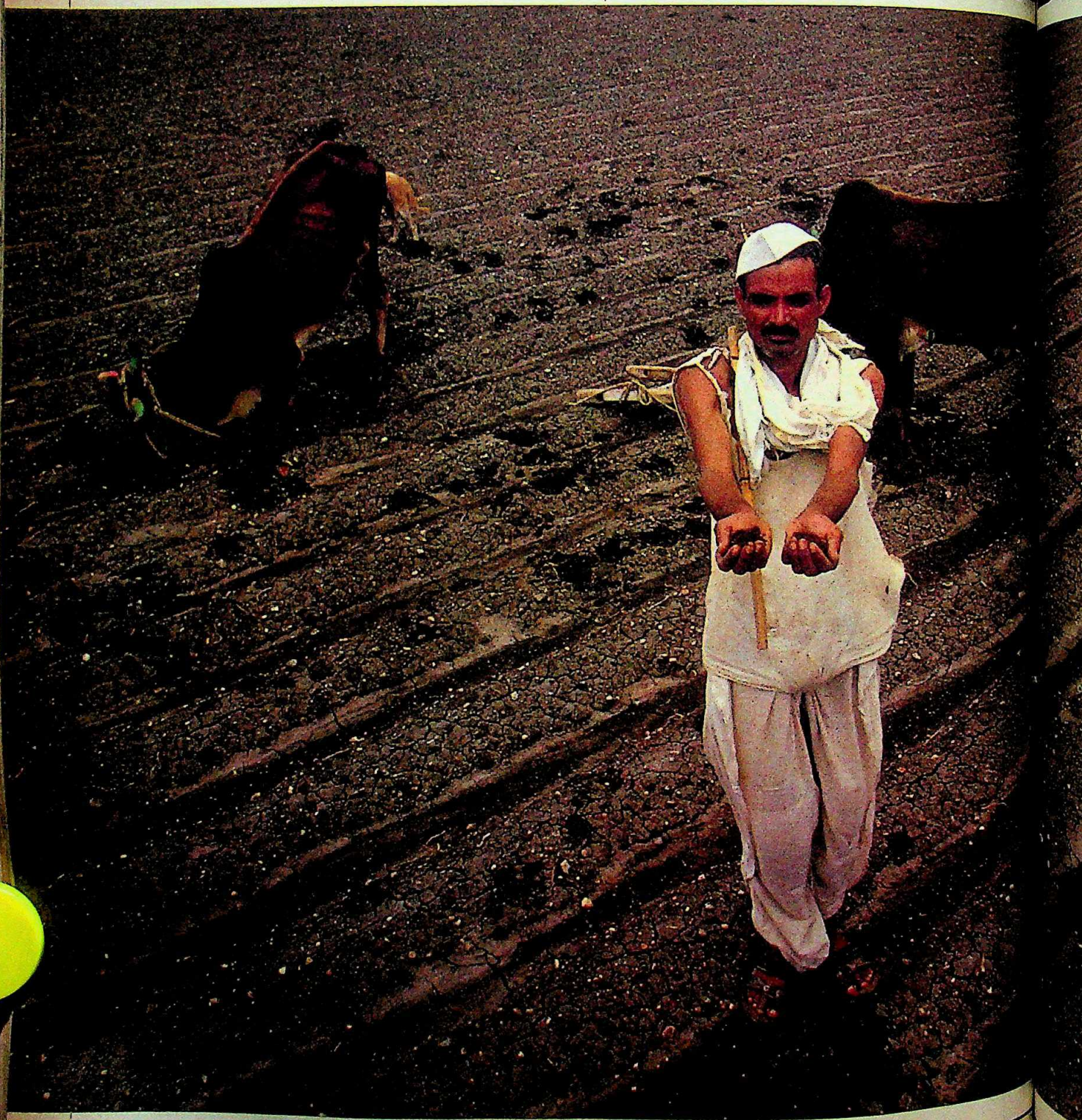
THE DEVASTATING GO



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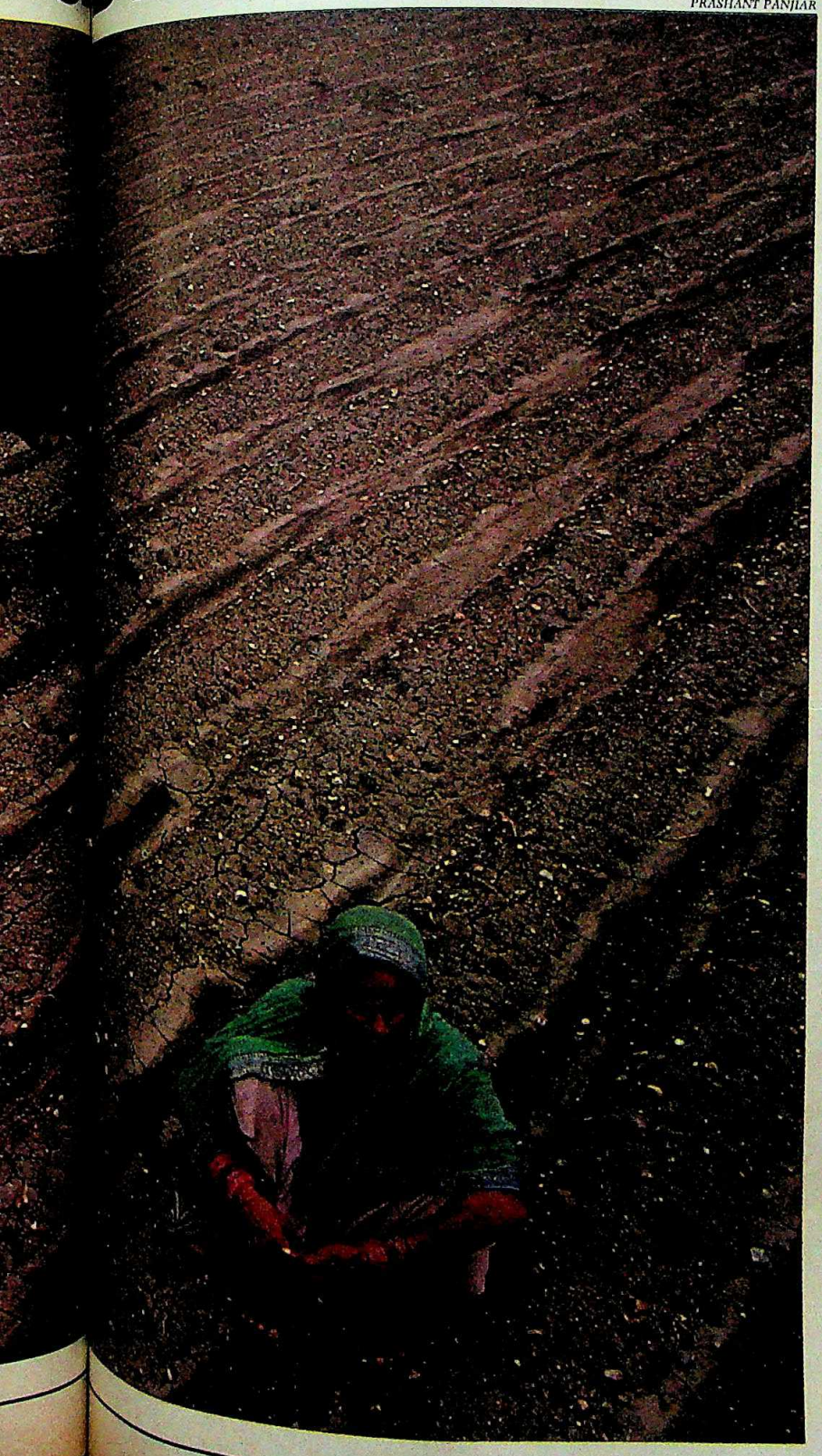
DROUGHT

PRASHANT PANJIAR



LAST fortnight the rains came to the festering soils of India. Farmers looked heavenward and some wept. But the tears that mingled freely with the rain were tears of frustration. The rain was too late. The damage was already done. It provided puddles of relief for thirsty cattle and perhaps the hope that some grass would sprout for them to graze on, but no more. Along with the rain, preliminary figures about the dry havoc that had wasted so much of the land began pouring into Delhi. They were far from final but still provided a sufficient epilogue to a tragedy whose shadow already envelops much of the country. What was usually talked about as a "monsoon failure" in city drawing-rooms was, in reality, a merciless drought that has already sapped the vitality and livelihood of millions of peasants in states ranging from Kerala to Himachal Pradesh, from Gujarat to Orissa. Twenty-one states succumbed to its withering spell.

The magnitude of this silent suffering cannot be gauged purely in terms of statistics—in cusecs and kilogrammes and milli hectares. Their story, ultimately, is about the uncertain journey—and survival—of the human spirit, about people who cope tenaciously even when there is nothing to hold on to. In order to capture the enormity of the situation and yet to reduce it to a recognisable human form, INDIA TODAY chose to focus on the trials and tribulations of families who battled the drought in their own ways. Some had already migrated to lands they had never known. Some were in the process of leaving the land they had cultivated for generations. Others had decided to stick it out and wait for the worst.

In most areas the battle for crops, fodder and irrigation has already been lost. The only hopeful sign was that there is no famine, yet. But the uncertainties remain. For urban dwellers, the devastation that stalks the countryside—compounded now by floods in four eastern states—is still distant thunder. They perceive it only in terms of rising prices and electricity shortages. But the key question as the months roll on and the rabi sowing season approaches is whether the late rains will be sufficient and prolonged. If they are not, there are chances that food shortages and hunger-pangs will begin to cut their swathe of misery through India's villages and spread into her cities. And this will be but one more horrific demonstration of how, for all its "progress", the country still remains piteously dependent on the rain god.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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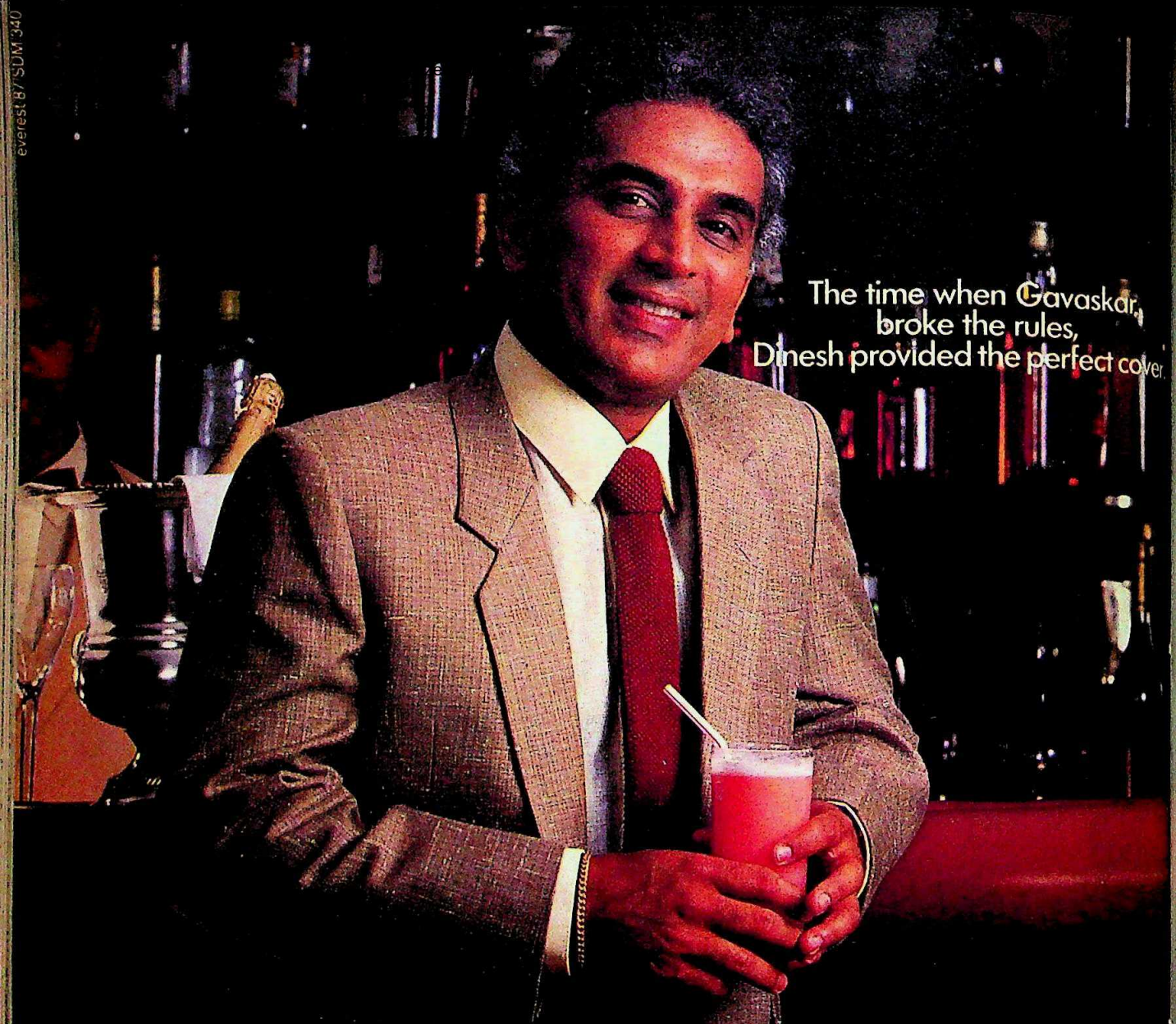

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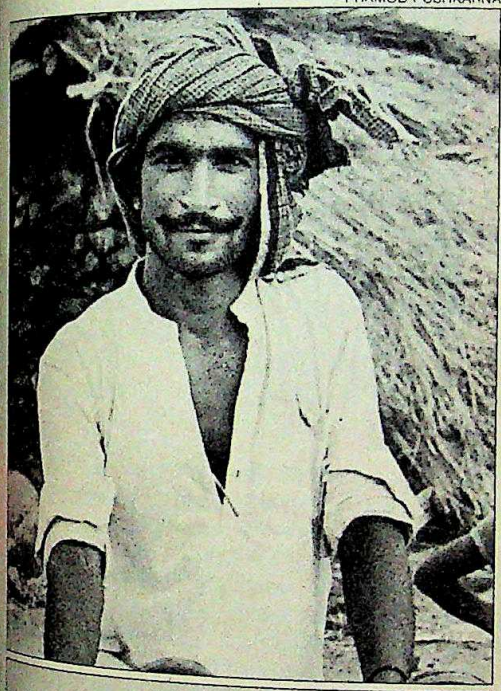
HE has the chiselled face, upturned moustache, and fierce, burning eyes of a Rajput warrior in a medieval painting. His legs are still sturdy. With artistic dexterity he wields his pickaxe on the soil, under which lies the rock that will finally be mined and taken to construction sites in Delhi. In this stone-quarrying colony of south Delhi, where thousands of dust-covered miners build their huts in dust-covered ravines, Jitta Ram, 21, is 800 km away from the only home he knows—a village named Batinda, near Jodhpur, in Rajasthan. He does not want to look back. The memories are painful. Two months ago, he and 20 members of his family, including his aged parents, sold 15 head of cattle for Rs 1,500, left their 100 bighas of land, and took the night train to Delhi. Two years ago, their soil, on which the family had toiled for seven generations, had produced til and moth. Last year, it produced very little. This year, the drought turned the land into stone. And there were no jobs in Jodhpur.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Jitta Ram left 100 bighas of land in Rajasthan to toil for a future in a Delhi stone quarry.

"My father made the decision," says Jitta. It was brief, unsentimental. "He told us simply that the waiting was over. We could not wait for June to turn into July and July into August and keep on staring at that sky where the clouds never formed and the dust haze kept the blue hidden." A relative, who had worked the mines outside Delhi, had told them there were jobs there paying as much as Rs 15 to Rs 20 a day. Now Jitta, his 72-year-old father, and his sisters all work. They dig, they break stones. They eat two meals a day: of chapatis and ground green chillies, and sometimes, there are fresh vegetables. The nearest well is 3 km away. Says Jitta's father, Prabhu, resplendent in his red Rajasthani safa in the whiteness of the quarry: "I hesitated in moving. I was proud. I didn't want to become a paid slave (Kissan ke liye mazdoori gulami hai). *But what can one say about fate?"*

Jitta's new island in the sun is a stony mound on which the family has constructed five straw huts. He has no children but his five little nephews and nieces play huddled together on that bare patch of land, not daring to venture beyond because of the danger of falling into a mine-pit. "While we work," Jitta says with determination, "we live, the children live." But memories of the other life still haunt him. "Sometimes it is as if that was all a dream. Waking up on my land, working a few hours, watching the sun rise, waiting for the crops to grow. There is no time now. I wake up at 5 a.m., go to the mines, take a one-hour break in the afternoon, then work until dark, and all the time I'm afraid that a boulder will fall on me and crush me. But this is my future," he smiles. His Shangri-La among the rocks is where young miners choke with dust, spit blood, develop silicosis and tuberculosis. Jitta has no time for such thoughts. His legs are still sturdy.

But "out there", where Jitta once lived, is where the drought scorched the land—as it did in most of the country. Out there in Rajasthan where bajra, jowar, guar, should now have been ripening in the monsoon-end breezes, 90 per cent of the cultivable land has not even been sown. All that rises into the sky are the thorns of acacia trees and bushes. Before the rain, the soil—part chocolate brown and part white as crusted snow—had covered the earth like the scaly and knotted skin of a leper. The popular image of Rajasthan is that of an uncompromising desert, of the sandy wilderness of Jaisalmer and Barmer. But Rajasthan is not a food deficit state. Ganganagar produced more wheat than

How poor is this monsoon really?

ALTHOUGH the cry of "the century's worst monsoon" has gone up, weathermen are reluctant to stick this label on 1987 yet. Says Dr R.P. Sarker, director-general of the Meteorology Department: "Whether or not it is the worst of the century can be said only after the monsoon finishes."

There are three kinds of drought: meteorological (rainfall deficiency), hydrological (fall in ground water or water flow in rivers) and agricultural (crop failure). Their extents need not tally. For instance, crop could still do well in low rainfall, if it is evenly spaced. Also, ground water level may not dip dangerously in a drought because of good rains in the years past. This year, though, the country has been affected on all three counts.

The 112-year-old department recorded the worst drought in 1877. In this century, the most miserable year was 1918, when the all-India average rainfall was 65 cm, or 26 per cent less than the normal 88 cm. The other poor years were 1972 (66 cm), 1979 (69.5 cm) and 1965 (73 cm). The deficiency seems limited because excess rainfall in one part compensates for drought in another. The calculation for 1987 will be done only after monsoon-end.

From June 1 to August 19, only 12 of the 35 meteorological subdivisions across the country have recorded normal or excess rainfall; the remaining 23 saw either deficient or scanty rain. The closest pattern for a similar period was in 1965 when 13 subdivisions had received normal or excess rain and 22 had not. By August 26, however the subdivisions with inadequate rainfall had fallen to 22. But meteorologists are hopeful that the next few weeks will prove luckier.

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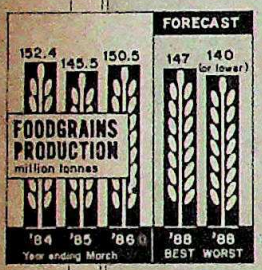
Two steps forward, one step backward

HOW much of a difference does drought really make to the harvest? In 1965-66, foodgrain production dropped from 89.36 million tonnes in the year gone by to 72.35 million tonnes—a 19.1 per cent slump. In 1966-67, another bad year, the output was similarly low. Another heart-stopping drop came in 1979-80, when foodgrain production dipped by 16.8 per cent—from 131.9 million tonnes to 109.7 million tonnes.



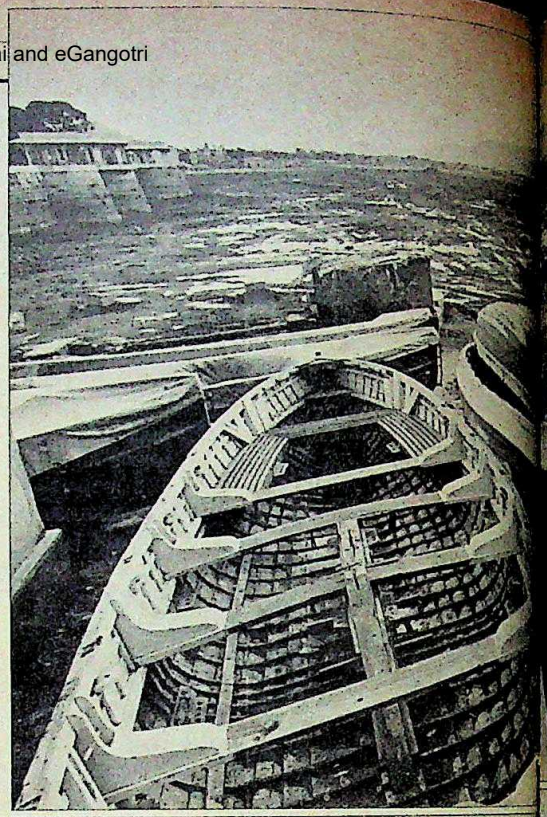
No one is willing to hazard a guess on what foodgrain production will be now. But if the rains had been normal, the output should have been a record 162 million tonnes as compared to the 150.47 million tonnes produced in 1985-86, the last year for which data are available.

A new record will have to wait. In good years, kharif makes up roughly 58 per cent of the annual harvest. If the 162 million tonne mark had been reached, kharif would have made up about 94 million tonnes (1985-86: 85.99 million tonnes). Current guesstimates say rice will be 10 million tonnes short and coarse grains five million tonnes less than expected. A 15 million tonne deduction gives a kharif result of 79 million tonnes—or equivalent to the 1981-82 figure.

Assuming a good rabi crop, total output would then be around 147 million tonnes. But this would seem an optimistic estimate and the final figure may be around the 140 million tonne mark—or lower.

Based on reports, the shortfall in expectations could be 8 per cent to 10 per cent in cotton production; and about 15 per cent to 20 per cent in pulses and oilseeds. But these, again, are at best rough estimates.

The Agriculture Ministry's boast that the percentage fall in output due to drought is getting progressively smaller will also be tested.



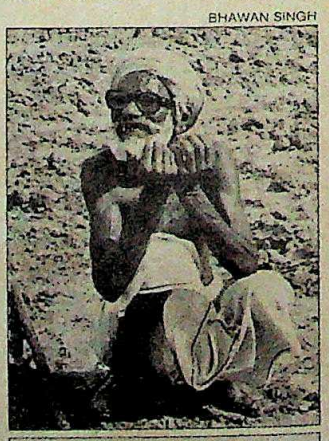
Rajasthan is also a land of large lakes whose wat water supply. But most of the reservoirs including t

it could absorb. Onions, tomatoes, bhindi, guar ripened in the fields of Ajmer and Jaipur districts. Alwar district sent 100 trucks a day overloaded with onions to the mandis of Delhi and was considered the sarson (mustard) bowl of India. Today, all that is last year's story. This year, with 10 mm of rain, only 15 per cent of Alwar's entire cultivable area was cropped. Today, there are no crops in the fields.

The mighty Khairtal anaaj mandi (grain market) which is normally impossible to enter during this season because of a constant 2-km-long line of trucks, now looks like a ghost town with labourers hanging aimlessly around their push-carts and the traders squatting about playing cards. In the secretariat in Jaipur, Chief Minister Harideo Joshi shakes his head and admits: "We have been pushed to the wall this time. We are at the end of the road." Central drought relief subsidies that totalled about Rs 187 crore during 1986-87, have left the state fighting with New Delhi about how to plug the Rs 70 crore deficit caused by what the state actually spent. And emergency plans are under way to provide daily-wage relief jobs to as many as 20 lakh people, create a special fodder belt along the Rajasthan canal under a newly-created Department of Fodder, import fodder from Punjab and sell it at subsidised rates through panchayati depots, and move two lakh cattle of a special breed to grazing areas near the Rajasthan canal.

Traditionally, in times of drought, as many as 10 lakh people have moved out of the state for jobs and greener pastures with their cattle. But the states to which they migrated—Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat—because of their own drought problems have now virtually sealed their borders. It took Banvar Ram, a settled farmer from Nagor near Jodhpur, a month to walk 600 km with 200 cattle to the Haryana border. But at Narnaul, he was driven back by the police who insisted on charging Rs 60 per head of cattle. So he trudged back 50 km to the village of Pujari Ka Baans in Sikar district and let loose his animals on the scarcely-planted forest land nearby. The villagers, facing the same plight—without irrigation water and cattlefeed—looked on with sympathy.

BHAWAN SINGH



Bairo, of Kesarpur, prayed daily for rain.

Rajasthan is also a land of great lakes and reservoirs whose waters percolate into the ground, adding to the underground reservoirs that help keep the water levels high in drinking and irrigation wells. Today, most of the great reservoirs have dried out. Outside Jaipur, the Ramgarh lake—the venue of the main rowing event of the Asiad—is almost dry. The great Anasagar reservoir of Ajmer—bigger than the famous Nainital lake—is bone dry, and the Siliser and Jaisamandh lakes near Alwar are nearing depletion.

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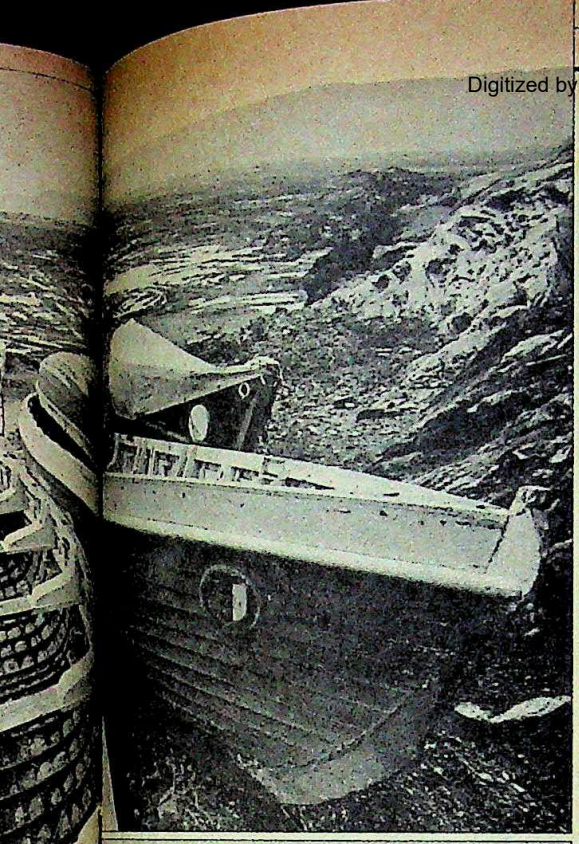

...ecked into the ground and added to the underground ...Anasagar lake in Ajmer dried up in the drought.

BHAWAN SINGH

village empty. People would be out in the fields playing, laughing, tending to their bajra and jowar. These crops survive the worst conditions. *Bajr pare to bajri hove* (bajra can withstand even lightning). Today, we sit around, we mope, we play cards, we curse, we go to bed, sleep doesn't come." There is no famine, yet. Most families have small reserves of wheat from the last harvest which they ration out. "The adults eat less so that the children can eat all they want," says Asharfi, a mother of three. The food consists of chapatis and chilli paste, but the green chillies, at Rs 20 a kg, cost double of what they were a month ago. The grain reserves are expected to last for another two or three months. Then, the villagers will borrow money against the rabi crop in order to sustain themselves, or sell jewellery. And if the rain is insufficient and the rabi fails, famine and disease will stalk Kesarpur.

Worse hit are the 50 families of the Harijan landless labourers. In better times, they worked for wages in the village fields, received a share of the produce and earned as much as Rs 15 a day for deweeding and cutting grass which served as fodder for their cattle. "There used to be a shortage of labour," Phool Singh remembers. Several trips to nearby towns by the labourers proved fruitless, as most of the limestone and bajri (red sand) businesses have closed down due to the lack of water. So, the Harijans scrounge and scrape around the village for menial work, or toil for meager supplies of grain. Village tailor Sadi Ram, who made *dehaati* shirts, has closed shop because he can no longer afford the Rs 60 rent.

For the first time in a hundred years, the residents say, the village is without milk. Like thousands of other drought-hit villages across the country, Kesarpur has run out of fodder and has turned loose its hungry cattle to forage in the dried up jungles nearby or on government land reserved for tree plantation. Where fodder is available, it sells for Rs 100 a quintal. The cattle market is depressed. A pair of healthy bulls, earlier costing Rs 3,500, can now be had for Rs 600. And there are few takers even for such distress sales. The fodder—that consisted mostly of the

Kesarpur, a village of some 200 families on the banks of the Jaisamandh reservoir, could be anywhere in drought-hit India. It encompasses almost exactly the myriad of drought-related miseries visited on the country's villages. Its plight also demonstrates that even with lakhs of tube-wells for irrigation, India—lacking a massive national effort at better management and preservation of ground water resources—continues to be hopelessly dependent on rainfall. There are no crops around Kesarpur because most of its tube-wells—dug to a depth of about 150 ft—are dry. The one that still works receives between a half-hour to an hour's electricity a day, which is insufficient for irrigation. On their own initiative, the villagers made a Herculean last-ditch effort to resuscitate their wells. One kilometre away from the village, Ramu and four relatives worked for seven days, from dawn-to-dusk, excavating their near-dry tube-well, bucket by bucket, pumping out residual water using a pumping set that consumed 15 litres of diesel a day. They have taken a loan for Rs 2,000 at usurious rates for the job, but the well shows no signs of resuscitation. They have to persevere: it is their only hope.

In the village, industrious hands lie idle. "Last year," says landowner Phool Singh, "at this time, you would find the

The buffer between enough and disaster

"THE drought gives no reason for panic," says Food and Civil Supplies Minister H.K.L. Bhagat. His confidence is linked to India's huge buffer stocks of foodgrain which, on July 1, stood at 23.39 million tonnes—64 per cent of it wheat and the bulk of the rest, rice.

Annual food procurement, over the last two years, has averaged at around 10 million tonnes of wheat and 9.5 million tonnes of rice. This year, the total could be about 16 million tonnes, a 15 per cent drop. But even this along with the stocks will see the year through.

But if the food is to reach the drought-hit areas, much will depend on the country's public distribution network which has grown from 2.4 lakh outlets in 1980 to about 3.4 lakh outlets at present. Although only 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the food is distributed through this system, it is crucial on two counts: it not only serves the poor but it can also be used in price control. An additional 2.5 million tonnes of foodgrain will have to be supplied to those employed at drought relief works through this network. Bhagat says that he has urged the states to launch anti-hoarding drives, check leakages from the system and attempts are also being made to prevent speculative forward trading.

Bhagat says that a good sugarcane crop will avert a sugar shortage. The ministry's primary concern relates to edible oils—normally imported in bulk—prices of which have been spiralling. After crop failure, the oil import figure has been revised drastically to 15.75 lakh tonnes—substantially more than last year's 11.8 lakh tonnes. And the bill will be a hefty Rs 800 crore. Imports could rise further as the Government battles to contain prices. The monthly supply has been doubled between July and September to 1.5 lakh tonnes. But from the look of things, the Government will receive more flak on this item than any other.

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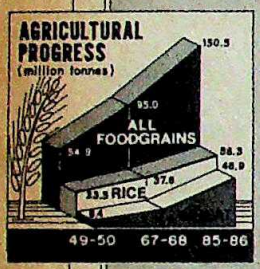
Food output rises but misery persists

'FAMINE' has been dropped from the Indian dictionary of English. The last case of mass deaths was in 1943 when three million perished in Bengal. But the Green Revolution has ensured that those days will never be repeated—even the panic of 1965 and 1966 and the perpetual reliance on import of foodgrain in that decade are unlikely to recur.

Between 1949-50 and 1985-86, rice production has made a quantam jump from 23.54 million tonnes to 64.15 million tonnes; wheat has multiplied more than seven times from a meagre 6.39 million tonnes to 46.89 million tonnes; total foodgrain production is up from 54.92 million tonnes to over 150 million tonnes. And yet, droughts continue to bring misery to millions.



That two-thirds of the cultivable area is rainfed is one reason. Plus, the problem of tiny holdings continues—56.6 per cent of the land holdings are less than one hectare. Another 18 per cent are between one and two hectares. A variation in weather dislodges first this lot from their precarious perch of existence.

India's 5.6 crore landless labourers (1981 census) also suffer grievously. When crops fail, work in the fields falls and even their pitiable daily wages—sometimes as low as Rs 5—dry out. Comparatively prosperous farmers find themselves in a jam because there isn't enough power to run the tube-wells.

So far, government effort has been concentrated on irrigated areas—often with an enormous investment—at the cost of unirrigated ones. Says Union Minister of State for Agriculture Yogendra Makwana: "Since 70 per cent of the land continues to be rainfed, it is dry land farming that will hold the key for agricultural growth in the future."

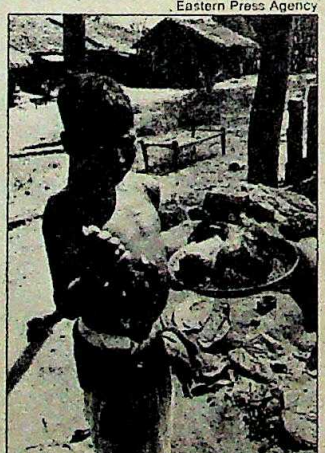
stems of bajra and jowar and wild grass that sprouted in the rain—disappeared with the kharif crop. This year, the parched earth—till the late rains—produced not a single green blade. The late August rains will provide some relief, allowing the grass to grow again, but this will not be sufficient to feed healthy cattle.

Rajasthan, like its neighbouring states, has already begun to buy fodder from Punjab. Sikh farmers from Sangroor daily ply the roads with overloaded trucks that are headed for fodder depots. But the crunch is so severe that these trucks, en route to Rajasthan via Haryana, are being stopped by the Haryana police who force the farmers to sell the fodder in their state. Kesarpur has yet to see any fodder. Two old village women, Banno and Kesri, keep silent vigil over the jowar that has sprouted in a small patch of land which has received water from the only working tube-well in the village. One stays by the patch even at night, like a mother fussing over her newborn child. The green jowar will be used for cattle-feed. Says Banno: "I feel that if I don't keep watching, it will die. I have never seen anything like this dry. I have nowhere to go."

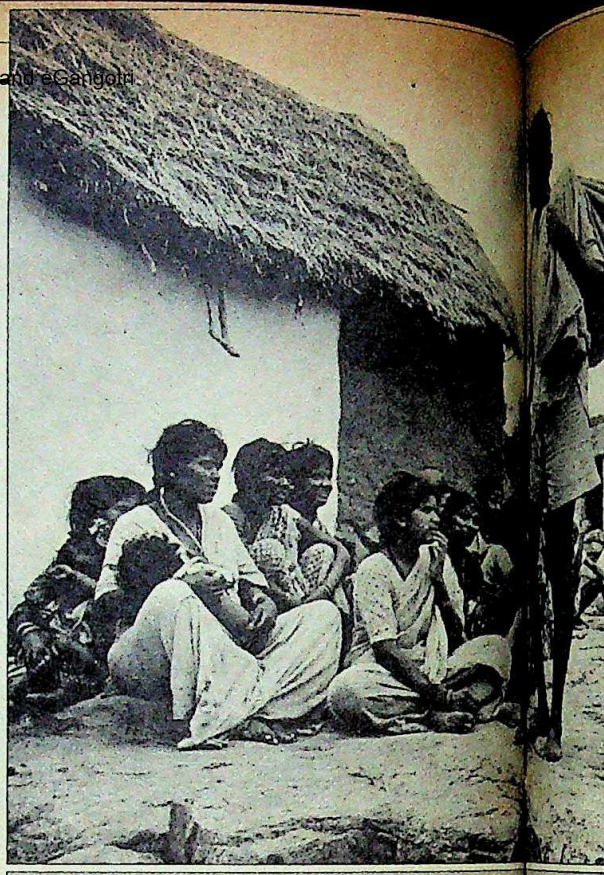
This year, rains came to the village of Mudalapalli in Karnataka near the Andhra Pradesh border, but for Narasimhappa, a 33-year-old Harijan labourer, they were too late. He could not get work in the fields. According to a local landlord, who owns 40 acres of groundnut and onion land, agricultural production had dropped anywhere between 50 per cent and 70 per cent due to the drought.

After working many years as an agricultural labourer on other people's fields, gradually and surreptitiously, Narasimhappa began to illegally cultivate jowar on a hilly patch of land, three miles away from his village. Planting groundnut would have been more lucrative, but he could not afford to buy the expensive seedlings. So, he cultivated jowar and bajra which brought him about Rs 100 a year—barely sufficient to make ends meet. Then, the drought began. As the yield decreased, Narasimhappa gradually increased his area of cultivation so that, at the end of three years, he had an acre to himself. He lost it all when forest officials swooped on the spot, evicted him and planted eucalyptus in the area.

Narasimhappa regularly found himself out of work. When fortunate enough to find work, he was paid Rs 5 for a day's labour and his wife Chinnagangamma earned Rs 4. As periods of unemployment in the fields became more frequent and prolonged, he began smuggling firewood. Every evening he would set out,


Eastern Press Agency

Invoking relief in Kalahandi's Muskapadar village


For Narasimhappa, a Harijan labourer in Karnat... came too lat... with his wife and two children left the only home ... known and m...

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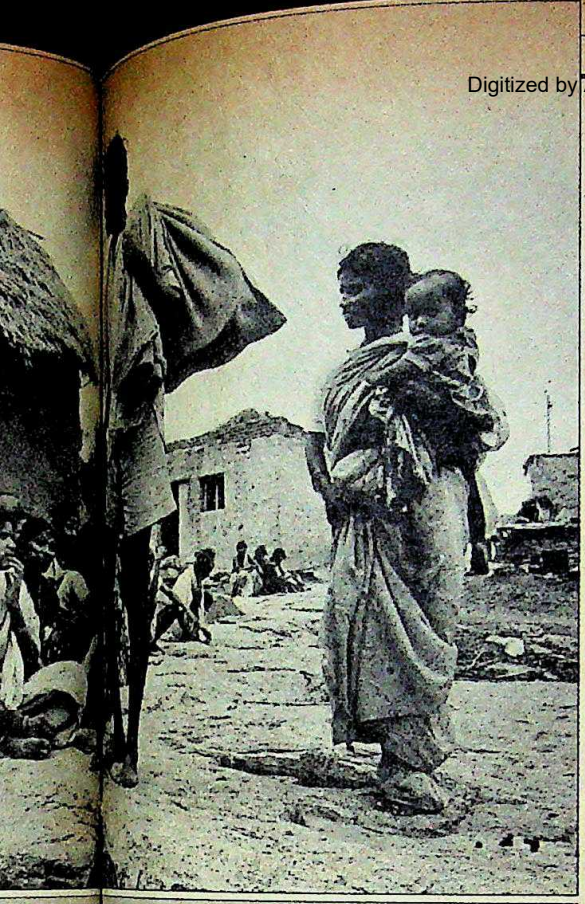

er in Karnata... only home ... known and migrated to Tirupati for a job.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

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appa regu- mself out of fortunate d work, he for a day's s wife Chin- earned Rs 4. unemploy- elds became t and pro- egan smug- . Every eve- ld set out,

Narasimhappa realised he had to raise some money to use for travelling. No one came forward to give him another loan, as he had already taken one previously for Rs 250. Once again, he headed towards the hills and, for a few days, smuggled firewood. When he had saved Rs 10, he decided to set out on the trip. A recent foot injury was ignored—that pain was nothing compared to the hunger pangs of his children.

Asked how he felt at the thought that he might never see his village again, Narasimhappa reasoned: "I am sad, but what can I do." Yet, he cannot accept the reality that he may never return to his village and has promised his family that they will come back to attend the village Ugadi festival in April, next year.

August 19 dawns like any other day in the little village. The Narasimhappa family rises as usual and attends to routine functions. At about 10 a.m., they squat on the floor to have their last meal—a dark brown ball of ragi and some chutney made of chillies and tamarind. Nobody speaks a word. The meal over, Chinnagangamma carefully packs the remaining ball of ragi to take along on the journey. She then removes the earthen pot from the fireplace and puts out the fire—for one long moment, she gazes into the dying embers, sadness shadowing her pinched face. "I wonder where and when I will cook my next meal," she muses. Without any further emotion, Chinnagangamma walks over to the clothesline and picks up a little shirt, which must have been a bright purple and yellow when new. Now, it is faded and dirty, even though it had been freshly washed, torn in places and without a single button. She dresses her daughter, who till then was clad only in a pair of thin red shorts. Setting her child on the floor, Chinnagangamma then packs their meager possessions—Narasimhappa's two shirts, her two saris, and two pairs of the children's clothes, a few utensils, two old and shabby bed-sheets, a mirror.

Walking along a narrow dung-stained cobbled path, the family heads for the village temple—a small, squat, stone structure painted in white where the little statuettes of Lord Venkateswara and Anjaneyulu are kept side by side along with some sacred swords, and heirlooms of the village. With his hands folded high, Narasimhappa prays long and hard. Asked what he prayed for, Narasimhappa trudging five miles to the nearby hills to chop trees. He would bring the bundle back to the village by nightfall, and set off again early the next morning to Bagepalli, a town six miles away, to sell the firewood. His earnings after trudging 22 miles a day: Rs 8.

But here again, the blighted man ran into problems. Harassment came in the form of forest officials, who would regularly round up the labourers. By August this year, the hardships of the Narasimhappa household intensified. His family was forced to skip the night meal. "At night my two children would start whimpering in hunger. I could only watch helplessly as my wife tried to cool the fires of hunger burning in their stomach with a glass of water," he says. Migration was the only solution. And Tirupati across the border, where it was rumored jobs were available, seemed to stand out as a beacon of hope.

Narasimhappa carefully chalked out a plan. After a morning meal, he and his family would set out for Chelur, eight miles away. The pace would be slow to enable the children to keep up. They would rest the night at Chelur and set off early the next day to the Kalakalacheruvu railway station, six miles away. From here, he and his family would travel ticketless to Tirupati by the afternoon passenger train leaving the station at 3 p.m. Having made the decision, the penniless

Turning a blind eye to ground water

STRANGELY, ground water, the most sensible source, has been neglected by policy-makers in favour of expensive surface irrigation with large dams. Up to the end of the sixth plan, Rs 15,206 crore had gone into large irrigation projects to serve a 20 million hectare net area. During the same period not more than Rs 2,773 crore went into forestry and soil and water conservation programmes to serve around 90 million hectares of denuded non-agricultural and 85 million hectares of erosion-prone agricultural lands.

The cost of creating irrigation potential per hectare has shot up from Rs 1,200 in the first plan period to Rs 40,000 now. On the other hand, ground water requires minimal expenditure on simple measures like excavating water storage tanks, building bandhs and terracing. And finally a small investment for a tubewell. Besides, ground water development also helps in times of flood by reducing water runoffs.

Figures reveal the distortions:

- Since 1951, 246 large surface irrigation projects have been initiated. Only 65 have been completed.
- 20.8 million hectares of gross irrigation potential was created between 1951 and 1985, but only 15.6 million hectares were utilised.
- Irrigation projects' rising losses amount to Rs 800 crore annually.
- The total storage capacity created by large irrigation projects by the end of the sixth plan was around 17 million hectare metres (MHM), while the country's ground water resources have an annual utilisable potential of nearly 42 MHM, of which only 10 MHM has been utilised.
- Seven million hectares of good agricultural land is being wasted by salinisation—due to waterlogging—but the current plan makes no separate provision for drainage and anti-waterlogging activities.

The price of being carried away by the big-is-beautiful syndrome has been heavy.

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Will power ever flow freely to the people?

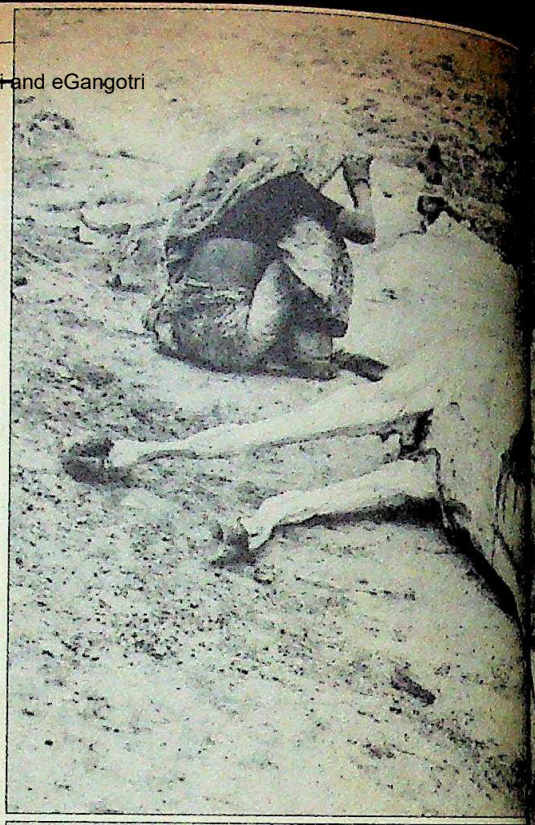
THOUGH India's installed capacity for power generation has grown dramatically since 1947—from 1,700 MW to about 50,000 MW—it is still stretched thin and is incapable of absorbing reverses. Per capita power consumption has leapt from 15 units (kilowatt-hours) to 190 units today—and yet it is ridiculously short of the 7,000 units to 10,000 units per capita that is common in the developed countries. And in spite of a whopping Rs 34,000 crore that have been committed to power in the present plan, by 1990 the gap between demand and supply will grow to 10,000 MW.

The problem now is hydel power which, going by targets, is expected to generate about 28 per cent of the total 200-billion unit output this year. Says Sathe: "The energy content in the reservoirs is presently 10 billion units less than last year."

Power to provide drinking water to man and beast, and for agriculture, is currently top priority, he says. Thirty per cent of the total normally goes to agriculture, and this year everything will hinge on the extra 4 to 5 per cent that has to be diverted here.

This will be taken out of the pocket of industry and urban areas. Sathe says that eight major industries—including steel, aluminium, textiles, chemicals and fertilisers—consume about 35 per cent of the total. He stresses that even a 10 per cent voluntary reduction in consumption by industry could make all the difference.

Sathe and his men are trying to coax a little extra out of thermal plants which have a plant load factor of 53.4 per cent. Last week, the Cabinet approved a scheme to distribute Rs 2.5 crore in awards to state electricity boards and their officials as incentive to cut down the heavy power thefts. But power shortages there will be, and if urban residents continue to face cuts during peak time for some months to come, they should not be surprised.



A 40 km route in Ahmedabad district is littered with carcasses. Farmers' migrations have skin of dead cows. With cattle dying in thousands

pa says: "I prayed to God to save us from all troubles. I prayed that my hands be put to good work." And then the family walks over to the father-in-law's house. Chinnagangamma's mother, Rakamma, takes her grand daughter in her hands and weeps. Her father, Elumalagangappa, watches in stoic calm. The family moves out, bidding farewell to the villagers along the path. The squatting old women reach out and touch Narasimhappa junior's hand, saying in Telugu: "Devadu manchidi cheveni papa" (God bless you little one). The family walks slowly out of the village watched by a handful of their friends and relatives. Rakamma limps a short distance, gradually trailing behind and finally coming to a stop. She takes the edge of her sari pallav and covers her mouth with it. Biting into her sari pallav she cries, tears rolling down her wizened, deeply-lined cheerless face. Not turning back even once, Narasimhappa and his family walk on steadily.

The one memory that remains indelibly etched in the mind of a visitor to the agricultural belts of Rajasthan and Haryana is the vast silent emptiness of the land. During the kharif season in the Mahendargarh district of Haryana—which is now cropless—the shoots of bajra and jowar were so tall at this time that a man working in the fields was barely visible. Today the eye can see a man standing on the earth almost up to the horizon. In this flat nothingness Ram Singh, 23, a farmer of Mahendargarh's Napla village now spends his entire time sitting on a cot outside his house and gazing listlessly at his 35 bighas of barren land in which he had desperately tried to plant jowar, moong and moth. His three sisters, Santosh, Suresh and Santara who are married in the village of Boodwara 20 km away, have come to live with him because their fields, too, have produced nothing. Singh's well, bored to 150 ft has run dry and he cannot afford the Rs 100 per ft charged by private drillers.

The family lives on the Rs 500 monthly army pension of his father. Every five days the family spends Rs 250 for fodder for their three buffaloes and every 20 days Rs 230 for a quintal of wheat. A year ago Singh seriously believed he had beaten the poverty trap. He had a well, cattle, good land, and had even borrowed and repaid Rs 10,000 for construction of a pucca brick room. Now he is in debt—he has already mortgaged his yet-to-be-sown rabi crop, and trudges in and out of army recruitment centres in search of a job. "Everything is just wiped out," he says. "We're back to where we started. There is no sign of any government help. And if the rabi crop fails, I shudder to think what will happen."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Sohan Singh of Sangroor is hit by crop failure.

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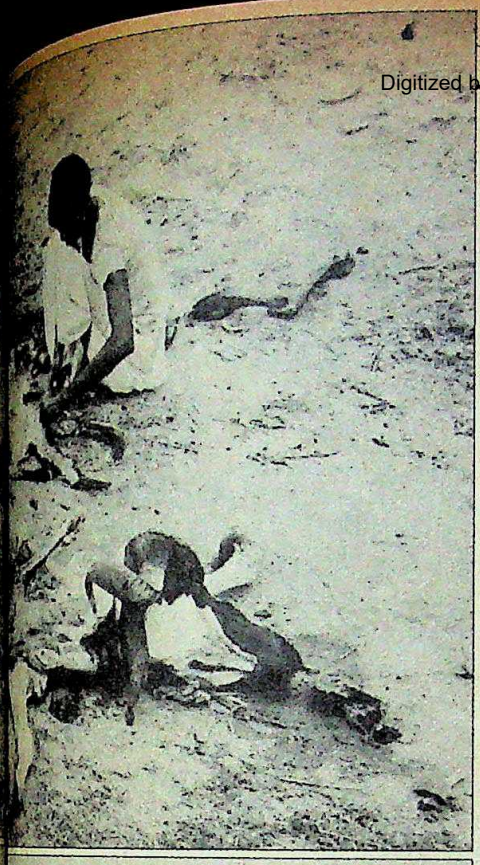


...carcasses. Farmers are seen removing the ...migrations have also begun in Kutch.

SALIM KAZI

Officials in Haryana whisper that this drought will set the prosperous state back by five years. Most of the nearby districts—Rohtak, Bhiwani are suffering a similar fate. In Gurgaon district, the hinterland of Delhi, where 1.15 lakh hectares were sown last year, only 10,000 hectares—less than 4 per cent of the cultivable area—has been sown and even here standing crops that look deceptively green from the main roads have burned or withered from inside. Cotton sowing in Bhiwani, Jind, and Sirsa has been seriously hit, and even in canal-irrigated Sonepat only 50,000 hectares out of a cultivable area of 2 lakh hectares have been planted. The district's paddy crop usually sown in 90,000 hectares has dwindled to just 20,000 hectares.

In Punjab the landscape changes from a parched brown to a welcome green. Lush paddy fields give the impression that the drought has passed Punjab by. But bitter faces looking skywards as they toil on the land tell another tale—one of valiant struggle to save the crop when the rest of the country has had to resign in helplessness. Not a drop of rain here either until the last week of August, but the land of the Green Revolution is suffering the most of the fact that 90 per cent of cultivated land here is irrigated. Of course that does not mean water is available for the taking. It means a desperate attempt to extract water from a ground water table that has dipped from 20 ft to up to 100 ft deep. It also means expensive reboring of tube-wells and heavy investment on diesel and electricity whenever it is available to keep those pumps running, to keep the thirsty crop standing on otherwise parched land.

Travelling across the state, the incessant drone of pumpsets deep into the night reminds you of the battle the farmer of Punjab is waging against the wrath of nature. So far he is winning, he is hopeful. Neck-deep in debt with the drought following on the heels of the ruined rabi wheat due to unseasonal rains in May, he is still putting his last penny on this crop with a dogged belief that he will emerge the victor.

Seventy-five-year-old Uday Singh in Alamgir is transporting soil for others in his tractor to earn money to buy diesel. Gurmukh Singh of Kaind village sold part of his land to make up for the losses of the rabi crop and is now thinking of selling his cattle to keep the water flowing on land he has taken on theka (contract) for paddy. The crop stands strong and healthy and that is all which is keeping him going.

Against a normal investment of Rs 1,500 per acre the farmer is spending nearly Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 per acre on his rice crop this year, says former chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala. According to him the farmer can only break even if he is given a procurement price of Rs 200 per quintal for his crop this year. "If they do not get a reasonable bonus for such an admirable effort this year; next time they will not invest," says Sukhdev Singh, vice-chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University.

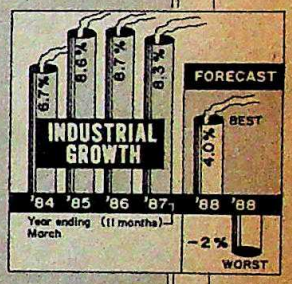
The canvas of Punjab is not all optimistically green however. There are those of course who could not summon up the finances for such an effort for the kharif and have left their crop midway or even put their land for sale to survive. Instead of the 18.9 lakh hectares under paddy in a normal kharif, this year finds only 14 lakh hectares. The production is expected to fall by at least 30 per cent because of the reduced acreage alone and another 10 per cent with lower yield.

The struggle goes on, too, in Uttar Pradesh where shortage of rain during the kharif season has devastated 55 of its 57 districts and crops worth Rs 2,500 crore lie damaged. Of a total cultivable

Slowing down the wheels of industry

EVEN as the drought ravages farmers, grim predictions of a dramatic dip in industrial production are being made.

A growth rate of 3.5 per cent to 4 per cent, says the National Council of Applied Economic Research. A more alarming prediction of minus 2 per cent comes from D.H. Pai Panandikar, secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.



Though industrial production has grown by more than 8 per cent annually in the last three years, the Cassandras have a point. Says O.P. Munjal, managing director of Hero Cycles, 60 per cent of whose cycles are hawked in rural India: "The drought conditions may hinder or delay expansion plans." Adds a Hindustan Lever official: "We expect a decline in the sales of agro-products in seriously affected areas."

A squeeze on the income of farmers could lead to a demand slump in items like textiles. Inflation could be still another consequence, limiting the public's capacity to save, and in turn the ability of the industry to raise funds. A drought also means a scarcity of power to run factories. In Punjab, mini-steel plants have virtually closed down.

Immediately hurt will be agro-based industries like fertilisers—already facing a glut—sugar and tractors, which account for 27 per cent of industrial production. Sugar output could drop next year while tractor firms are unlikely to meet this year's sales target of 85,000.

"It's not just the rural market. Everyone's purchasing power will be affected," says Suresh Krishna, president of the Confederation of Engineering Industries. "I foresee a demand recession after March."

If he's right, industry may be heading for a dramatic downslide.

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Hoping against hope for the economy

THE drought will positively leave a major scar on the economy. The question is: how deep? With feverish optimism about the rabi crop, policy makers are hoping economy growth will be between 1 and 2 per cent. But this would be the scenario at its best, against an average growth rate of 5 per cent achieved in the previous plan. A more realistic view of the coming year would point to a zero rate of growth—and if the rabi fails too, a negative growth of 2 per cent to 3 per cent. The worst case scenario means a 5 per cent drop in per capita income.

Drought necessarily results in a cutback in purchasing power and demand. It also leads to inflationary shortages. The signs of the increase in prices in the coming months is already evident with vegetables like onions and tomatoes selling at Rs 6 and Rs 20 a kg. At a conservative estimate, planners are gearing themselves for a 12 per cent increase in the wholesale price index, against an average rise of 6 per cent in the last half a dozen years or so.

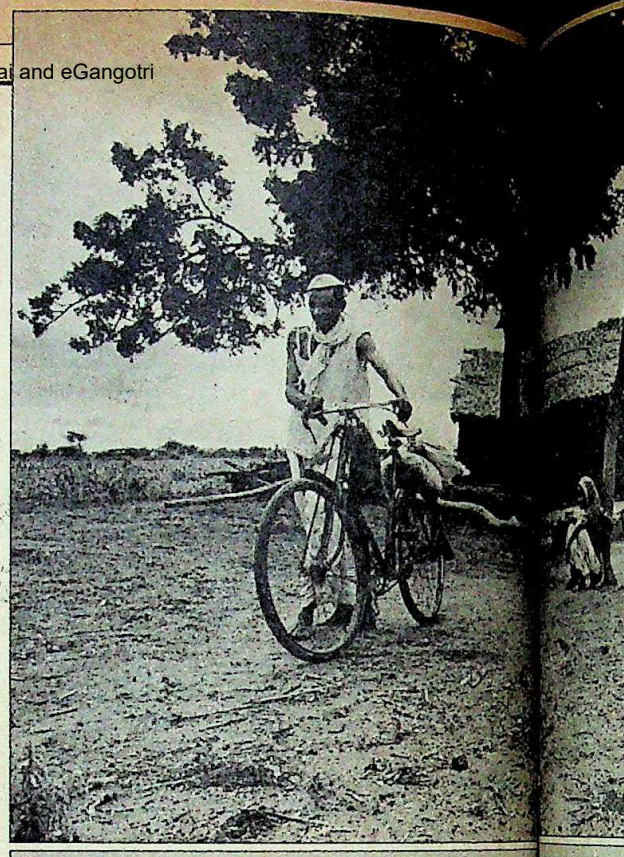
Government finances, already stretched to keep the deficit within the Rs 5,700 crore promised by the prime minister in the budget, will have to accommodate an inescapable additional expenditure of at least Rs 1,000 crore on Central drought assistance. In the circumstances, savings and market borrowings hold no hope for big increases.

Unless the Government imposes fresh taxes, like the surcharge that Rajiv Gandhi had hinted at last fortnight, expenditure of the Government in other sectors—even developmental expenditure—would have to face a tight squeeze. Further, a shortage of edible oils and a higher demand for diesel are expected to put a huge import load on the balance of payments. With the import bill and the deficit compounding the problems of a sluggish economy and a price spiral, the Government has an unenviable task on its hands.

area of 124 lakh hectares, almost 55 lakh hectares have not even been sown. Of a total kharif production of 106 tonnes last year, 73 lakh was paddy. This year the kharif production is not expected to cross the 90-lakh tonne mark and paddy production is unlikely to be more than 40 lakh tonnes. Here, too, the ground water levels have dropped by an average of 20 ft. In Etmadpur, a village with a population of 2,000 in Amaoli block—one of the most prosperous areas of Fatehpur district in central Uttar Pradesh—only one of the five state tube-wells is working. Says Raja Ram Yadav, a village milkman who earns his living from his nine cows: "I'm afraid my cattle may not survive. The cows now yield only half the milk they had produced."

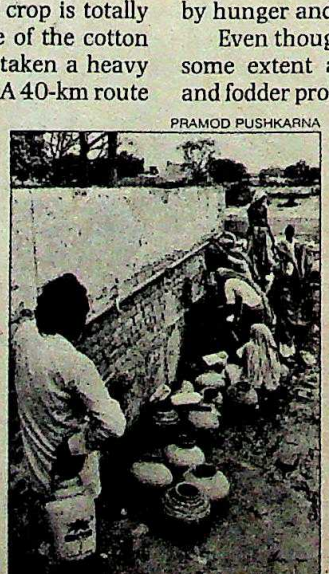
And despite the recent rainfall in Gujarat state ranging from 30 mm to 100 mm the effect of the drought is unabated. As many as 20 lakh people are expected to go on the relief dole. The rains have provided only a breather. With cattle dying in their thousands, residents from the largest district, Kutch, have begun mass migrations southwards. Barring some pockets in south Gujarat, the kharif crop is totally destroyed, and the failure of the cotton and groundnut crop has taken a heavy toll of textile and oil mills. A 40-km route from Viramgam in Ahmedabad to Nal Sarovar is littered with cattle carcasses and farmers can be seen removing the skin of dead cows. Siddhi Gaga of Shahpur village was forced to leave his home after 25 of his 35 cattle died. The plight of this village is so desperate that people have been forced to eat rotis made from the roots of shrubs. On the opposite coast in Orissa not even 20 per cent of the crop, especially paddy is expected to survive. Ganjam, a southern district of Orissa, is the state's bustling rice-bowl. But even from here people have begun to flee their villages. And there were reports from the Tribal-dominated Koraput district—hotly denied by the Government—that children and elderly people had begun to die of diseases caused by hunger and eating poisonous shrubs.

Even though the recent rains have to some extent alleviated drinking water and fodder problems in Madhya Pradesh, official statistics paint a dismal picture of the havoc wrought by the drought: some Rs 394 crore worth of crops ruining more than 25 lakh of farmers have been damaged. While 11 lakh hectares of the kharif area remained unsowed, half the crop in the 36 lakh hectares that was sowed, perished. Unlike the arid deserts of Rajasthan or the barren lands of Uttar Pradesh, the aerial view of Kerala is one of greenery and sleepy lagoons all around. And when a Central survey team visited the state last fort-



Kachru Dubey of Maldhon village in Maharashtra h[as] pump for his well. But the well is drying out and Du[bey]

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Dry wells force farmers to go long distances for water.

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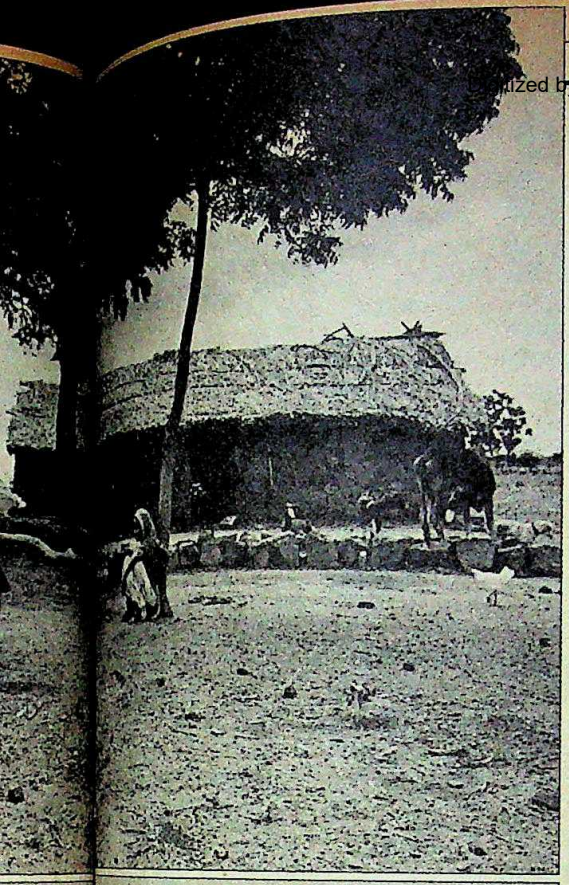

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PRASHANT PANJIAR

...night in a heavy downpour Kerala's offi... ...cials had a hard time convincing the ...observers that the state was suffering from ...the worst drought in its history. The ...Government has even cancelled the tradi... ...tional Onam tourist week celebration be... ...cause of the economic devastation caused ...by the drought—a total loss of Rs 1,200 ...crore. As a result of a total crop failure, ...Kerala will now obtain more than 90 per ...cent of its rice requirements from ...neighbouring states. Wynad district ...which has the highest rainfall in the state ...registered only 81 cm of rain as compared ...to last year's 252 cm. Pepper, ginger, ...cardamom, as well as the state's main cash ...crop—coconuts—have been badly ...affected.

This year the bulk of Maharashtra's 45,000 villages were hit badly as crops dried up and water tables plummeted. With the recent rains, peasants anxiously look at the clouds praying that rain should continue until September to ensure a good rabi crop. Five years ago Kachru Paraji Dubey began digging for water on his farm in Maldhon village, 50 km from Nasik city in Maharashtra. Three years ago Dubey sold 10 of his 22 acres to raise money for digging deeper. He also bought a diesel water pump, confident that with his own supply of irrigation water he would be able to make the land yield more than other farmers in rain-fed Sinnar taluka. After four years of drought, Dubey wonders if he will be forced to sell the remaining land and become a landless labourer. "The water in the well can at best irrigate half an acre now," says the disconsolate, 35-year-old Maratha farmer. "We also need some for drinking. Agriculture is our father and mother. I can not even think of selling the land and going away."

In June, Dubey began sowing bajra on his 12-acre farm, but even before he finished the rains had gone. A 3-acre plot, ploughed but lying fallow, the furrowed earth cracked by an unrelenting sun is testimony to the farmer's failed aspirations. After a long dry spell, the monsoon revived again in August, too late to save the kharif crop. But the stunted, yellowed bajra plants have suddenly turned grasshopper green again, as if nature itself was mocking man's indefatigable spirit. If the fickle monsoon does not play truant again, Dubey will get some 50 kg of bajra from the land. In a good year he can get as much as 30 quintals. "For the last three years, we farmers have survived thanks to wheat from the Government ration shop," acknowledges Dubey ruefully.

For Dubey's mother Narbada, it has been a long, hard struggle ever since her husband died when her only son was just a year-old. She rented part of the land to another peasant, worked as a farm labourer, but sent her son to school hoping that one day he would get a degree and a job in the city. By the time Dubey was 18-years-old, she had to change her plans. There was not enough money for the son's studies. Dubey began working on the land, and dreaming of his own well to irrigate the farm. He is married now, with a 12-year-old son Prakash and an infant daughter. His wife Heerabai though is expecting another child and has gone with her daughter to stay with her relatively better off father. Now the family's hopes of a better life in the city have been placed on Prakash's shoulders—the son lives with Heerabai's brother-in-law, a government employee, 20 km away and studies in the fifth standard in a village school, far away from the drudgery of farm life. For the father though the future, even if full of foreboding, remains firmly in Maldhon. "Whenever I go to Nasik I see how much better the condition of city people is," he observes. "But as long as I have land, God willing I will struggle here to make it yield something. That is the sacrifice I

No one is taking this bull by the horns

FEW city dwellers can fully comprehend just how much cattle means to a villager: they are central to village economy and when drought claims cattle, a farmer loses capital as valuable, sometimes, as land itself.

And still, the price of official failure to tackle the problem of fodder is now being paid. Late last month, fodder prices were about 50 per cent up: between Rs 50 and Rs 70 per quintal in Haryana, Rs 70 and Rs 100 in Delhi and crossed Rs 120 in Rajasthan.

About 32 million—of a total 184 million—cows and bulls are affected, with Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu—in that order—being worst hit. The total population, including buffaloes, sheep and goats: 368 million.

Green fodder needs to be supplemented by dry fodder—paddy residue, wheat straw and fodder crops like maize and jowar, among other things. In times of drought, 3 kg of dry fodder per day is adequate—the normal requirements are 5 kg—to maintain the weight of a cow's body but the production of milk starts falling.

According to Amrita Patel, secretary of the National Dairy Development Board, in Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, milk procurement by cooperatives has dropped sharply and last month, was 40 per cent lower than at the same time in 1986.

Apart from organising cattle camps and fodder, the centre is also pushing reluctant state governments to divert some molasses—a byproduct in sugar production—from the liquor industry to enrich dry fodder. It also wants straw and bagasse (sugar-cane left over after crushing) diverted from industrial units.

No state government is more guilty than Rajasthan which, in spite of huge tracts of wasteland has made no serious attempt to develop grass reserves. A 15-year-old recommendation of the National Commission on Agriculture to this effect to many states continues to be ignored.

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Trying to measure up to the task

WHILE the primary responsibility of tackling drought lies with the states, the Centre plays a crucial role. It provides the cash or grain (as wages in relief works), monitors progress and directs state governments on how best to tackle the situation.

By end-August, the Centre had already released Rs 226 crore to fight the calamity. A cabinet committee on drought headed by Rajiv Gandhi and a committee of secretaries, headed by Cabinet Secretary B.G. Deshmukh—to oversee administrative measures—had begun functioning. A number of ministries have been allotted specific tasks and at the centre of responsibility is the Agriculture Ministry.

Caught in a tight spot in making ends meet, the Cabinet decided last week to adopt austerity measures that would lead to a saving of Rs 500 crore to Rs 600 crore: this includes cuts of Rs 250 crore in defence and Rs 100 crore in railways expenditure. Politicians and bureaucrats will also be permitted to travel abroad this year only if it is absolutely essential. Cuts in expenses could follow in other areas in the coming weeks.

On the other hand, as the Government tries to mobilise resources, there is a distinct possibility of a drought surcharge. There is considerable discussion on what form it ought to take and this should soon be clear.

Politics has become an inherent part of drought control. The states have developed a vested interest in it and regularly make wildly exaggerated claims of damages—Uttar Pradesh alone has asked for Rs 1,200 crore in Central assistance this year. It is a game two can play. The Centre treats the claims cynically and the states are lucky if they can get New Delhi to part with a fraction of the money they demand.

—Side-bars have been compiled by SREEKANT KHANDEKAR, TANIA MIDHA and PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

have to make to ensure my son goes to college."

In the fields all across the land the struggle for survival continues with forceful vitality in what is, despite all odds, a triumph of the human spirit. But what is even more obvious is that despite thousands of crores of expenditure on relief works and rural employment anti-poverty programmes, the Government, after 40 years of Independence, has not been able to insulate the country's agriculture—and economy—from the vagaries of the monsoon. The fact that buffer stocks of food supplies have been built up and that there is no starvation yet is scant solace for the millions of farmers who have lost everything and have been set back for years. Theirs is also a total psychological devastation not readily apparent to people in the cities. As Shanker Singh of Ladpura village near Ajmer, Rajasthan put it: "All these government programmes simply serve to make the peasant dependent and in debt. It is the same way that the British controlled the peasants."

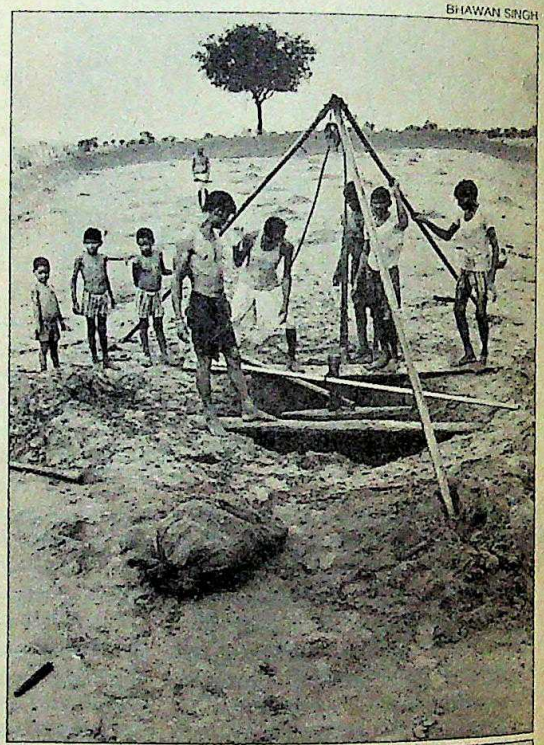
Relief measures which cost the exchequer Rs 5,000 crore last year are but a palliative with nothing permanent to show for them. And in most states the money is gobbled up by corrupt officials and greedy contractors. Barring a few states like Kerala and Gujarat hardly a relief work was anywhere in sight. Not even fodder depots had been established. Despite recurring droughts, it is obvious that nothing has been learned from the past—there is no systematic or sustained effort at soil and water management and conservation, no provision for deep-well drilling mobile rigs, designed to drought-proof the country. Unless such steps—which should be the most fundamental thrust in any anti-poverty programme—are taken, the silver lining of India's progress will continue to be threatened by the dark clouds of drought and devastation.

But the silver lining that is persistent is not in government statistics or programmes. It is in the struggle of millions of peasants who continue to dare to dream of a better future.

It is embodied in the struggle for survival of Ghasi Ram a 20-year-old Jat farmer from Borna Ki Dahni in the Sikar district of Rajasthan. This season his land became a veritable desert. "I used to sit around," he says, "pitying my lot, wondering what to do, cursing my luck." Last fortnight, before there was any sign of rain, he woke up one morning and decided to fight. He borrowed Rs 1,500 from a money-lender and trudged along with his two brothers to a sand dune in the middle of his field and began manually boring through it. In five days he had reached 60 ft but had not hit water. "I will keep boring until I find water even if it kills me," he says. What will he grow when the water comes? He smiles as if hiding a secret and replies: "Maltas. Oranges. Every crop has failed here. So why shouldn't I try fruit? I will plant an orchard. An orchard in the desert."

Will he require help from the Government? His answer: "Damn the Government!"

BHAWAN SINGH



Determined Ghasi Ram, of Sikar, Rajasthan: "I will find water even if it kills me."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with M. RAHMAN, ANITA PRATAP, UDAY MAHURKAR, SREEDHAR PILLAI, FARZAND AHMED and TANIA MIDHA

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Farooq Under Fire

Rising unpopularity threatens Kashmir accord

Farooq Abdullah's coalition Government, whose victory was hailed as a major electoral event barely five months ago, has begun to show signs of dangerous wear and tear. Its failures are causing new political tensions and alignments in the state. A report from Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR:

LAST month, when Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah went to Srinagar's Idgah mosque to offer prayers on the occasion of Id-ul-Azha, some 3,000 securitymen, including an entire batallion of plainclothesmen, formed ring after ring of protection around him. And, even as he delivered his *taqreer* after the prayers, thousands of worshippers began to mill out of the tightly guarded enclosure without bothering to listen to him.

Where once this sole *nishani* of the lion of Kashmir had held crowds deliriously spellbound, and where thousands of Kashmiris would lift him aloft their shoulders on occasions such as Id, Farooq has now become a prisoner of his own political insecurity. He is unable to mix freely with the very people who are supposed to have given him his landslide victory.

The cordons of armed policemen were present partly because on the previous Id, two months earlier, Farooq had been manhandled by angry demonstrators while he tried to perform his namaaz. The fury against him had been so intense that bands of angry youth in Srinagar's Lal Chowk had ripped two iron pillars from their very foundations, between which was strung a portrait of Farooq and his father Sheikh Abdullah. And on July 13, Kashmir's Martyr's Day, when Farooq led a procession that was thinly attended in comparison to previous ones, armed policemen entered houses en route and kept vigil at their windows. In fact, Srinagar's police academy has been severely strained for two months, as recruits have had to double up to ensure the chief minister's safety. Recalls G.M. Shah, former chief minister and Farooq's brother-in-law: "Even Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed was highly unpopular towards the last days of his regime. Yet his most vicious opponents never thought of preventing him from praying on a religious day."

In less than 200 days, the man who led the Congress(I)-National Conference (NC-F) alliance to a dramatic sweep at the polls, and whose charisma and ability to mingle with crowds were his most precious assets, has become the object of fear and loathing on the streets, and faces criticism from the bureaucracy and from his Congress(I) partners and even open attacks from his own party members. Admitted NC(F) MP Rashid Kabli, founder of the party's youth wing in 1964: "I believe in this party because it represents the essential mainstream, but our image is shattered. Our MLAs and MPs are disgusted. Farooq's image is already one of suppression, suffocation, and rigging. The voters feel betrayed. The accord with the Congress(I) has delivered nothing."

This hostility to Farooq is not an overnight phenomenon. Its seeds were sown during the accord with Rajiv Gandhi when, as Kabli noted: "He refused to take the party into confidence, rammed the agreement down their throats and then did nothing to prepare the people to accept it." Initially, observers felt the accord was the only way to bring stability and democracy to the state. In retrospect, it seems that Farooq's quick embrace of the Centre was guided by personal compulsions. He wanted to ensure the quick political demise of Shah's defectors and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, whom Farooq blamed for engineering the defections that toppled his government. The price he had to pay was to accept a ruling partner—identified in the Kashmiri mind as a coloniser—whom he himself had denounced as an oppressor two years before.

The alliance apart, one of the major reasons for the bitter resentment against Farooq is the widespread belief, in the valley, that the Assembly is the illegitimate product of rigging. Several election petitions have already been filed in the high court. From the bazaars of Srinagar and Anantnag to villages near Kupwara and Pahalgam; among shikarawalas, shopkeepers, Gujjars and government servants, the refrain is the same: our votes were stolen. Says Trilochan Dutta, veteran Congress(I) leader from Jammu and one of the chief architects of the accord: "It may look like I'm speaking against my alliance partner. But we should hang our heads in sorrow over what was allowed to happen in the poll." Most government officials now privately admit that rigging occurred, and differ only about its extent.

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

The emotional stake in this particular election had been unusually strong. The emergence of the Muslim United Front (MUF) under Qazi Nissar and Maulana Abbas, and the People's Conference (PC) under Abdul Ghani Lone—which together polled more than 40 per cent of the votes—as the most formidable opposition block—was a significant indicator of the public mood. Farooq and the Centre branded the entire opposition movement as "fundamentalist" and anti-Indian, which was a convenient oversimplification. Even though a few opposition leaders had indulged in rabid secessionist rhetoric, they represented a growing protest movement against corruption, the dynastic rule of the Abdullah family and Farooq's accord with a party that is seen as serving New Delhi's interests.

Bhim Singh, Dogra leader from Jammu and head of the pro-Farooq Panthers Party, says: "On the one hand you want to emotionally Indianise this suspect population, but on the other, you rob him of his vote and destroy his faith in Indian democracy. You can't have it both ways."

Compounding the resentment is the

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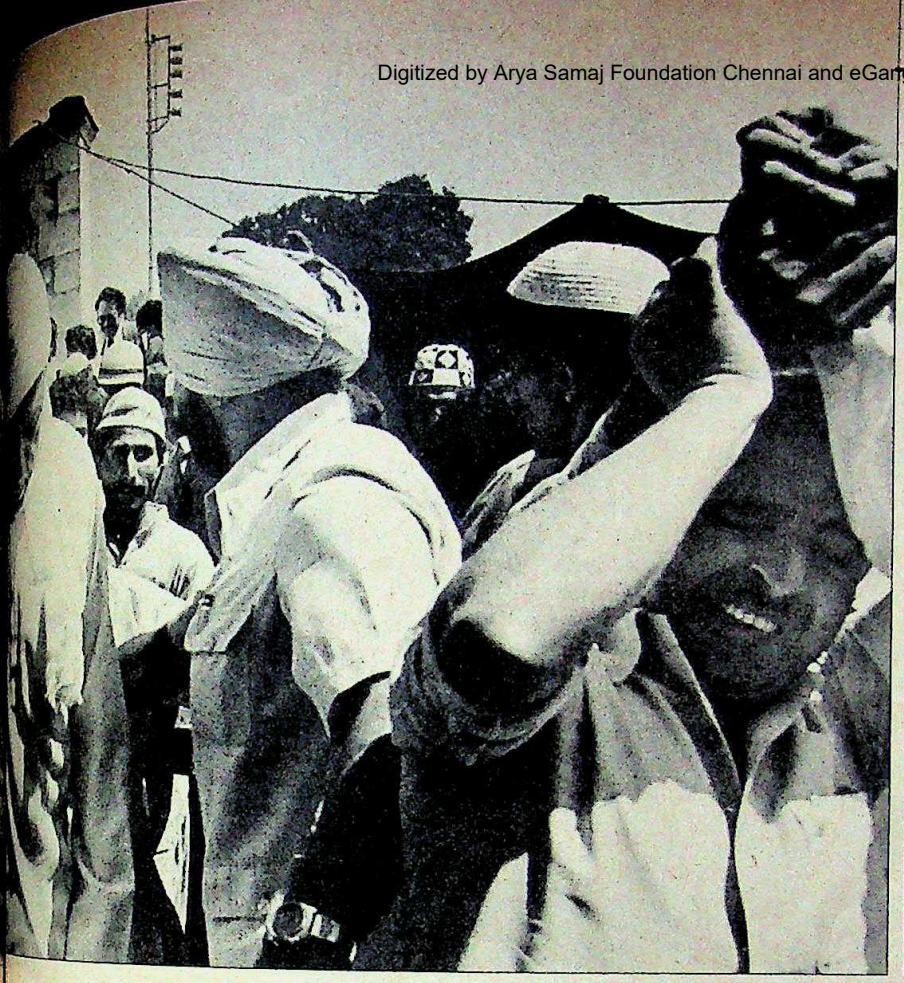
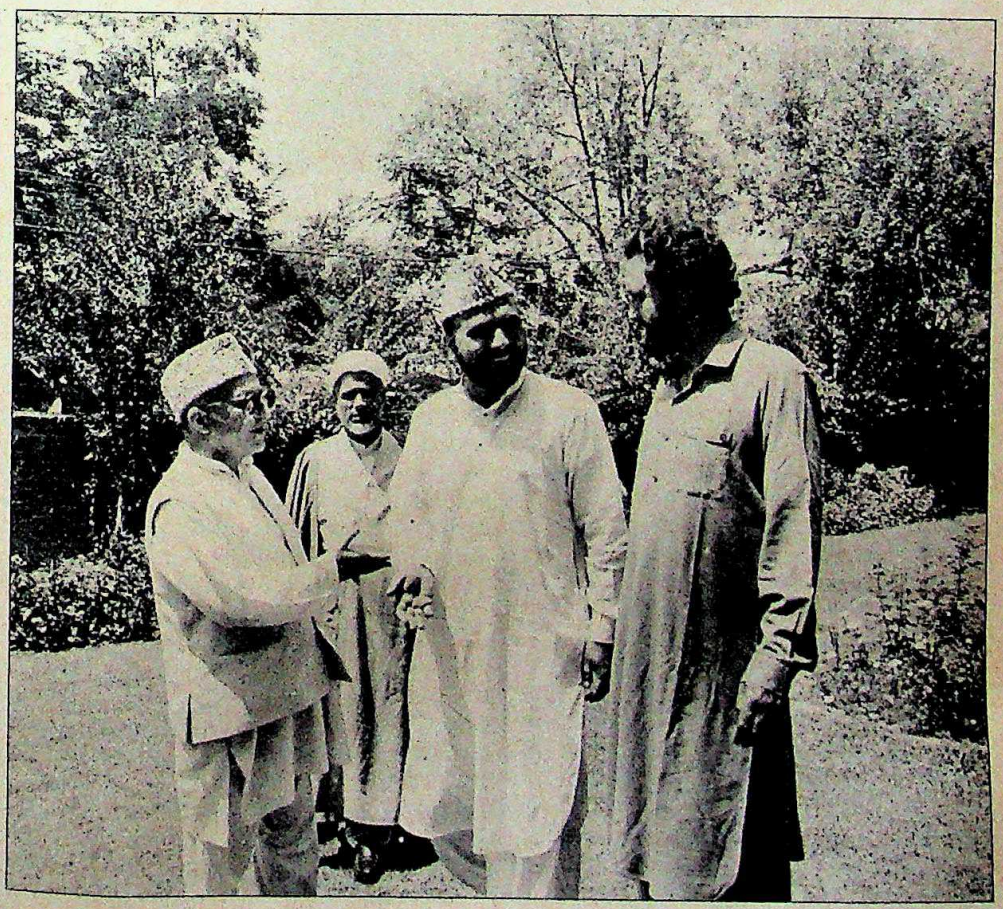


Farooq has now become a prisoner of his own political insecurity. He is unable to mix freely with the very people who are supposed to have given him his landslide victory. He faces criticism from both Congress(I) and NC(F) party members.

Securitymen clearing the way for Farooq at Idgah mosque

Opposition leaders—branded by the ruling government as "fundamentalist"—really represent a burgeoning protest movement against corruption, the dynastic rule of the Abdullah family and Farooq's accord with a party that is seen as serving New Delhi's interests.



MUF leaders (from left) Shah, Maulana Abbas, Qazi Nissar and Lone

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FAROOQ ABDULLAH

"I don't want cheap popularity"

EVEN as Farooq Abdullah's popularity has ebbed, he remains feisty and intense, and lashes out with emotion at his critics who, he says, have never dared to walk in his shoes. His gaze level, his eyes often narrowing with anger, he defends his position with dramatic gestures and soaring oratory worthy of a Mark Antony. Excerpts from an interview with Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR:

Q. *There seems to be a tremendous fall in your personal popularity in the state. The same people who carried you on their shoulders now demonstrate against you on Id.*

A. What do you want me to do? Destroy Kashmir just because I want to be raised on the shoulders of people? I had to take a bitter decision for the betterment of the nation. How long can I afford to keep quarrelling with the Centre and tolerate the suffering of the common man in Kashmir? My father went through worse than this.

Q. *Do you have any second thoughts on the accord?*

A. I took the decision to walk down a path full of thorns. I've never had second thoughts—from the word go.

Q. *There seem to be other reasons for popular disaffection. There are complaints of government inefficiency and inaction.*

A. People here love to criticise for the sake of criticism. The spirit of doing something for yourself has disappeared. I am telling the people of Kashmir, you cannot stand here with a begging bowl any more. No more begging bowl. You have to stand on your own feet and make a go of it. And only those who do will survive.

Q. *And everywhere people say the election was won through rigging. How do you respond to this charge?*

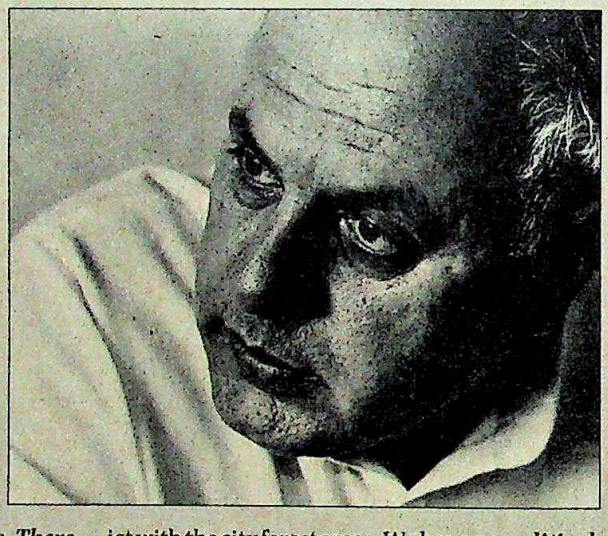
A. They said the same thing in 1983. But they couldn't prove a damn thing. And now let them keep saying that again until kingdom come. But it doesn't deter me from the path I've chosen. Let them go to the courts and the tribunals.

Q. *How do you respond to the charges that your government is negotiating with the same forest cutters who were banned from the nationalised forests under governor's rule?*

A. We still totally ban felling but we know trees are cut clandestinely.

Q. *What about the trees that were felled in the city forest (green belt) in Srinagar?*

A. That's an exaggeration. Only some bushes were removed. The golf-course was planned in 1983, before the city forest came into being. And we will have to see how much of its plans conflict with the city forest areas. We have no intention of destroying the forest.



Q. *Your government seems to face a crisis of credibility. People call it a government of crooks that is pocketing development money.*

A. The trouble in Kashmir is that they think everybody's a crook. Forty years ago these people had no clothes. Were they even the owners of their own fields? There was not even a pyjama in the villages. Today, we've become masters of the land. They have tinned roofs with clean drinking water. Where the hell do you think these things come from? I just gave government employees pay relief worth Rs 34 crore. Where the hell do they think this came from? And I did this without raising taxes.

Q. *But what about development?*

A. We've just had about Rs 300 crore of flood and drought damage. This is what is cutting our progress. We had to remove and resettle 10,000 families. All this is costly.

Q. *But even here people say not enough was done.*

A. Do you think that there's a tree with money hanging on it and Farooq can reach out and pull it down? Or am I expected to rub my magic lamp of Alladin and have a genie come out to perform miracles? I may be the most unpopular man but Farooq is not going to revive the bogey of Pakistan. I'm not going to make that mistake. You can crucify me today but nobody's going to change my course of action. I don't want cheap popularity.

Q. *No one said it was an easy task.*

A. And you make my task more difficult when Muslims are killed in Meerut and Ahmedabad. What do I tell those young MUF (Muslim United Front) students when that happens? India must know what price it has to pay if they want Kashmir. When (opposition leader) Syed Geelani asks me what percentage of Kashmiri minorities are employed in Central Government jobs, how am I to answer? Still, the path I've chosen is hard, but it's the only one. Once, my father was called a kafir by the Muslims. If that is my lot, so be it.

Q. *People here, including members of your own party, have been critical about political arrests and what they call repression in the state.*

A. What should I do when they tear India down? Do you want another Meerut here? Then you will be the last one to protect me. You will then conveniently blame Farooq for causing a Meerut here. But as a point of fact, there are more Sikhs in jail than Kashmiris.

Q. *You're obviously very emotional about all this.*

A. I know the price I'm paying. If I'd taken the easy path I wouldn't be talking to you today. But I'm not going to look back. This is a fight to the finish and may God help us. And contrary to what people say, I'm not worried about my security. I still get down on the roadsides and I eat *bhuttas* with the people. If they want to kill me, let them kill me. *Himmate mardaan madade Khuda* (God helps only the courageous).

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failure of Farooq's Government to provide dramatic benefits since the signing of the accord. The chief minister had publicly justified the accord on the grounds that it would end Centre-state friction, ensure stability, and bring in Central assistance for speedy economic development. But it has not lived up to these promises. Farooq maintains that it is too early to judge his performance in attempting to rebuild the state's infrastructure.

But this is not readily apparent. Except for the Jammu-Srinagar Highway maintained by the army, most roads in the state, including the strategic Baramulla Highway, are in a shambles. In the valley, people complain that the Government totally failed to provide relief during the worst flooding and waterlogging that occurred in 40 years. "What little compensation was provided," says Mir Mustafa, independent MLA from Chadura, "was given to certain favoured and undeserving people. I've challenged Farooq to come to any village and I'll show him the proof". And in Jammu, Congress(I) MLAs and opposition leaders are further about the Government's failure to provide drought relief to rice farmers. Says BJP leader Chaman Lal Gupta: "It is as if the Government has ceased to exist because of the growing tension between the alliance partners. Jammu hasn't even received its full quota of fertiliser, fuel and kerosene subsidies." State officials in both the regions note despairingly that Farooq has failed to even bring the full benefits of the Fourth Pay Commission to the state.

Above all, institutionalised corruption, waste and neglect—virtually non-existent during Governor Jagmohan's rule—has returned with a vengeance. The traditional misappropriation of Central and state subsidies by politicians—at the expense of development activities—is again evident. Even as thousands of daily wage labourers are without work but still remain on the payrolls, MLAs have now been assigned extra quotas of daily wage employees. In many districts, people complain that contractors favoured by the NC(F) are given projects by cancelling existing tenders or by issuing tenders without bids. Projects started years ago, like the construction of a new hospital in Kupwara, have been abandoned mid-way.

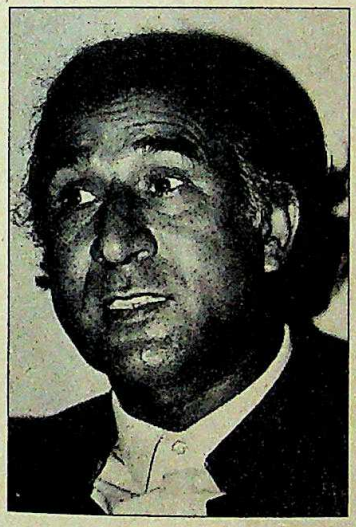
But what reinforces the image of an uncaring government, officials say, are some of the projects approved by Farooq. A Rs 2.5-crore golf course is now under construction near the Dal Lake. The Government faced charges, in the Assembly, that it allowed the felling of some 1,500 trees from the city forest—earlier developed as a special wilderness area—to accommodate it. The forest minister even admitted 600 trees had been cut. A brand new five-star hotel is also being constructed at the cost of the destruction of one of the most picturesque hills surrounding the Dal Lake. An earlier proposal for the hotel was opposed by the NC(F) on the grounds that it would ruin the environment and cause pollution in the lake. Last month, Farooq himself laid the hotel's foundation stone.

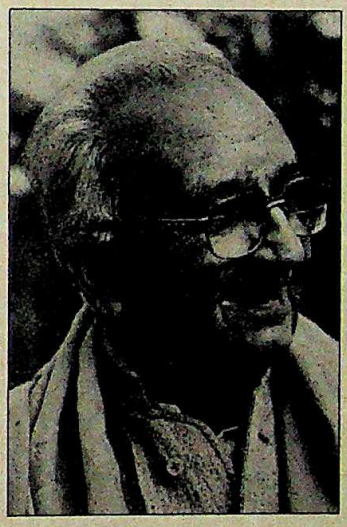
Senior bureaucrats and even NC(F) members say that the Government's functioning is virtually paralysed due to politically-motivated mass transfers of civil servants and district general managers of state industries. In one case, a senior IAS district commissioner was moved from Anantnag to Poonch, then transferred out within 15 days. Said a senior civil servant: "Today, even a class four peon has become a political appointee."

The bureaucracy, barely functioning, is vertically divided between two lobbies. One is led by M. Rahman, principal secretary, who runs the Government for Farooq and is known to even dictate terms to cabinet ministers, and the second by Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, additional secretary, planning, who is a contender for Rahman's position. Chief Secretary M.P. Khosla has been reduced to a cipher. And Farooq once again faces criticism that he neglects detailed official work, spending more time than he should outside the state. Until recently, his government's performance was mercilessly lampooned on state television in a popular Kashmiri serial, *Hazaar Dastaan*. It featured a king of Kashmir, constantly going hat-in-hand to the king of Delhi, and imploring: "Please increase my dole. Even if you give me more, you will never run out of resources. But no matter how much you give me, I will always be short." The show was taken off the air following strident objections from Farooq's Government.

Says Mir Mustafa, independent MLA from Chadura: "During governor's rule, the state didn't take an extra paisa from the Centre and yet schools, roads, hospitals, drinking water were made available, and justice was on the roadside. Within a few months, the governor had shown results." What became apparent, during the Jagmohan period was that, given an atmosphere of an efficient and people-oriented administration, the valley's fundamentalism is only skin deep. The people's demand then was not for *Nizam-e-Mustafa* or for Pakistan, but for jobs, more representation in Central Government departments and fair recruitment policies. Even Qazi Nissar, who had been jailed by the governor for disturbing the peace, admitted: "Yes, there is sadness now that the reforms made for the state's

"Our image is shattered. Our MLAs and MPs are disgusted. Farooq's image is already one of suppression, suffocation, and rigging. The voters feel betrayed."
RASHID KABLI
NC(F) MP





"It may look like I'm speaking against my alliance partner. But we should hang our heads in sorrow over what was allowed to happen in the poll."
TRILOCHAN DUTTA
Congress(I) leader

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benefit have been reversed."

The de-weeding of the Dal Lake has ground to a halt. Playgrounds under construction in rural areas are gathering dust. Government doctors—despite a high court ruling that the governor's ban on private practice was in the public interest—are back in business as usual. There is also a move to abolish the subordinate selection boards—set up under Jagmohan—to wipe out the statewide favouritism and bribery involved in the recruitment of non-gazetted officers. And negotiations are on between the resin and timber lobbies that most government officials believe will pave the way for the tapping of resin by private parties and contractors to re-enter the state's nationalised forests. Green-felling and timber smuggling, say state officials, are on the increase. A senior police officer admitted: "It is beyond our control as the smugglers enjoy political protection."

The muffasil town of Tregam offers a typical illustration of why the people of the valley are angry and ready to explode. This town of about 7,000 people has few of the facilities associated with similar places in India. There is no sewage system, little or no electricity and clogged drains. A major demand of the people for an extended water supply led the concerned department to purchase pipes for pumping water to the town. But during the election, officials used the pipes as flagpoles for the NC(F). Angry townsmen, joined by their womenfolk, ripped down the poles after the election. Many were then arrested and locked up under the Safety Act. Says Mehboob-ur-Rehman, chairman of the town's voluntary protection committee: "The trouble is, whenever we raise our voices for good governance and reform, we are branded fundamentalist and pro-Pakistani and thrown

MUFTI MOHAMMED SAYEED

"There's no democracy"

FOLLOWING his resignation from the Union Cabinet, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, former president of the state's Congress(I), returned to Kashmir last month to one of the biggest welcomes ever accorded to a state leader in recent times. With Farooq Abdullah's popularity on the wane, observers see Mufti as a possible, distant alternative. This shift in his political fortunes is ironic considering that one of the key imperatives of the Kashmir accord was the destruction of Mufti's political influence in the state. He spoke about his resignation and future plans to Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR.

Q. Do you believe that the Kashmir accord was a healthy phenomenon for the party and for the country?

A. In 1983 Farooq had denounced the Congress as a party which supported slaughter of Muslims in Assam. The way the accord was suddenly implemented was a total surrender to Farooq. People like me, who have been the targets of social and religious boycotts for standing by the Congress(I) through thick and thin, were left high and dry. No one consulted me.

Q. Did you express your views to Rajiv Gandhi?

A. I told him that for the most part the NC(F) and the Congress(I) were not campaigning together nor even holding combined meetings. I was ignored. The accord is between two people: Rajiv and Farooq. The grassroots were not involved. Whatever clout the local leadership had was lost.

Q. But the Congress(I) is still represented in the coalition.

A. Yes, but the hardcore party loyalists were left out. The people brought in were lightweights.

Q. So why didn't you resign earlier?

A. It had been telling on my nerves. I felt I was in bondage. In fact, on March 23, I had offered my resignation. But the prime minister dissuaded me. Then Meerut began to prey on my mind. I felt there was a communal divide and the alienation of Muslims would be the worst destabilising factor for the country. I told Rajiv Gandhi that, as a secular party, we should conduct peace marches and he should visit Meerut. But I found him drab and insensitive on the issue, incapable of reacting emotionally. And the party seemed to have a *chalta hai* attitude on this issue.

Q. Is this a change from the past?

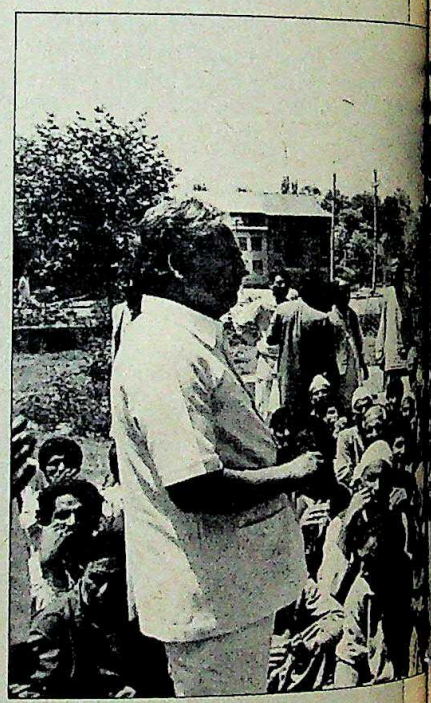
A. Well, he's not like his mother. She consulted us on every issue as she did a cross section of people. But now, after our sacrifices, we're thrown away like flies, reduced to the status of pygmies.

Q. Do you still have faith in the Congress(I)?

A. My faith in the Central leadership is shaken. Look what happened to V.P. Singh and others. There's no democracy, no forum. The life of the party is gone. All that's left is sycophants and yesmen who are killing the Congress(I). In the old days, there was a Kamraj, a B.C. Roy; now there are people without bases who have ruined the party.

Q. Will you form a new party?

A. The ball is in the leadership's court. I've simply come back to square one. I'm back with the people and I stand for the same values as before. It is



no longer a question of labels. I will continue to address national issues and I will welcome V.P. Singh—or for that matter, even leaders of the Opposition—if they wish to address issues in this state.

Q. Will questions like Bofors and corruption figure in your campaign?

A. The idea of a parliamentary committee without the Opposition just stinks. It will not clear away doubts. People are asking: if you're clean, why hide anything? Our vitality is being finished and we're being made to look like a banana republic. It is the same in Kashmir. Farooq knew he had lost the election at the time of the alliance. That is why the rigging took place. And if they call me anti-party for raising these issues, I don't bother.

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into jail. And it is only because people feel that the Centre is party to this repression that they show their protest by attending rallies of fundamentalist leaders."

There is little doubt that before, during and after the election, there has been considerable repression against opposition activists. Thousands of political workers were arrested under the Safety Act. Many of them were confined to local thanas, instead of central jails. Several were freed and then re-arrested. While the Government concedes that, at present, there are no more than 150 detenus, opposition leaders and independent lawyers believe there may be as many as 1,500. The repression issue has become so serious that the *Kashmir Times* ran an editorial against the Government. Even Abdullah admitted: "It is true we arrested candidates, and innocent workers and smugglers are in jail. This has created a hysteric atmosphere. I pray that we don't create another Punjab here."

The alliance now stands discredited and is virtually non-functional because of its inner contradictions. There has been no effort to make it work at the grassroots level. Farooq, members of Congress(I) complain, no longer bothers to make consistent joint tours with his Congress(I) partners. The coordination working committee of the two parties has not been constituted and Farooq, under pressure, no longer justifies the accord on ideological grounds. Instead, he now talks of the accord as a device for obtaining money from the Centre. The government level is also starting to show cracks, with Congress(I) MLAs and ministers complaining that they are being sidelined. Three Congress(I) ministers have had their ministries so truncated that they can hardly perform: higher education has been eliminated from Education Minister Mohammad Aslam's portfolio. Mula Ram has the Power Ministry, but the real power—Central projects—is in Farooq's hands. Similarly, Beli Ram is industries minister, but the portfolio of financial corporations is with the NC(F).

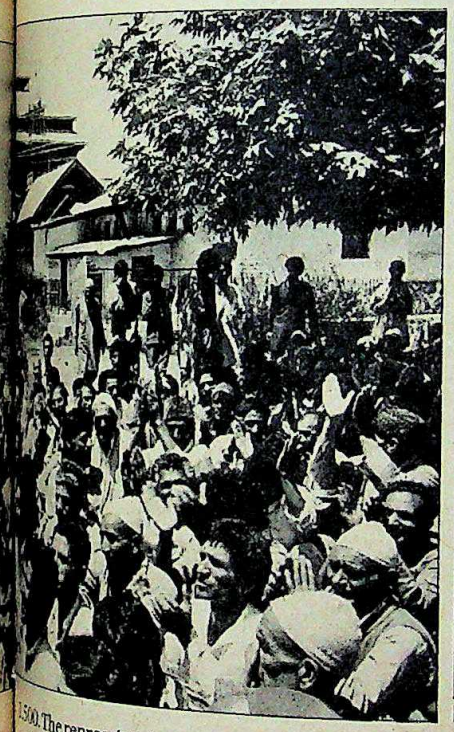
There is a political vacuum in the state, and new forces and alliances are moving in to fill it. While no one can simply write off the NC(F) as a formidable political force, the party is under great pressure to regain lost ground, in which it faces a stiff challenge. This became amply evident, following the Meerut killings in May, when Farooq's party issued a call for a statewide bandh. When shopkeepers in Srinagar discovered that the call had been issued by the NC(F) they did just the opposite: they refused to close their shops in what amounted to a symbolic show of no confidence in the ruling party.

Meanwhile, PC President Lone and NC(K) Chief G.M. Shah have joined the MUF. While some see this as a strengthening of the fundamentalists, the reality is that Lone and Shah, who have been associated with mainstream parties, will be able to isolate the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami within the MUF with the help of Nissar—who has repeatedly sworn allegiance to India—thereby presenting a more secular challenge to the NC(F). Says Lone: "We are not going to bring up the accession issue. Our point is that the Centre is supporting corruption in order to make the NC(F)-Congress(I) combine a success. This is the fundamental complaint of the Muslims of Kashmir." And adds Nissar: "I must look to the present. We've all committed our mistakes. Our fight is for our rights within India."

But perhaps the person who has made the most dramatic re-entry into Kashmir politics is Mufti Mohammed Sayeed. After he resigned as minister for tourism over the issue of communalism, and because he was totally sidelined by Rajiv during and after the accord, he came home to a tumultuous hero's welcome. Mufti, who had been the sole standard bearer of the Congress(I) in the state and was declared an outcast by Sheikh Abdullah, has become the beneficiary of anti-Rajiv and anti-Farooq feelings. His credibility has risen as the people see him as a committed fighter and the only Kashmiri who has dared to quit a Central ministership. And his condemnation of communalism after the Meerut riots has struck a sympathetic chord among Kashmiri Muslims.

So worried was the high command by Mufti's resignation and his return to Kashmir that it ordered an immediate dissolution of the state's Congress(I) committees in order to prevent institutionalised support for him. But the welcome he received in Anantnag—far more enthusiastic than Farooq's reception there a few days later—showed that the Congress(I) cadres, sidelined by the alliance, remain with him and that his base of support, even within opposition voters, has grown. Already, Kashmir watchers are saying cautiously that with the local Congress(I) cadres behind Mufti and with increasing numbers of disgruntled NC(F) politicians looking towards him in the light of his new anti-Centre stance, he may emerge as an alternative force. He may, in fact, even gain the support of MUF leaders seeking to build a new secular and nationalist image for themselves.

Right from the start, the accord was a gamble. Even its supporters said that its only chance of survival would be the ability of the alliance partners, particularly Farooq, to deliver a clean, efficient and just administration. Today, few in Kashmir defend it. Rajiv's last remaining accord in the country is virtually a dead duck as the partners pull in different directions, casting Kashmir adrift once again, on a sea of political uncertainty.



With local Congress(I) cadres behind him and with increasing numbers of disgruntled NC(F) politicians looking towards him in the light of his new anti-Centre stance, Mufti may emerge as an alternative force.

Mufti addressing a meeting: enthusiastic reception

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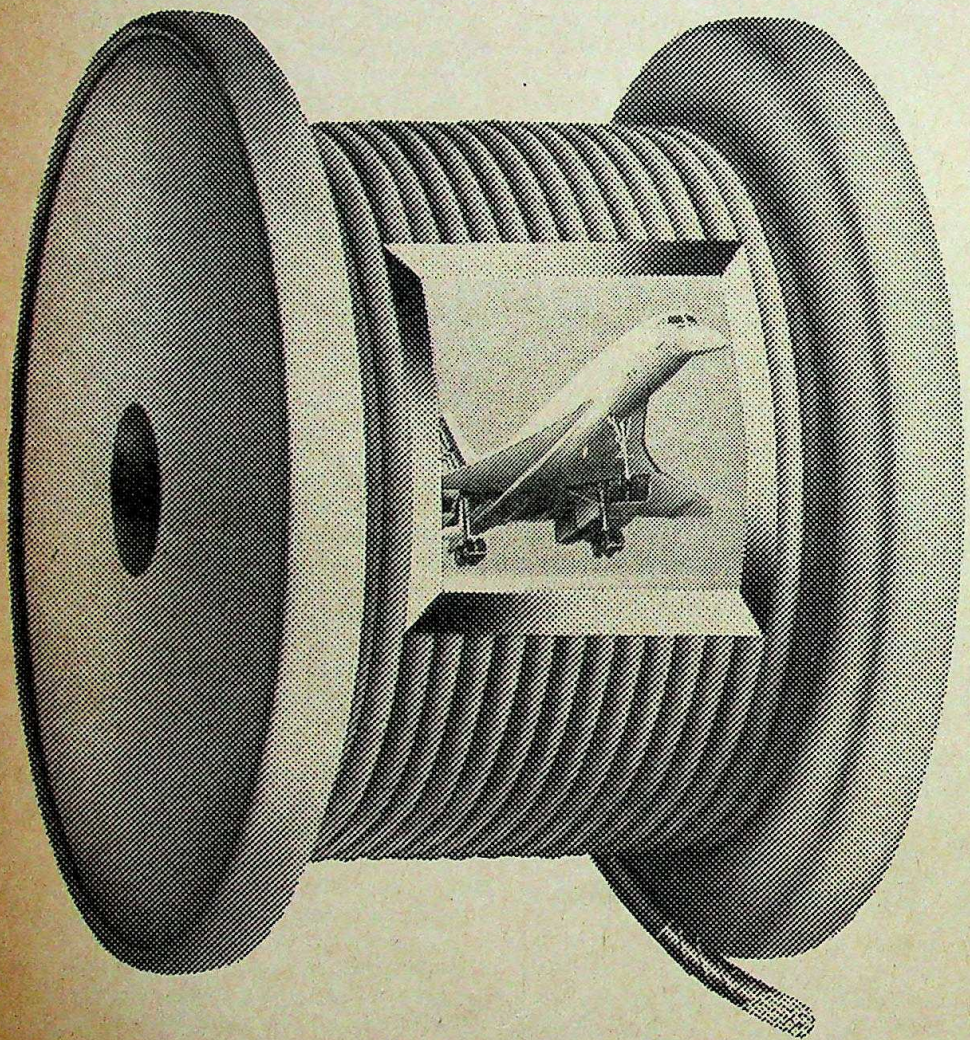

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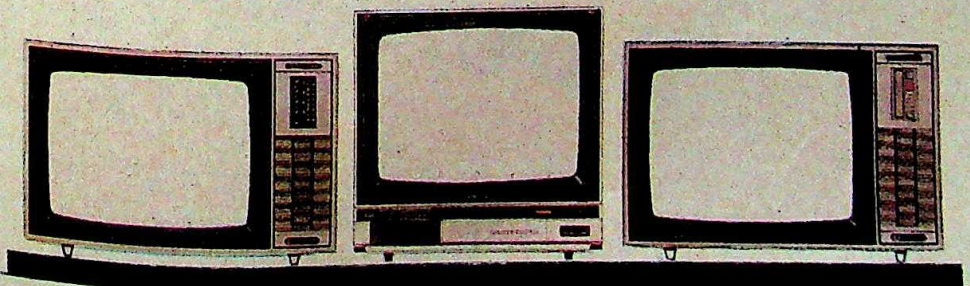

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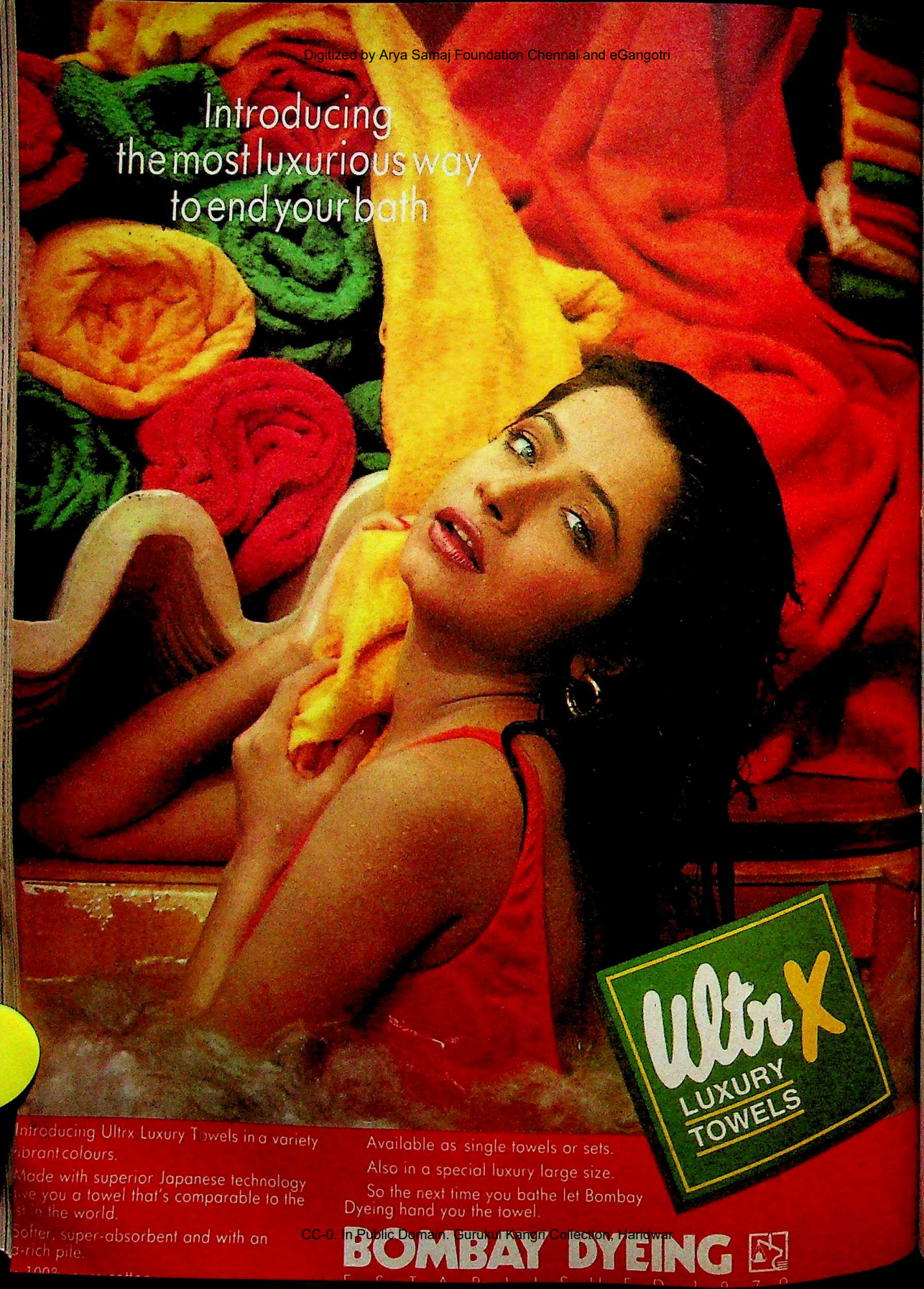

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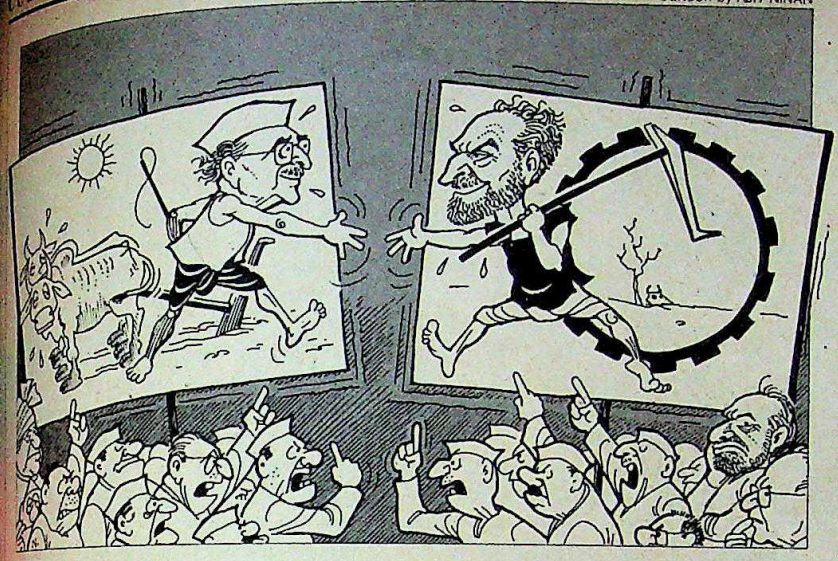

THE OPPOSITION

Moves for Merger

Janata and Lok Dal(B) prepare to get together

ONCE again, the search for a credible alternative to the ruling Congress(I) has begun. Last fortnight, a team of senior Lok Dal(B) and Janata Party leaders held a series of secret meetings to discuss a possible merger. Since earlier unification moves had come to naught, the new initiatives were kept a closely guarded secret from the media as well as middle ranking party functionaries. Madhu Dandavate, Janata Party leader, said: "We are interested more in the post-merger news than in the pre-merger dialogue. But this time, we are moving in the right direction and all of us are convinced that there is a need for an alternative to the Congress(I)." And H.N. Bahuguna, Lok Dal(B) chief, added: "The Lok Dal is not averse to a new left-of-centre party to fight the Congress(I). Let us demolish our old houses and use the debris for raising a new house in which we can all live together."

The foundation for a new political house was laid in New Delhi, in July, during the Janata Party's national executive meeting. Party President Chandra Shekhar moved a resolution for uniting opposition parties. The resolution also authorised him to nominate a panel to look into the possible merger of all non-Congress and non-communist parties. Later, a five-member group was set up, with Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, Orissa party chief Biju Patnaik, Madhu Dandavate, Gujarat party leader Indubhai Patel and party General Secretary George Fernandes.

Patnaik immediately set the ball rolling with a dialogue with Lok Dal leaders Karpoori Thakur, the former chief minister of Bihar, and Devi Lal, who have sided with him before in the Charan Singh-led Lok Dal. Bahuguna initially opposed the idea of any outright merger without discussing the respective party programmes. But he gave in to internal party pressures and formally set up a four-member team of Devi Lal, Karpoori Thakur, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Uttar Pradesh Lok Dal(B) chief, and Sharad Yadav, Rajya Sabha member.

The two teams met at least 10 times to discuss the modalities and timing of the merger. So far, there has been no tangible result besides the mutual agreement on the need to form a single opposition party. Said Jaipal Reddy, Janata MP from Andhra Pradesh: "The viability of a political party creates its own credibility. At present, there is no viable opposition to the Congress(I). With this merger, there will be a viable national opposition party."

The merger moves have been motivated by other political developments too. Janata Party leaders are worried by the emergence of V.P. Singh and his group as an alternative to the Congress(I) in several north Indian states. Singh has also been attracting considerable support in other parts of the country. The Janata Party observed that while Singh was talking to opposition leaders, he was keeping a distance from their party. Hegde finally broke the ice by inviting Singh to Bangalore. Party leaders feel they can bargain better with Singh if they offer him a wider base.

Some Janata Party leaders are also unhappy about the emergence of a regional leader like Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao as the spokesman of the national opposition. Presently, the combined parliamentary strength of the Lok Dal(B) and the Janata Party is about 35 as against over 40 of the Telugu Desam.

Both parties also see the merger as a chance to display their combined strength to the communist parties. Today, the communists—ruling in three states—dictate terms to the Opposition on national matters. In contrast, the Janata Party rules in one state and is fairly strong in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Bihar. If the merger comes through, the new party will be an alternative to the Congress(I) in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The party will be a formidable force in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh as well.

But the winning post is many hurdles away. Negotiations are at present bogged down with working out a new name and leadership. While Janata leaders want the breakaway groups to retain the Janata name, the Lok Dal(B) favours a new party with a new name.

The question of choosing a leader may be an even greater problem. Earlier merger bids never progressed as this issue was not resolved. Participants in the merger talks are unanimous in their view that neither of the current chiefs should be considered for leadership. Lok Dal members are averse to a merger under the leadership of Shekhar who's been Janata Party president since its inception in 1977. Among the alternatives being looked into are Patnaik and Hegde. Though Hegde is preoccupied with his chief ministership, large sections in both parties feel he should move from state politics to the national stage. If their persuasions fail, Patnaik is likely to be the ultimate choice.

Even if the leadership issue is amicably resolved, the new party may face difficulties in selecting party programmes. Though both claim to share the same left-of-centre ideology, Patnaik and Hegde are known for their liberal economic views. But the final hurdle will

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be in keeping together all the leaders, each of whom has strong personal ambitions.

But the new party may encounter difficulties with other opposition parties and the V.P. Singh faction. While the BJP is indifferent to the merger moves, Singh has chosen the communists as his 'natural allies'. But the Janata leaders are hopeful of striking a deal with all the opposition parties. The success or failure of the ongoing talks will, at any rate, prove crucial in establishing the credibility of the non-communist Opposition.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

ANDHRA PRADESH

Land Trial

Legislature versus judiciary

JALAGAM Vengala Rao, Union industry minister and Andhra Pradesh Congress(I) president, is no friend of the state's ruling Telugu Desam Party. The animosity was further established when Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao announced recently that the Venkateswara Commercial Corporation (VCC)—Vengala Rao is a managing partner—made false declarations to get exemption from the Urban Land Ceilings Act for some prized land in Malakpet in east Hyderabad.

Last fortnight, the mudslinging metamorphosed into a row between the state's legislature and judiciary. The high court stayed an inquiry by a House committee "from going into the correctness, propriety, legality or otherwise of the exemption" as the Malakpet land issue is sub-judice.

Judge G. Ramanujulu Naidu's decision took the 294-seat legislative Assembly by surprise. Finance Minister N. Srinivasulu Reddi, quoting Article 194(3) and 212 of the Constitution, said that the courts had no right to inquire into the legislature's proceedings. Said Srinivasulu: "The high court has grabbed the powers, functions, duties, responsibilities and immunities of the legislature. It is daylight murder of parliamentary democracy."

But the finance minister, it transpired, misled the House by not informing it that the Malakpet land issue was sub-judice. Countered Srinivasulu: "How is the Government or the competent authority under the Urban Land Ceilings Act concerned with a private court battle between the VCC and the persons who sold them the land? Permission was given under Section 27 of the Act but the computation of the exact area varied and the competent authority had not yet determined the surplus land required to grant the final exemption."

Several party leaders hastened to caution the minister from attributing statements to the judge. And in the melee, NTR suggested that the House pass a resolution to inform the President about the alleged interference of the court in the affairs of the legislature. The speaker ruled against the suggestion, saying the House was competent to protect its rights and need approach the President only if it was helpless. Still, the House committee has been constituted to probe the exemption issue.

The Malakpet land issue involves a one-acre plot bought by the VCC under a 1978 sale agreement from M.R. Reddi, a retired general manager of the southern railway. The VCC subsequently had to move the city civil court as the owners suddenly became reluctant to execute the sale deed. In August 1982 they received a favourable verdict. But the owners have gone in appeal against the lower court's decree. And in January this year, in a petition to the chief minister, they claimed that Vengala Rao had used his influence and official position to get valid permission.

Reddi stated that Vengala Rao floated the VCC for the sole purpose of acquiring the 5,162 sq yard plot to ostensibly construct a hotel and commercial complex. The VCC was allegedly created to escape the law as the members already possessed land in excess of the urban ceiling limit. The owners had as far back as January 1979, appealed against the Urban Land Ceiling Authority's granting of exemption to the VCC in an application made on January 9, 1979. He also alleged that in order to bypass the provisions of the Urban Land Ceilings Act the site plan was modified to inflate the plinth of the existing buildings and reduce the area of vacant land. In fact, the area according to the agreement of sale is 6,162 sq yards and according to the site plans 4,985 sq yards.

Referring to all this as evidence, Srinivasulu said: "The undue haste with which permission was granted and the conflicting figures about the area showed there was something fishy. For this reason, we agreed to a House committee."

However, some feel the finance minister himself is fishing in troubled waters. A young lawyer B. Purushotham Reddy has petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court for a writ of quo warrant directing Srinivasulu to relinquish office for his "calculated and pre-planned speech" to bring down the judiciary's reputation, and his attempt to tarnish the reputation of Justice Naidu and contempt of court. The lawyer quoted Article 211 of the Constitution which prohibits discussion in the legislature, about the conduct of any Supreme Court or high court judge in the course of his work.

With the Assembly unlikely to meet before November, the high court scheduled to take up the quo warrant issue on August 27, and the VCC petition against the House committee on September 7, the controversy will rage for a long while yet.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Vengala Rao allegedly floated the VCC to acquire prime land in east Hyderabad and to get exemption from the Land Ceilings Act.

Finance Minister N. Srinivasulu Reddi says that the high court is assuming the legislature's powers by interfering in the inquiry.

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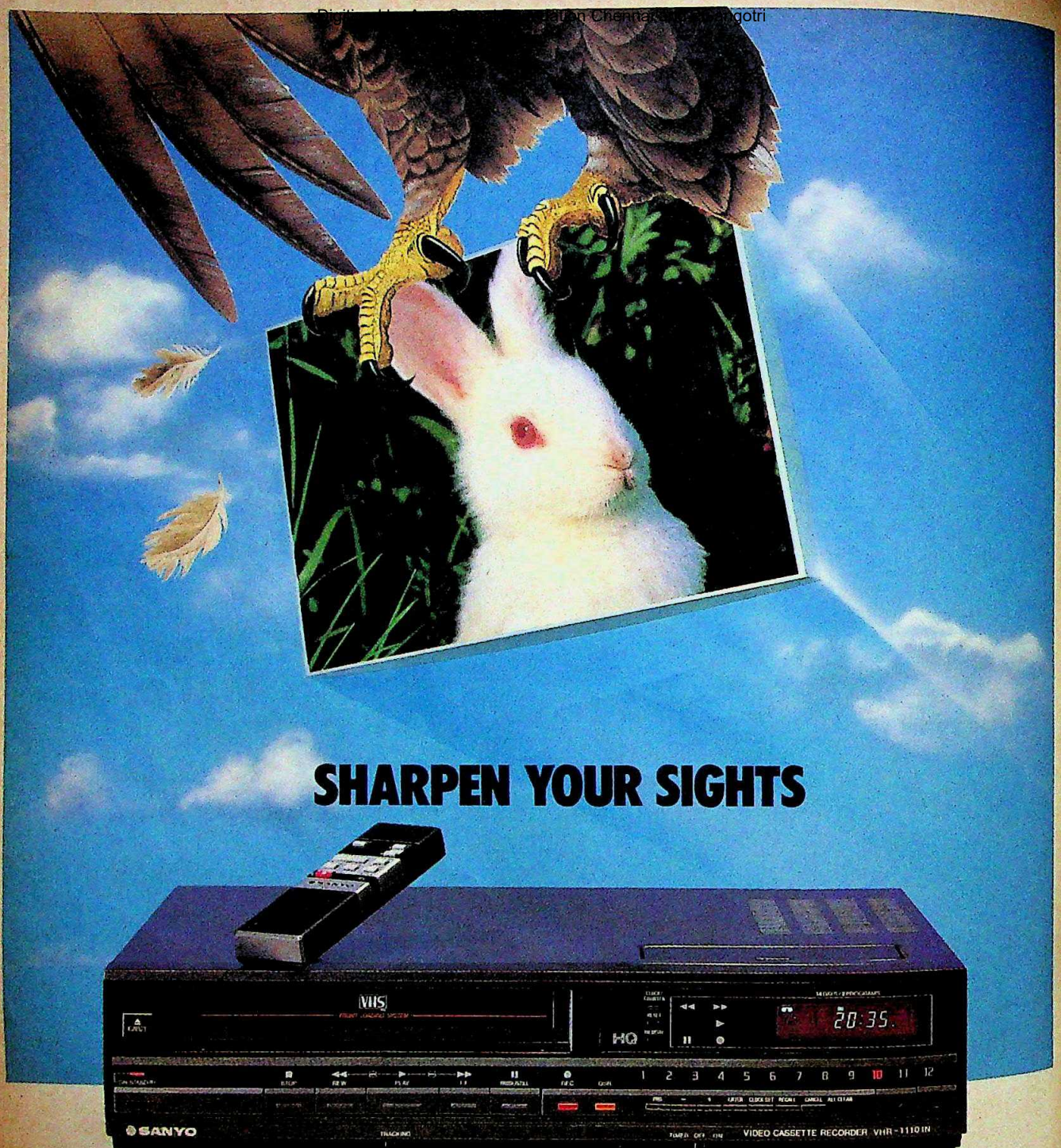

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US EMBASSY

Visa Wait

Stricter scrutiny for students

LAST month was "student season" at United States consulates as hundreds of students flocked to seek a student visa before US universities open their sessions this month. For many of them, though, it turned out to be the season of disappointment as it has become more difficult than ever for Indians to obtain a visa to study in the US.

Though embassy officials deny that there has been any change in policy, others who work at the embassy admit privately that in the last few months "it's become very tough" to get not only a student, but any non-immigrant visa.

The stumbling-block is generally the same. The visa officer interviewing refuses to believe that a young, intelligent, unmarried student wanting to study in the US does not intend to settle there permanently. According to the McCarran-Walter Act, passed over President Truman's veto during the cold war in 1952, a US visa officer must presume every applicant for a non-immigrant visa intends to stay indefinitely.

A random survey of those emerging from the consulate in the embassy building in New Delhi last fortnight, indicated that the consuls take this law very seriously. During a couple of hours one morning, only one of those who said they had applied for a student visa reported success. Slightly balding at 37, he was leaving behind a wife, children and a job in a public sector company. All those—about a dozen—who had just finished school or college in India were refused.

An angry 27-year-old student said outside: "My father has tens of lakhs of property here. Why should I stay there?... I am the only son of my father. He's fifty-plus. Who will look after all this?" He wants to study computers in the US. His reason is representative of many: "One thing is sure. In India, an America-return can do wonders... he'll get any damn job here."

No wonder every rebuffed applicant wanted to try again. So much so that not one was willing to give his name to the press. Their tenacity seems almost pitiful considering the frustrating results. A post-graduate from one of the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), for instance, was told at his first visa interview to bring evidence that he would get a job at the IIT on his return. Though he persuaded his professor to issue a letter that he was likely to find a job at the IIT with the US qualification he was seeking, he was turned down again last fortnight.

A doctoral student had been invited to present a paper at an international seminar. Though his was to be only a short visit of a few weeks, he was refused twice. Finally, he turned to his father, a Congress(I) politician, to get the Government to put pressure on the embassy. But despite a recommendation from the External Affairs Ministry, the visa was elusive. "This is the first time I have used my father's contacts," he says ruefully. But he was eager to go since participation in an international seminar would be valuable for his bio-data.

The US Embassy seems to have more regard for other diplomatic personnel in the city than for the Indian Government. A young doctor who obtained a visa for higher studies in his third attempt revealed that a recommendation from a foreign ambassador in town had done the trick.

Though US visas have always been difficult to get, an observer who works closely with the embassy says it has become particularly difficult since the departure of the previous consul-general, James Blanford, a few months ago. Blanford had been in India for some years and was sympathetic to Indians. His replacement, Leo Wollemburg, only took charge in early August.

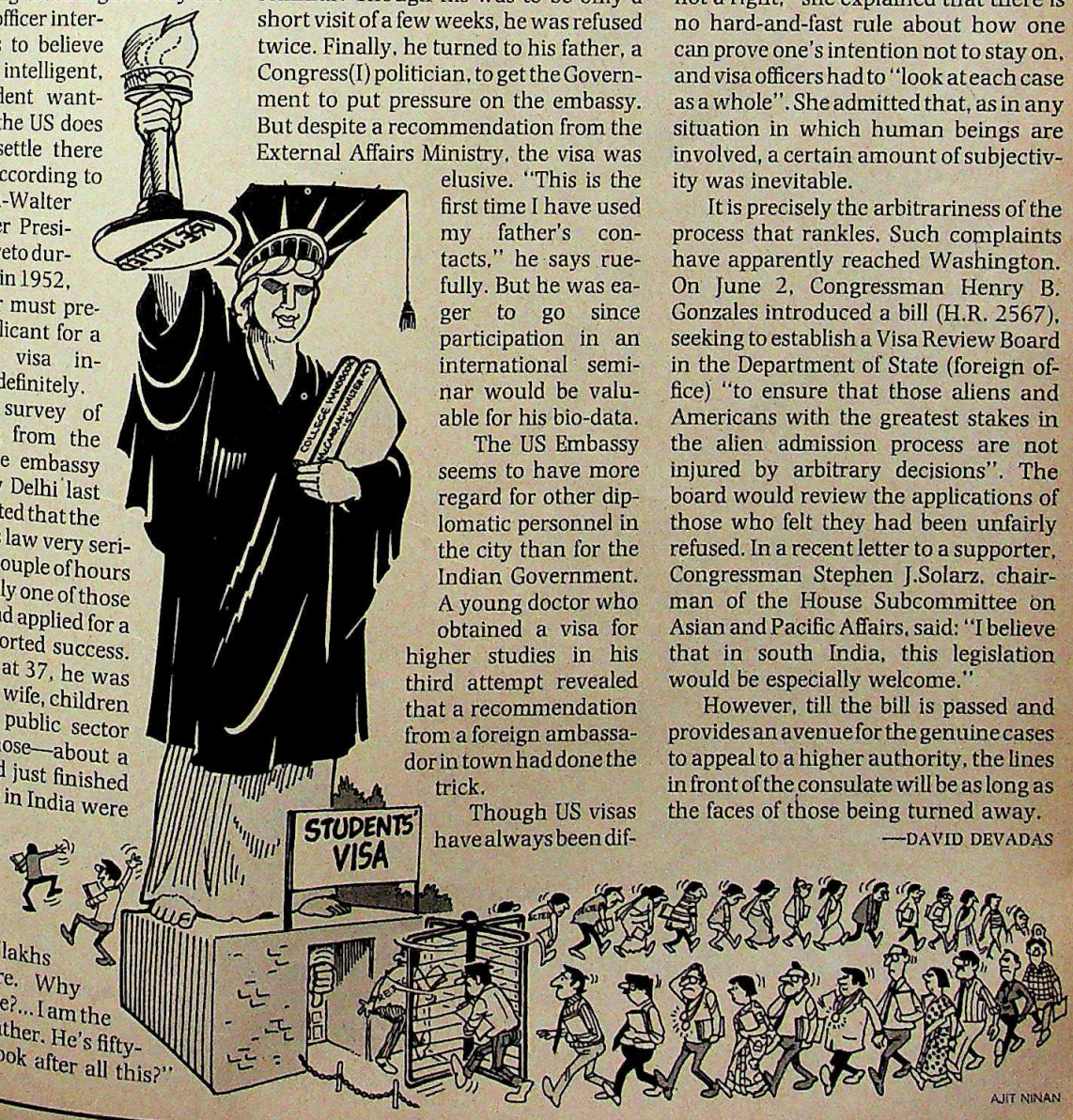
Wollemburg was not available for comment but an embassy spokesperson said there had been no change in policy and that, in fact, the number of student visas given worldwide to Indian nationals had increased from 3,812 in 1975 to 5,587 in 1985 and 6,305 in 1986. She could not, however, give the numbers of those who applied and were rejected except to say that the overwhelming majority of applicants were given student visas.

Stating that "a visa is a privilege, it is not a right," she explained that there is no hard-and-fast rule about how one can prove one's intention not to stay on, and visa officers had to "look at each case as a whole". She admitted that, as in any situation in which human beings are involved, a certain amount of subjectivity was inevitable.

It is precisely the arbitrariness of the process that rankles. Such complaints have apparently reached Washington. On June 2, Congressman Henry B. Gonzales introduced a bill (H.R. 2567), seeking to establish a Visa Review Board in the Department of State (foreign office) "to ensure that those aliens and Americans with the greatest stakes in the alien admission process are not injured by arbitrary decisions". The board would review the applications of those who felt they had been unfairly refused. In a recent letter to a supporter, Congressman Stephen J.Solarz, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, said: "I believe that in south India, this legislation would be especially welcome."

However, till the bill is passed and provides an avenue for the genuine cases to appeal to a higher authority, the lines in front of the consulate will be as long as the faces of those being turned away.

—DAVID DEVADAS



AJIT NINAN

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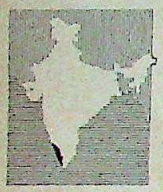
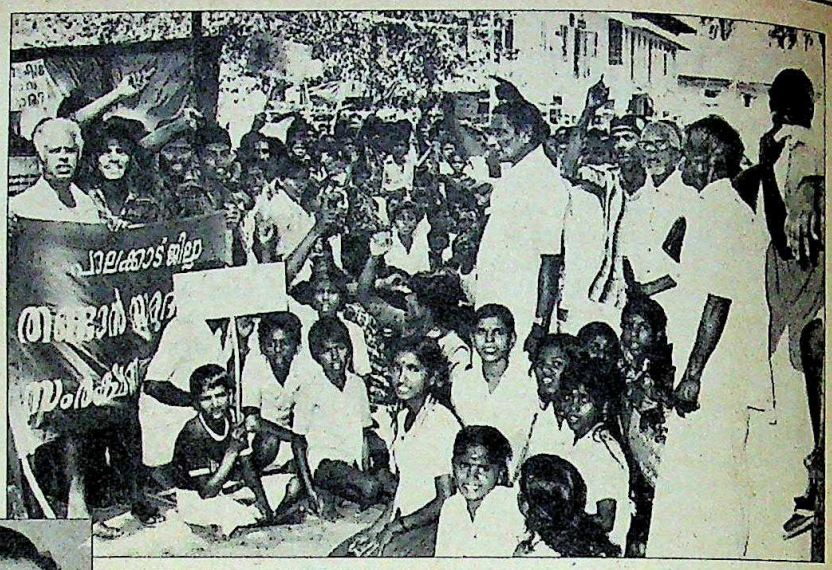
KERALA

Identity Crisis

A struggle over caste



ARE the Thandans in north Kerala's Palghat and Trichur districts Scheduled Caste? The Thandan Samrakshana Samidhi (TSS) claims the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Amendment) Act 1976 gave them SC status. But the Kerala Scheduled Caste Front (KSCF) disputes this. The Front maintains that the Thandans—variously referred to as Ezhavas or Thiyyas in Malabar—are higher caste.



TSS protest outside a tehsildar's office: agitated

"We have decided to fight it out...or the Ezhavas will grab our benefits, leaving us in despair."

K.V. KUMARAN
president, KSCF

The Thandans, however, have been claiming certificates attesting their SC status. In Palghat district alone over the last three years 7,356 such certificates had been issued. But in June this year, as a result of widespread criticism and political pressure, the tehsildar of Palghat orally instructed all village officers to discontinue issuing certificates. He also, despatched a report (Ref A5-S NO. 4111/87) to the director of Scheduled Caste Development in Trivandrum seeking clarification from the Government. Last fortnight the state Government responded by appointing Dr Ramachandran Raj, a sociologist to head a commission that will once and for all decide whether Thandans are SC.

The tehsildar was forced to take action because the KSCF had made public their resentment of the Thandans hogging a major share of the reservation cake. According to a rough estimate, 50 per cent of the students who got admission to professional colleges in the reserved category last year were Thandans. The figures this year are no different. Eighty-five Thandans were admitted to Palghat's Victoria College in the reserved category. Two others got admission to post-graduate courses in the prestigious UC College, Alwaye.

The Thandans maintain they are taking what is theirs. "The 1976 Central Act includes us in the SC list. We have nothing in common with the Ezhavas, we are a separate community and we can also quote from history books to justify our cause." The confusion it appears is in the community's antecedents. The Thandans in the erstwhile state of Cochin were headmen, chosen from amongst the Ezhavas and appointed by the local chieftain. But the Travancore Thandans, included in the Travancore-Cochin scheduled caste list of 1950 were coconut tree climbers. The list did not change after the reorganisation of the state in 1956.

The present controversy reared its head in 1979, when the Kerala Government passed an order giving SC status only to the Travancore Thandans. The Thandans united under the TSS banner, and petitioned the high court which ruled in their favour. The court also directed the state Government to appoint a commission to settle the dispute. But fierce opposition from lobbies within the Congress(I) delayed the commission's appointment by a whole year. Then the TSS obtained a stay order from a vacation judge in the Supreme Court in May 1984. Soon after, the Dr Ramachandra Raj Commission was wound up. And in 1984, the Karunakaran government feverishly wooing the Ezhavas—who were traditionally CPI sympathisers—issued a fresh order stating that Thandans throughout Kerala would be SC.

The Palghat tehsildar's orders have now put a stop to the flow of certificate seekers. The TSS, in the meanwhile, has been organising dharnas and meetings outside revenue offices in the district. In July an angry mob of Thandans even beat up a village officer because he had refused to issue caste certificates.

However, a few students in their individual capacity obtained directions from the high court for the issue of certificates. Some 120 others are awaiting the court's orders. But village officers are mostly ignoring the court's order. Some have even written to colleges to disregard certificates given to Thandan candidates. Said an exasperated Sister Ezechil, principal of Palghat's Mercy College: "This year a lot of girls have been admitted in the SC quota from the Thandan community. But we are in a fix, village officers have sent us memos to disregard the certificates."

The E.K. Nayanar Government seems serious in its intentions to solve the problem. The chief minister warned of severe action against those who secure benefits meant for SC by using false documents. The Government, he said, would also stop assistance to persons not eligible, and take steps to recover the money already collected by them.

The battle is on. Said K.V. Kumaran, KSCF president: "We have decided to fight it out, because we are convinced if this is allowed the Ezhavas will grab all our constitutional benefits, leaving us in further despair." —SREEDHAR PILLAI

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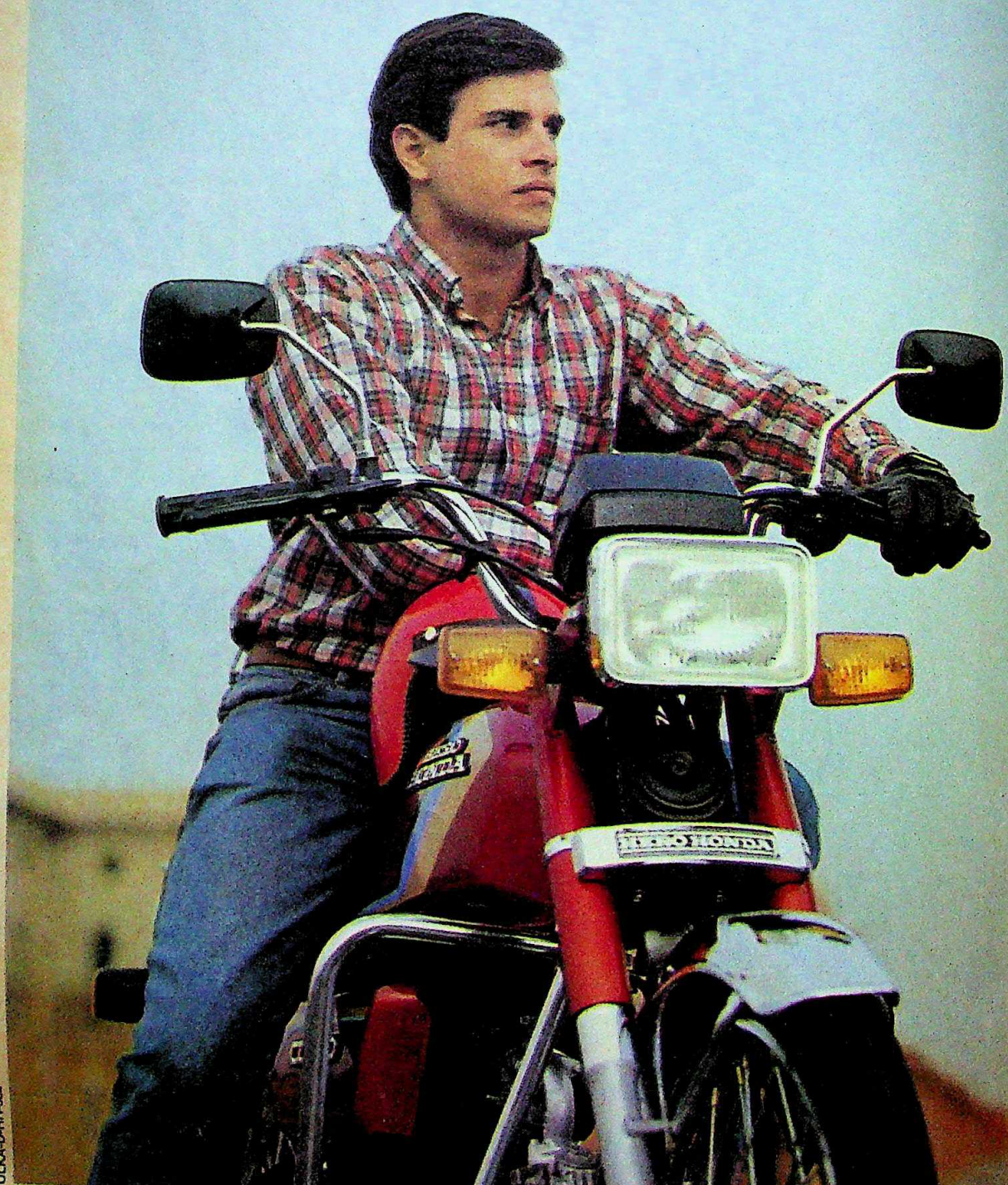
The Hero Honda CD100 Vs



ULKA-D-HH-532

Meet Sunny (on the left) and Bunty. They are old friends. And old foes. They have rarely agreed on anything in life.

If Sunny loves cricket, Bunty loves football. Sunny enjoys literature, Bunty loves to plunge into the world of facts and figures. Bunty is always formally dressed. Sunny would never be caught in a suit and tie. Sunny works in an advertising agency. Bunty works in a bank.

In their ten years of friendship they have agreed only once. And that was when they both bought their Hero Hondas.

But not really. Because ever since then a war has broken out between the two. Each claims his Hero Honda is better in every respect.

Like fuel economy. The last time they had an argument about whose motorcycle was more fuel efficient, they journeyed a full four hundred kilometres to test it out.

Like toughness. They have taken their bikes through

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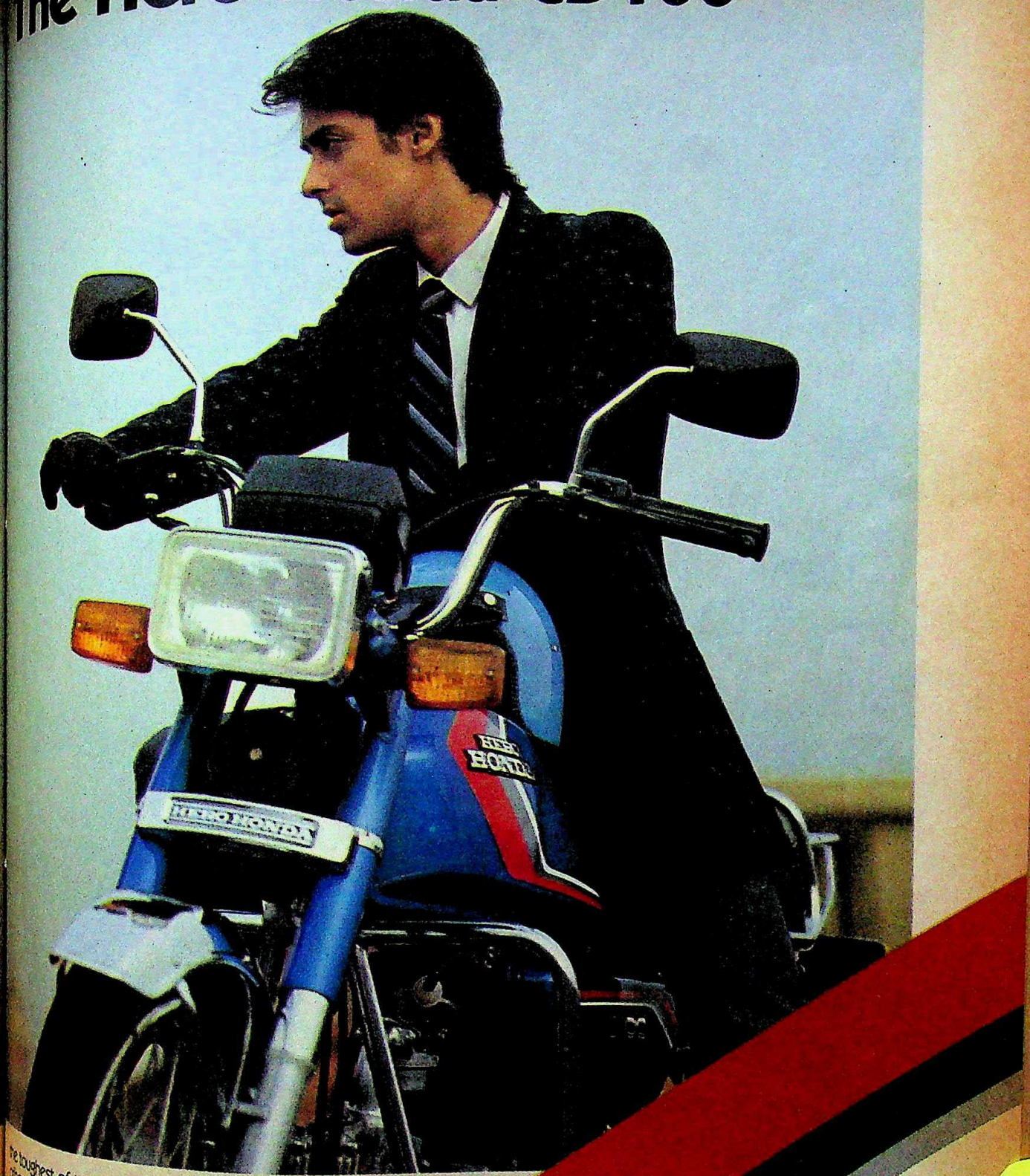
The Hero Honda CD100



the toughest of terrains just to prove a point to the other person.

Like looks. Sunny insists that his red bike is the finest looking bike in town. Bunty feels that his Hero Honda easily commands more attention (especially with the girls in his colony).

But we can't really blame the two. It's so easy to be fiercely proud of your Hero Honda that you'd never let another bike steal the show—even if the other bike is also a Hero Honda CD 100 — *What a bike!*

HERO HONDA

Fill it. Shut it. Forget it.

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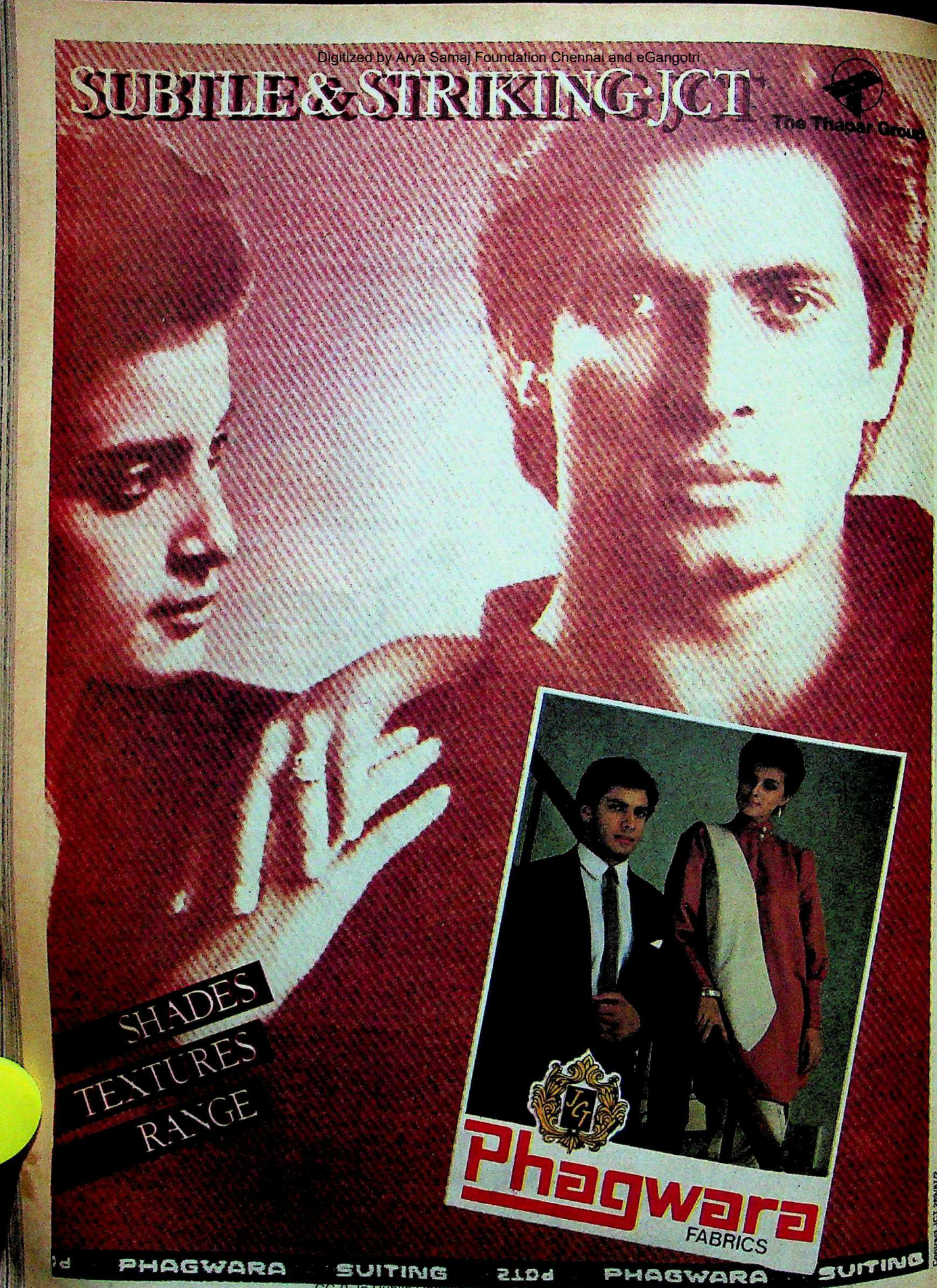
SUBTLE & STRIKING JCT

The Thapar Group



SHADES
TEXTURES
RANGE

Phagwara
FABRICS

PHAGWARA SUITING PHAGWARA SUITING

Contrast JCT 289/812

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DELHI

Power Hungry

Load-shedding a grim reality

DELHI no longer commands unlimited power. That is not a political comment but the grimy reality of the summer of '87. After years of relatively uninterrupted power supply, the pampered capital has had to sweat through two and more hours of power cuts a day during much of July and all through August. The really bad news, though, is that the city might well "shed load" through the winter and on till the next good monsoons.

Delhiites were not pleased. A minor mob turned violent outside a Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU) office in the Punjabi Bagh area one evening, incensed at being without electricity since the morning. Other angry crowds formed outside the Gujranwala Town and Rana Pratap Bagh DESU offices as hundreds of sweating residents failed to get through on the phone. Seeing the angry crowds, DESU officials at the offices bolted, leaving the crowds only angrier.

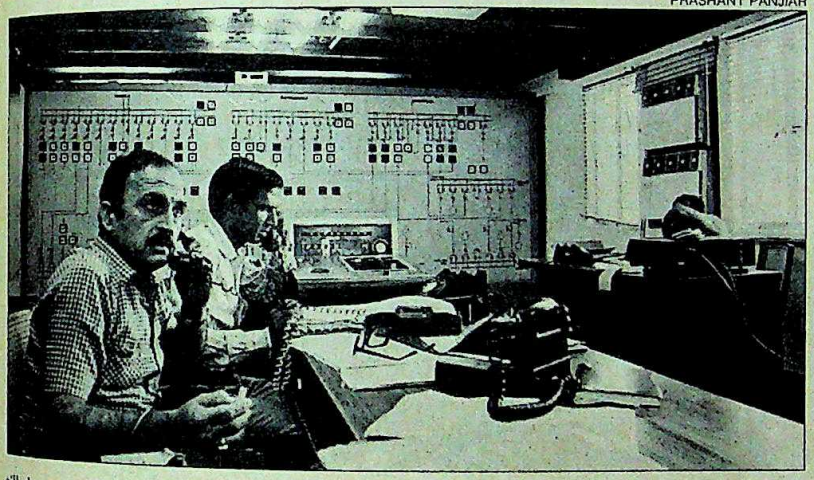
Not only people, traffic also went haywire. As traffic lights went out along with street and other lights, the traffic police returned to their traditional hand signals. But with power cuts as unpredictable as they were, the cops just could not keep up and completely uncontrolled intersections became common.

The sweaty days, dark evenings and frayed nerves were caused by a combination of spiralling demand—increasing at around 15 per cent annually—and the disastrous monsoon. The drought has pinched the city's power supply like a two-pronged pincer. On the one hand, the extraordinary heat sent the demand for power rocketing to feed the innumerable air-conditioners, coolers and fans. On the other, the low levels in reservoirs—Bhakra is 24 ft below normal—sharply affected hydro-power generation.

The city's demand—up from a peak of 968 mw last year to around 1,050 mw this summer—has far outstripped the capacity of the capital's own generating plants. And the northern grid, normally amenable to Delhi's needs, will have to give priority to agriculture.

DESU's main power station at Indraprastha was generating about 300 mw. DESU Chairman K.S. Gujral emphasised the importance of the six gas turbines installed in May 1986, which were contributing another 150 mw. This was supplemented by about 300 mw of power from the Badarpur plant, run by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC).

PRASHANT PANJIAR



DESU's monitoring panel: poor supply

In August, the northern grid, with many of its plants operating under emergency measures, managed to augment supply by another 100-150 mw. Thus, the total power available was 800-odd mw, far below the peak demand.

The ironic fact, as NTPC Chairman M.L. Shishoo pointed out, was that "this year we have more power". The country's installed production capacity is now 49,000 mw, up from 1,400 mw at Independence. But if production was negligible 40 years ago, so was consumption. Today, industrial, agricultural, as well as household demands are growing geometrically as more and more consumers take to washing-machines, vacuum cleaners, computers and the like.

Even if the monsoons had been bountiful, many states would have been short of their needs. The long hot summer has only meant that the shortage reached crisis proportions and Delhi got a taste of the bitter medicine other areas get a regular dose of. In some states, farmers often have to irrigate their fields and factories have to function at night because that is the only time power is available to them.

It seems as if Delhi will have to join the rest of the country's frugality. Neon display boards, for instance, could be curbed, as they were in Bombay during a previous crisis. For at the rate demand is growing, this particular tunnel is likely to be long and the light at the end continue to flicker. Although a number of new production units should be on line by the end of the seventh plan, the demand is likely to grow even faster. Shishoo predicts that "not till 2000 A.D. even, will we reach the plateau level" when demand and production will both be more or less constant.

—DAVID DEVADAS

MADHYA PRADESH

Over Flying

Political aid at public expense

UNION Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Motilal Vora are revelling in their newfound political companionship. Vora's dedication to his friend is particularly touching. Last fortnight, at his instance, the state's General Administration Department (GAD) cleared a Rs 3.47-lakh bill for a private helicopter that the former Gwalior prince had used for three weeks in April and May, around north-western Madhya Pradesh. The bill, pending clearance for three months, was equivalent to the cost of maintaining the state helicopter for a full year.

The "mass-contact" tour was part of a joint attempt to strengthen the duo's power base. The helicopter was hired from a private company because the one owned by the state Government was out of order and the bill went via the state's Aviation Directorate to GAD which is responsible for hospitality to visiting dignitaries. GAD officials, quoting rules and regulations, pointed out that the state Government was not obliged to pay the transport bills, specially plane-hiring

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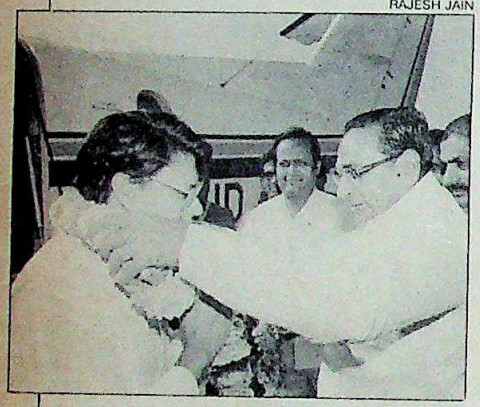
charges, of a visiting Union minister of state. Besides, GAD's entire budget this year to entertain state guests is a mere Rs 2.18 lakh.

Playing safe, they kept the bill pending until Vora overrode official objections recently and issued instructions for its settlement. Commenting on the objections raised by GAD, N.B. Lohani, the chief minister's secretary who also looks after state aviation, said: "The minister was a state guest and we are morally committed to foot the bill."

RAJESH JAIN



Vora (right) greeting Scindia: friendly

Vora has become overly liberal in permitting party leaders to use the state aircraft. During the last two years, 23 Union ministers have been aided by his generosity on this count. Not surprisingly, expenditure on the state aircraft has gone up more than eight times since 1980-81 to Rs 51 lakh: it costs Rs 20,000 per hour to fly. Even junior Central ministers have been beneficiaries of his largesse.

But the chief minister obviously doesn't know when to stop. Once he lent his helicopter to Union Minister of State for Law Hans Raj Bhardwaj, for a trip to Chhattisgarh, and his plane to Scindia at the same time. Vora himself had to motor for the better part of the night to attend their functions. And last fortnight, Vora lent his plane to fly a ruling party MLA's father to Bombay for medical treatment. However, according to information furnished in the state Assembly, Scindia has topped the list of users, with his travels costing the state Government a staggering Rs 1.26 lakh in the last two years.

Until now, Scindia had studiously distanced himself from group politics in Madhya Pradesh. But he has turned active of late, obviously aided and abetted by Vora—and with some help from the state exchequer. —N.K. SINGH

ASSAM

Tribal Unrest

Agitating for autonomy

PUBLIC expectations are on the rise in upper Assam's hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar. Last fortnight, as the country celebrated Independence day, over 6,000 tribals marched through Diphu, Karbi Anglong's headquarters, demanding an autonomous state within Assam. Boycotting official celebrations, they organised a parallel flag-hoisting ceremony where, apart from the tri-colour, flags of the Karbi Students Association (KSA) and the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)—the two organisations spearheading the stir—were hoisted. More than 90 activists were also injured when the police lathi-charged them.

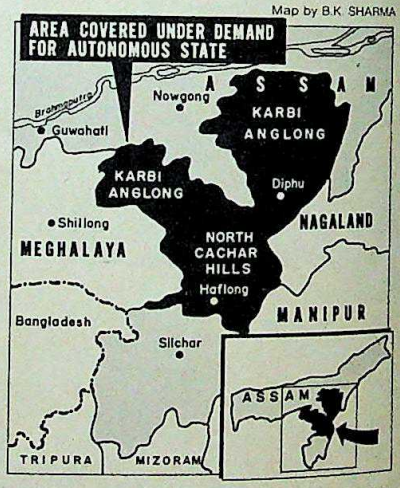
The demand for an autonomous state has been a constant refrain for two decades. But it is only now that it has acquired the shape of a mass movement with students in the lead. Says Bibison Engti, KSA president: "This agitation will not be called off till we get an autonomous state."

Agitationists underline that they are only asking for the implementation of a constitutional provision. The two districts (combined area: 15,237 sq km) with a total population of 7.21 lakh, were given autonomy after Independence to help tribals—85 per cent of the population—retain their identity. When in 1971, neighbouring Meghalaya attained statehood, residents of the two districts were asked whether they wanted to become part of Meghalaya or continue as they had until then. They stayed on with Assam after the state leadership assured them that greater independence would come their way.

But the agitators complain that the area has been neglected by the state Government and the tribals are being kept out of Assam's mainstream. They now want the enforcement of Article 244(A) of the Constitution—introduced in 1969—which reads that the two districts can be made into an autonomous state.

In a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 18, the KSA and ASDC pointed out that the hills had come to be dominated by contractors and businessmen. They also said that 90 per cent of the Government employees in the hills were plainsmen. Last year the state Government had admitted in the Assem-

Map by B.K. SHARMA



Tribals in Diphu: escalating conflict

RAMESH MENON

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McDowell

The Moving Spirit

PRESENTS

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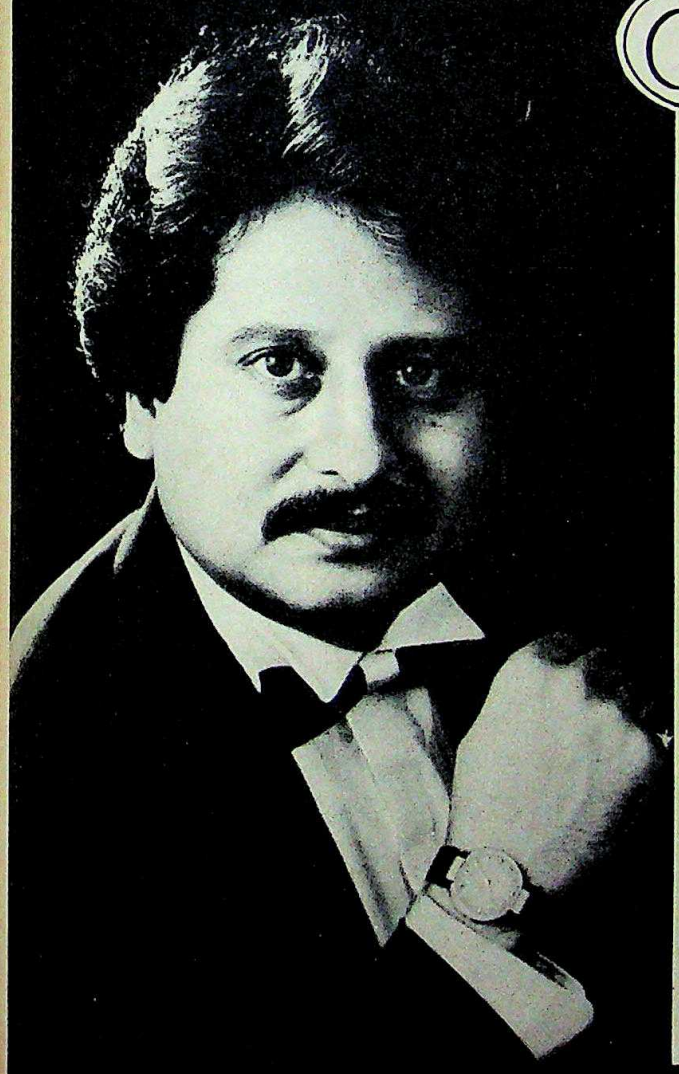

Date	City
29.8.87	Bombay
5.9.87	Bombay
6.9.87	Poona
11.9.87	Bombay
12.9.87	Bombay
13.9.87	Madras
19.9.87	Delhi
20.9.87	Srinagar
24.9.87	Pali (Rajasthan)
26.9.87	Udaipur
30.9.87	Nagpur
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6.10.87	Calcutta
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bly that not a single Karbi was employed in the Guwahati secretariat. Said Robinson Kro, adviser to the ASDC: "Assam has seen different political parties in power. All of them were anti-tribal. Our only hope is an autonomous state."

The "imposition" of Assamese in schools and colleges is also resented by the tribals who prefer English. "We are not out to divide Assam. We just want an autonomous state within it," says ASDC's chief spokesman and movement leader Dr Jayanta Rongphi.

But Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta, echoing a common fear, says that "the demand for an autonomous state is the first step towards statehood". Home Minister Bhirgu Phukhan adds strongly: "We are ready to consider tribal demands sympathetically but we shall not permit any further division of Assam."

There is no real shortage of money for Karbi Anglong's development. In 1986-87 it received a whopping Rs 40 crore—the Centre giving Rs 37 crore and the state Government the rest. But much of it has been frittered away. Some recent examples: generators worth Rs 8,000 have been bought for Rs 32,000; clocks costing Rs 125 have been procured for Rs 750; bananas available for Rs 6 a dozen have been purchased for an incredible Rs 84. This explains why literacy in the district is only 19 per cent and why, in the interior, tribals still subsist on tubular roots in the summer. The money has traditionally been gobbled up by the Kabri Anglong's district council—headed by a chairman—members who work hand in glove with bureaucrats in Guwahati.

Rongphi and other student leaders say that merely pumping in money that will go into a few hands, is not a solution. Only an autonomous state, they feel, can induce the kind of political culture that will genuinely oversee tribal interests.

The local Congress(I), unwilling to be left out, is making the demand of autonomy too and persuaded Union Minister of State for Home, Chintamani Panigrahi to visit Diphu last fortnight to ostensibly study the issue. The ruling Asom Gana Parishad objected, saying it would encourage the agitators. But the KSA and ASDC saw through the Congress(I) game and called for a bandh in Diphu on the day of Panigrahi's visit. The bandh call was successful.

The hill districts are certain to become another political battlefield as the conflicting forces face one another on the autonomy issue.

—RAMESH MENON in Diphu and Guwahati

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Deluge of Letters

A Bombay weekly which published two versions of the same letter purportedly written by the CIA director, with similar text but dissimilar layout, invited accusations of forgery. Subsequently, a third version of the same letter in a Calcutta weekly only reinforced doubts about its authenticity. Now a trend has started. Editors are flooded with letters which they are afraid to touch for fear that they are forged. I have seen some of them. I reproduce them for you to judge for yourself whether they are authentic or forged. Here they are:

"Dear Rajivji,

I must thank you for your cooperation in helping me leave India. I hope you are satisfied with all I have done for you. Please do not worry about my ever getting caught. Nobody will ever locate me. I have changed my name. I am no more Win Chadha.

I remain,

Your faithful accomplice,

Lost Chadha."

"Dear Mr Lars Ringberg,

My colleagues and I in the Opposition are thrilled that you are launching a pre-judicial probe into the Bofors deal. But for God's sake, do not be hasty. Our delegation should be allowed to complete its fact-finding trip to Sweden before you announce anything. As a matter of fact, please do not announce anything till we have completed a second fact-finding trip in December and a third fact-finding trip next February.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Atal Behari Vajpayee."

"Dear Amitabhji,

All our party workers have asked me to convey to you their disgust with the fraud you have played on them. They have decided to withdraw their support. Since you confessed that you have no secret Swiss bank accounts, you have ceased to have any attraction or charm.

Yours sincerely,

Bhajan Lal."

"Dear Rajivji,

I have received your message. I agree with you that the policy of the *Indian Express* is disgusting. I too would like to change it. But I am helpless because the circulation keeps mounting. However, if you promise to buy 10 lakh copies of the paper every day, I can consider some change.

Yours sincerely,

Ramnath Goenka."

"Dear Shri Darshan Singh Ragi,

Thank you for leaving the field clear for the Khalistanis. My government desperately needs a new accord. Since the Punjab accord is dead, our only hope is an accord with Khalistan after it is formed.

Yours sincerely,

Rajiv Gandhi."

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DELHI

An Undercurrent of Fear

The threat of terrorism brings security and insecurity to the capital

THIS winter won't see children playing in the lawns of Modern School. By the time the season changes, the walls around the graceful red brick building in the heart of New Delhi would have been raised seven feet high, iron spikes planted on top and a fierce barbed wire woven through them. Already security guards are parked outside to protect the school from terrorist attacks. "The innocence has gone," says Satish Gupta, an artist and an old Modernite. "I feel as if my childhood is being caged." Principal S.P.Bakshi is resigned. "I have received no letter, no threat from terrorists," he says sadly. "But this is the parents' decision and we are implementing it."

Ever since terrorism moved towards Delhi, it has created its own peculiar urban aura. During the day, everything seems normal. At night, it turns into a city under siege. As the traffic deserts the streets and even the cheeky three-wheelers whimper away, the police barricades rise into view, one by one. The policemen position themselves behind their sandbags, fingers trembling on the triggers of their Sten guns. The mood has changed, fear has settled over the city, as destructive as the cloud that blew from Chernobyl to Europe. No one knows who's going to be next. There is security and insecurity everywhere. Delhi, the country's gracious capital, is today the most heavily guarded city in the democratic world, held hostage, as it were, by an invisible army.

It was meant to be a city apart, terrorism always occurred on its fringes or was a problem that VIPs on the hit-list worried about. The ordinary citizen was safe—till the Behl house massacre and the Kalkaji attacks shook that complacency. Quickly grills came up around homes, chowkidars were put on alert and discreet little chains fixed behind doors. "Now every time the bell rings," says Preeti Chawla, 37, a housewife. "We first peep from the window to see who's there."

Overnight, VIP children acquired security guards to escort them to school while their parents cruised around in cars full of securitymen. "If you look at it, two or three terrorist incidents are nothing," said psychiatrist Dr K.K. Kothari, whose recent patients include a number of people hit by the fear psychosis. "But terrorism has been advertised so much that people have got hooked to it."

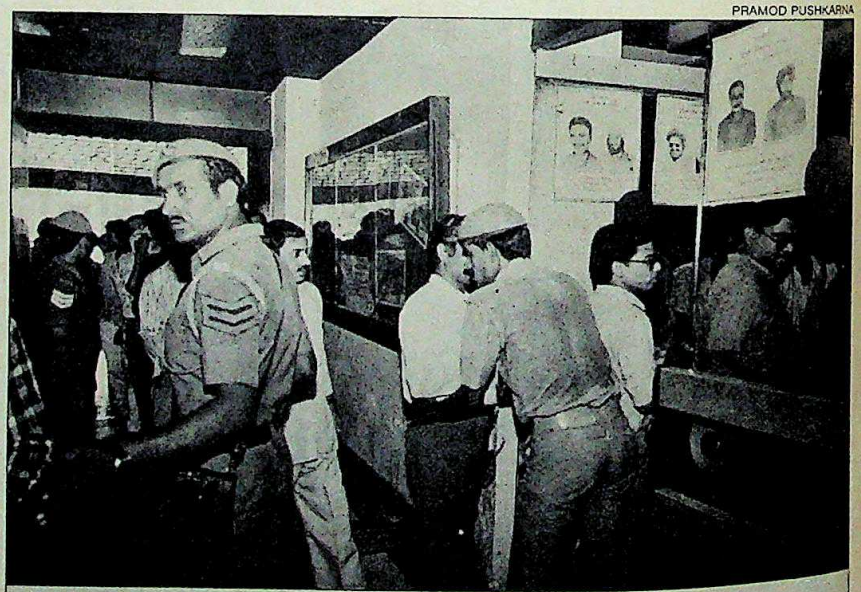
It is a deadly disease and Delhi's got a bad case of terroritis. Immediately after an attack, the city recoils, people shun restaurants and lock themselves into their homes. The small shopkeepers pull their shutters down. The city's parks lose their early morning joggers. Even the pavement dwellers disappear in search of safer pastures. More securitymen are let loose and the invisible threat hangs like a shroud over the city.

Then the mind begins to play games as nothing happens but the anxiety builds up. Every rumour becomes credible. A fist fight becomes a terrorist attack, a tyre burst is mistaken for a bomb blast. One shuffles uneasily if a stranger walks too close, and rolls up the windows as the car at the stop light looks suspicious. "Whichever direction the mind is working in, it follows that," says Kothari. A few houses away from the doomed Behl house, an innocent football that was blown into the driveway by a gust of rain created panic. The neighbours came, the bomb squad was called. "We have begun to react in an abnormal way. These people are not going to let you be normal," said Manjul Gupta, who runs a plant boutique. "That is their whole game. I used to hate that blaring *shaadi* music. Now I long to hear it. This stillness of the night gets me."

A few days pass, the fear evaporates in the heat, but the mood continues to be brittle. "Nothing happened last weekend, so it may this weekend," said Sanjay Mehta, 27, a worker. Nandita Batra, a housewife, cancelled her daugher's first birthday party, because, she says: "I didn't want to have a fleet of cars outside my house. I didn't want to be responsible if anything happened." And Saddam de Figueiredo, three, suddenly asked his mother: "How did my grandfather die? Did terrorists gun him down?" The mood of Lutyen's Delhi has changed: it is a city that has gone grey overnight.

Nothing perhaps has frightened it as much as the recent threat to schoolchildren, a threat that blew in from nowhere and was whipped out of shape by the press. "The terrorists' first aim is to create panic and that is what the media is doing," said Police Commissioner Ved Marwah. Five hundred children, according to the threat, were marked to be killed. By the time the rumour reached north Delhi, a little child went running to his mother: "Do you know 4,000 children are

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



● Police keeping strict check at the cinema: deserted halls

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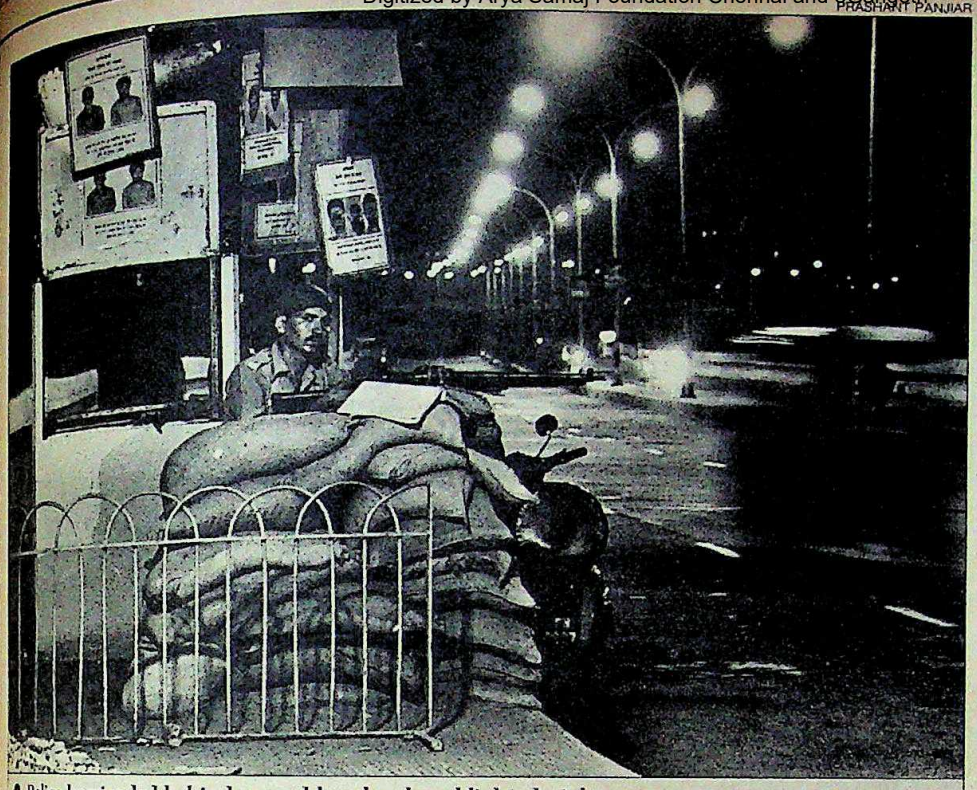
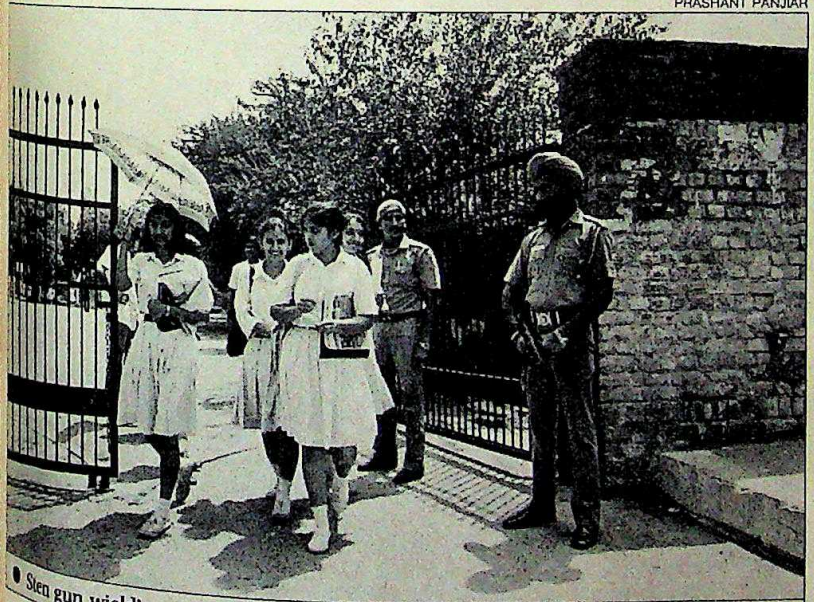
PRASHANT PANJIAR



● Police barricaded behind a sand-bag bunker: blighted nights

PRASHANT PANJIAR



● Sten gun wielding security outside a school: loss of innocence

going to be killed by terrorists?"

"When there is anything to do with children, parents are bound to overreact," said Vicky Suri, a garment exporter. The children, alas, are being forced to grow up too soon and at four and five are already dealing with fear and death. Ishaan Kapoor, five, advises his mother that if a terrorist were to come to their house she should simply pretend to be dead. Sidhartha Jain, seven, had a severe asthma attack after the threat and was consoled by his sister Shonali, 11: "Why do you worry about terrorists? They can't harm us, we'll die when we have to." Nothing hurt the Delhi heart as much as the spectacle of little children being escorted into school buses by armed guards—with their blood groups tagged on to their uniforms.

Independence day this year was the most dreaded day of all, targeted as it was for a terrorist attack. The week before was one of the most tense the city has ever spent. "On the 14th and 15th our restaurants were practically empty," said an Ashok Hotel manager, schools were shut—and on Independence day, so high was the tension in the city, that Kavita Singh, a Ph.D. student confessed: "I sat in front of the television all the time waiting for Rajiv Gandhi to be bumped off."

The road from the airport into the city never looked so lonely and so long. The police bunkers inspire no confidence, every eye is suspicious. A string of red and yellow lights that hangs outside a hotel after the bride and groom have left seems incongruous somehow with the gloom of the night. For most of that week, the city was dead by 10 p.m., paanwalas closed shop early and the good old days at the movies with popcorn, it seems, had gone forever. "We measure the tension by the shows," said Raj Chopra, a Delhi film distributor. "The evening and night shows are zero."

For the ice cream men of India Gate, this has been Delhi's cruellest summer. "Earlier you couldn't get room to stand on August 15th," said an elderly Sardarji, a veteran ice cream seller. "This summer our season hasn't even started." In the bleak atmosphere, even the little niceties of life become so inane. "It seems wrong somehow to be shopping or putting flowers in your hair," said Vanita Dhawan, who works in a travel agency.

Whatever might be in its heart, physically the city begins to reassert itself. And just then another rumour comes: that water is being poisoned, that 500 Bengalis in Chittaranjan Park are going to be killed, that Doordarshan Bhawan will be blown up. That sigh of relief is never quite taken. There is a red alert and the nights are blighted again. The headlines scream fear: that more terrorists have moved into the city, that these are the deadliest of the lot and their arms more advanced than those of the police. "How does that kind of reporting help anyone?" asks Sanjay Aggarwal, a businessman. The rumours spread while the terrorists—whoever they may be—sit somewhere, laughing, play-

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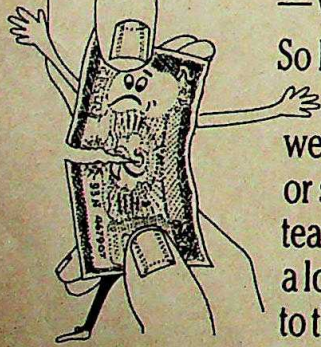
Yet, alas, we don't live as long as we should. Improper handling shortens our existence. In fact, the life of notes like me is the lowest in India, than anywhere in the world. On an average, over 300 crore pieces of notes are destroyed annually —what a waste.



So I beseech you, do treat me right. If I were to be damaged or spoilt, it would tear me apart... a loss to you, a loss to the nation.

It's all so easy to avoid mishandling. Here are a few pointers:

* Do not handle me with oily or wet hands.
* Do not write on me – no personal messages not even telephone numbers, please.
* Do not roll or crumple me up – I may rip.
* Do not make multiple folds.

And see – by mutilating me you run the risk of not having me accepted by anybody. Even the Banks may refuse to replace me if I am torn too badly, or if part of me is missing, or if my number is beyond recognition.

So please – handle me nicely.

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ing the piano on our emotions. "It is a triumph for them," said Vijay Raghavan, an advertising agency executive. "They've created fear so effortlessly."

Thankfully there are the believers, those who will not let the terrorists' have the last laugh. "Why have we become so vulnerable?" asks Satish Gupta. "OK, so we've had six years of terrorism. What is six in 2,000? It will pass." Half the battle is not letting the fear seep into the skin. "How long can you stay in hiding?" says Ashish Sondhi, who works in Chandni Chowk. "The chances of getting hit by terrorists are much less than getting hit in a car accident." The young and the romantic have begun returning to the coffee shops, speeding in their shining air-conditioned Marutis, willing both the heat and the fear away.

If anything, the tough knocks of life should bring out the character of the city. It belongs to the paanwalas who have begun to keep their shops open again, to the ice cream men who come to India Gate every day—takers or no takers—and the optimists like the young housewife, who says: "I pray morning, evening and night that peace should return to Delhi." And to the lonely, bewildered moon that peeps from behind the trees at the deserted streets of the city—beloved city—scared, tense confused, wondering whether Delhi will ever be Delhi again.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

SECURITY

Tough Task

THE time is 10.30 p.m. and it is action stations in the Delhi police control room. A wireless message has just been received that two youths, armed with guns, are roaming the streets on a two-wheeler. For the city's 78 police stations and 120-odd pickets and road blocks, it is a state of maximum alert. The scene shifts to the roads.

Two young men on a motorcycle approach a barricade on Mahatma Gandhi Road in south Delhi. A weary constable, holding a carbine and flashing a torch, flags them down. They are allowed to pass only after a three-minute search. Revving up, the driver comments tersely: "When the terrorists come, you will be nowhere near the scene." Half-a-dozen two-wheeler drivers, waiting to move past, join in the mocking laughter.

The publics cynicism has become proverbial. All the police efforts to prepare itself for a surprise terrorist attack are greeted with a raised eyebrow. This reaction has demoralised the men in khaki and bred a sense of hopelessness amongst the citizenry. The capital is still trying to cope with terrorism—which struck first with the transistor bomb blasts in May 1985.

Delhi's Police Commissioner Ved Marwah seems almost resigned when he says: "It is a cruel thing to say, but it has to be said. There is no foolproof method to fight terrorism. The police is not omnipresent." The terrorists hold the trump card: they can choose the target. The police can only react after the event. This was evident after the indiscriminate terrorist strike in south Delhi on June 13, when the police jotted its control room maps with many green and red flags to denote road blocks and pickets.

Thereafter, two types of road blocks emerged: those supplemented by the 168 control room patrol vans and those connected to the wireless fitted vans through hand-held walky-talkies. Armed teams of three policemen with one semi-automatic weapon, one revolver and 'shoot to kill' orders—are posted at these pickets. Each constable, on an average, costs the Government about Rs 45,000 annually. The nine policemen, at the 120-odd pickets in three shifts round the clock, account for a staggering Rs 4.86 crore—more than 5 per cent of the Delhi police annual budget.

● Ved Marwah

This highly visible deployment was meant to be a deterrent to terrorists. But, it evidently failed when a BJP leader and a brother of another BJP leader, were shot dead last month in the city, and their killers escaped unmolested. With the police commissioner's admission that the road block system can work only if there is "no time gap" in information of a shoot-out reaching the control room, the entire operation appears to be an exercise in futility.

Further, policemen manning pickets are not trained to fight terrorism. Speed is all important. The first man to fire has the last word. But policemen continue at their notoriously slow pace. In a recent exercise, two speeding trucks crashed through the blocks and had to be chased after, despite instructions to shoot at any vehicle defying orders. "They still fear the consequences of shooting (a possible magisterial inquiry) and will take time to change their attitude," said a senior IPS officer, adding that the exercises showed "reasonable" results—though there could be improvement.

The police is also stretched thin protecting Delhi's VIPs. Of the 153 armed companies—from the Central Reserve Police Force, the Provincial Armed Constabulary and the Tamil Nadu Special Police—98 companies have security duties. Also, 21 companies have semi-static duties, stationed at ministries, courts and other installations. Suggestions to create an exclusive elite corps for security have been turned down by the Centre and a proposal for a crack urban anti-terrorist squad is also pending.

The Delhi police also gets little or no advance information from its intelligence wing. An Operational Cell to deal with terrorists, that was floated two years ago, has degenerated into a division which maintains files on top terrorists and follows up prosecution proceedings. The police still depend on the public to provide detailed information on a terrorist crime.

Senior police intelligence men complain their task is more difficult as the terrorist groups do not operate from the city. "They come from Punjab with their targets in mind and disperse after committing the crime. Looking for them is like searching for a needle in the haystack." While many officials say they get little help from the Intelligence Bureau—their main source of information on terrorists—Marwah insists that "coordination has improved in recent days".

In attempting to tackle the terrorist scourge in Delhi, this must be borne in mind, that the problem actually lies in Punjab. And if Punjab can no longer be left only for Ribeiro to handle, neither can Delhi be left to Marwah.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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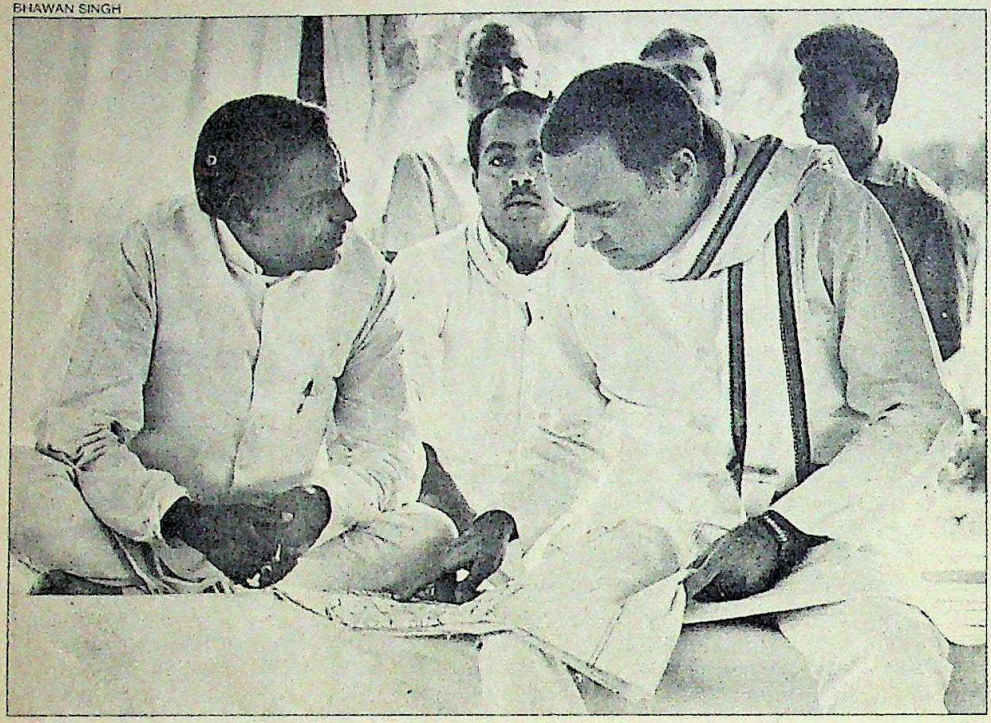
BHAWAN SINGH



Bir Bahadur Singh, Sanjay and Rajiv: in happier times

The exit of Uttar Pradesh's powerful transport minister Sanjay Singh from the Cabinet, and his subsequent expulsion from the party for anti-party activities, was a personal setback to the prime minister. The war of political nerves could well decide the fate of the Central leadership.

UTTAR PRADESH

Shock and Resignation

A minister quits, leaving the chief minister shaky

WITH the resignation and subsequent expulsion of Sanjay Singh, transport minister in the Bir Bahadur Singh Government, dissidence in the Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) has finally broken out into the open. The desertions that followed only benefitted the V.P. Singh faction. A confrontation that essentially started as a minor revolt against the chief minister has snowballed into a major campaign against Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his home state. Senior Correspondent DILIP AWASTHI *in Lucknow and Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *look closely at the fast moving political drama.*

THE battle for political and administrative control over the nation's largest state, Uttar Pradesh, has finally begun. Last fortnight, when the two dominant factions led by two Thakur chieftains—one by the expelled former defence minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh and the second by Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh—finally bared their swords, the countdown had begun to reach its final stage. As more and more expulsions and desertions from the ruling party began, it was evident that the outcome of this war of political nerves could well decide the fate of the Central leadership itself.

For the first time in the history of the state which has always been the bulwark of the Congress(I)'s political strength, did so many powerful state leaders pit themselves not only against the chief minister but the main party and Central leadership. Eleven of the MPs—including Ram Dhan and Arif Mohammed Khan—who have openly allied themselves with Singh are from Uttar Pradesh. In addition, four cabinet ministers—Sunil Shastri, Surendra Singh, and Zafar Ali Naqvi—who quit are now campaigning against the official Congress(I). And 25 MLAs defied high command orders and attended a recent rally in Bareilly organised by Singh supporters. Sanjay's resignation in his open quest for power from atop the Singh bandwagon, represented a personal setback for the prime minister. He represents Amethi, Rajiv Gandhi's constituency, and had played a key role in getting Rajiv elected. Sanjay enjoyed the confidence of Rajiv who often stayed at his house during trips to Amethi. Said a confident Sanjay who first entered politics with the help of the late Sanjay Gandhi: "It is just a beginning. A deluge will soon begin and Uttar Pradesh will witness the fall of the first Congress government." Retorted Bir Bahadur: "They are day-dreaming. They can't win their own seat without the Congress(I) symbol and Rajiv Gandhi's support. It is Sanjay Singh who won on Rajiv's name in Amethi."

But what came as a surprise in the fast moving political developments was the turn the numbers game had taken in the state. The dissidence, which essentially started as a minor revolt against the chief minister, has snowballed into a major campaign against Rajiv in his home state. Even Sanjay had initially trained his guns only on Bir Bahadur. But when he resigned, he fired a fusillade against the prime minister. Said Sanjay after he quit: "I have lost total faith in the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi who is facing so many allegations of kickbacks in defence deals. We will expose corruption at high places to the people of Uttar Pradesh."

Predictably, Sanjay met Arun Nehru and Singh soon after his resignation and announced his decision to work as part of their group. But he was not the only one to join the Singh faction. In addition to the MLAs attending the Bareilly rally, more than 30 others had earlier pledged their support to him. Over a dozen of the 60-odd District Congress(I) Committee (DCC) chiefs threw in their lot with the dissidents.

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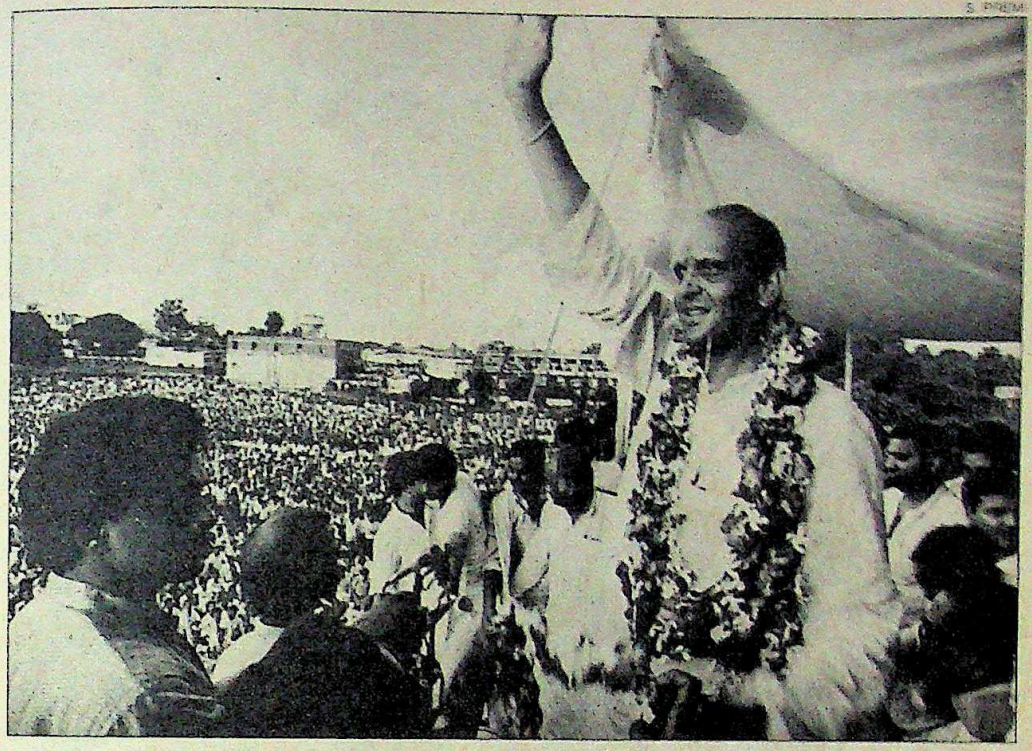
It became evident during the Bareilly rally that fence sitters, after seeing the massive turn-outs, have begun to jump onto the V.P. Singh bandwagon. Though visibly shaken, the chief minister and the Congress(I) are still confident they have an edge in terms of numbers.



V.P. Singh at the Bareilly meeting

It became evident during the Bareilly rally and other public meetings that fence sitters, after seeing the massive turn-outs, have begun to jump onto the Singh bandwagon. The Bareilly meeting was organised by a vocal Congress(I) legislator Jaideep Singh Brar, who is known to be a hardcore Sanjay Singh follower. Just before the public meeting, Brar said: "But for a couple of office-bearers of the DCC, most of the Congressmen would attend the meeting." Though he himself and Narendra Pal Singh, a local Congress legislator, were on the dais, Brar claimed that the remaining six Congress(I) legislators from Bareilly—a Congress(I) stronghold—had extended their whole-hearted support and promised to join the group at an opportune moment. The DCC President of Bareilly, Ram Swaroop Shukla was either unaware or too confident of his party men's loyalty. He had predicted: "Nobody from the Congress(I) will attend the meeting." But at least three office-bearers of the DCC and city Congress committee were present on the dais when Singh arrived.

The Bareilly meeting had been planned to counter the claims of Bir Bahadur that he had full support in the state's western districts. In fact, Singh had gone out of his way to shake hands with Mahendra Singh Tikait, the Jat leader of Muzaffarnagar who had been branded as a dissident by the state Government some months ago. After Singh's well-attended Muzaffarnagar meeting last month, Bir Bahadur was desperate to prove to party leaders that there was no erosion of support in that region. Tikait informed emissaries who approached him on behalf of the chief minister that while he would allow Bir Bahadur to use the Bharatiya Kisan Union platform at an coming meeting, he would not allow Congress(I) flags or any other Congress(I) leader to come within a 7 km radius of the meeting ground. He also decreed that the chief minister would have to come alone and use security arrangements provided by the Jat leader.

THE chief minister obeyed and was allowed to address the meeting of well over three lakh farmers in Sisauli, Tikait's home village on August 12. On stage, when the chief minister was talking about the outstanding dues of the farmers, the temperamental Jat leader snatched the microphone to say: "If the chief minister wants our welfare he can get the money deposited by our leaders in foreign banks back and write off our dues."

The other important state political leader who has launched a public crusade against the chief minister is former energy minister Sunil Shastri. On August 20, he organised a public meeting at Unnao and announced that he would take his campaign all over Uttar Pradesh. Said Shastri: "Such an unwarranted and irresponsible chief minister should be removed by the leadership or else the people will have to do this themselves."

The dissident campaign will now shift to Lucknow. During the first week of September, a massive convention has been planned in which Singh will also participate. All these developments have posed for the chief minister the most formidable challenge of his political career. Ranged against him are not only his former ministers, but also high-profile national politicians like Singh, Arun Nehru, Ram Dhan, and Arif Mohammed Khan. Bir Bahadur's main support, however, is from the powerful Brahmin lobby. Said Chandra Tripathi, Chandauli DCC president and the daughter-in-law of Kamalapati Tripathi: "All those who were never in the Congress(I) have finally left. This will make us a stronger and cohesive group."

But the chief minister is not depending only on local political support. Realising fully well that he can remain in power only if he is able to rally the MLAs behind him, he has initiated administrative steps which have made the state's legislators the highest paid in the country. During the last session of the state Assembly, Bir Bahadur, ignoring the advice of his Finance Department, introduced a bill which raised the legislators monthly salary from Rs 2,500 to Rs 4,000. He also raised travel expenses from Rs 10,000 to Rs 35,000 and allowed MLAs to avail of air travel facilities as well. A

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BIR BAHADUR SINGH

"They can't pull me down"

UTTAR Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh is a survivor—so far. Despite destabilisation threats from his own colleagues, Singh, 51, is close to completing two years in office. When he took over in September 1985, it was predicted that he wouldn't last for more than six months. But the last two months have been particularly tumultuous for Singh. Excerpts from an interview with Senior Correspondent DILIP AWASTHI *on the current political situation:*

Q. ***What repercussions will Sanjay Singh's resignation have on you?***

A. Whether it is Sanjay Singh or Sunil Shastri, they never had a political base. They were only important because they were ministers. They are nobodies now.

Q. ***But Sanjay Singh claims the support of 25 to 30 MLAs.***

A. What else should he be telling the press for publicity? But let him try, he will find out for himself that no one will be by his side.

Q. ***So the political developments don't worry you?***

A. Not at all. In fact, I always warned the high command of the danger to the party from these traitors, and I had hoped that they would be exposed.

Q. ***Yet they always maintained that they wanted you out.***

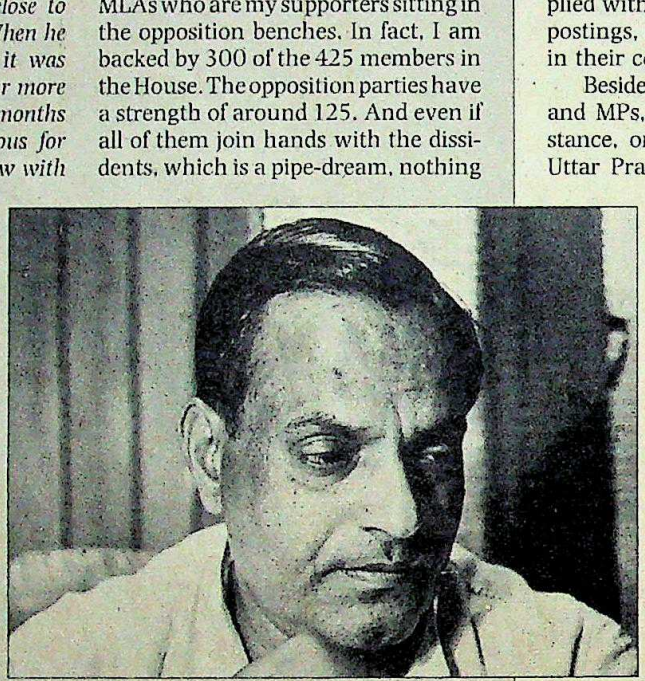
A. Why did they always want this? I have never given them any trouble. I never interfered with their departments. It was all a conspiracy against the party leadership. They were hand-in-glove with V.P. Singh.

Q. ***Will they try to topple you now?***

A. That is what they will be praying for. But I can assure you that this feat is beyond their reach. They neither have the calibre nor the following to pull me down.

Q. ***What if 55 to 60 MLAs join hands with this group.***

A. Forget it. They cannot have more than 25 MLAs for their dirty games. Even if we assume that they have 60 with them, so what? I also have the support of 12 independents, and my trump card will be 15 more MLAs who are my supporters sitting in the opposition benches. In fact, I am backed by 300 of the 425 members in the House. The opposition parties have a strength of around 125. And even if all of them join hands with the dissidents, which is a pipe-dream, nothing will happen.



Q. ***The group which wants to topple you is heavily banking on the support of the 75 Harijan MLAs of the Congress(I) who are unhappy with the party.***

A. Impossible. This is a fight between the rajas and the poor, downtrodden people. Harijan MLAs hate the rajas traditionally. They are supporting me with all sincerity.

Q. ***Why do you think you can win back the MLAs?***

A. See, MLAs now have a lucrative job (laughs). Rs 4,000 a month and all those perks like air travel. Not one of them would want to lose it if I decide to put my foot down and expel them for anti-party activity.

Q. ***So why haven't you taken action against the 22 MLAs who are openly attending V.P. Singh's meetings?***

A. I am not in a hurry. I want them to realise on their own that they are cutting the branch on which they are sitting. We will wait for some time and then see what is to be done.

subsidised loan of Rs 1 lakh was sanctioned to each legislator for vehicle purchases, and all of them were entitled to avail of free electricity and water in their residences. The chief minister's calculation was that none of the MLAs would risk dissolution of the Assembly and lose these precious perks. In addition, he made himself accessible to all MLAs and complied with all their requests for transfers, postings, and stoppage of loan recoveries in their constituencies.

Besides offering carrots to the MLAs and MPs, he used the stick too. For instance, one pro-Singh MP from central Uttar Pradesh was summoned and told that his father would lose the status of a standing district counsel for the Government if he went along with the dissidents. Another legislator was told that the pending criminal cases against him and his family members would be reinstituted. One MP from western Uttar Pradesh was warned that the state Government would attach his property for recovering the cooperative bank loan which had not been cleared for over five years.

The key number in the toppling game is 90. That is the number of MLAs—a third of the party's legislative strength of 267—required to defect en masse in order to avoid the strictures of the anti-defection law under which they would lose their assembly seats if they constitute less than one-third. Together with the combined opposition parties consisting of 180 legislators they could form a new government.

Actually, even without a mass one-third formal defection, the dissidents need to harness only 60 MLAs for a no-confidence petition to the governor in which case, again, with opposition support for the dissidents, the Bir Bahadur Singh Government would be reduced to a minority. And the dissident Congress(I) would emerge as the single largest group within the Opposition. Right now the Opposition consists of 532 Lok Dal(B) members, 30 Lok Dal(A), 20 Janata Party, 16 BJP and several independents.

The Brahmin leader most ardently supporting the chief minister is Home Minister Gopinath Dixit. Significantly, the Health Minister, Lokpati Tripathi, is maintaining a low profile. "He is probably waiting for a winner to emerge," remarked an MLA, one of his supporters.

That horse-trading is about to begin is

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amply indicated by the way the MLAs have started asserting themselves. The chief minister, whenever he is in town—which is two to three days in a week—spends all his time with the MLAs and party office-bearers. Bir Bahadur is now constantly issuing orders on requests made by MLAs.

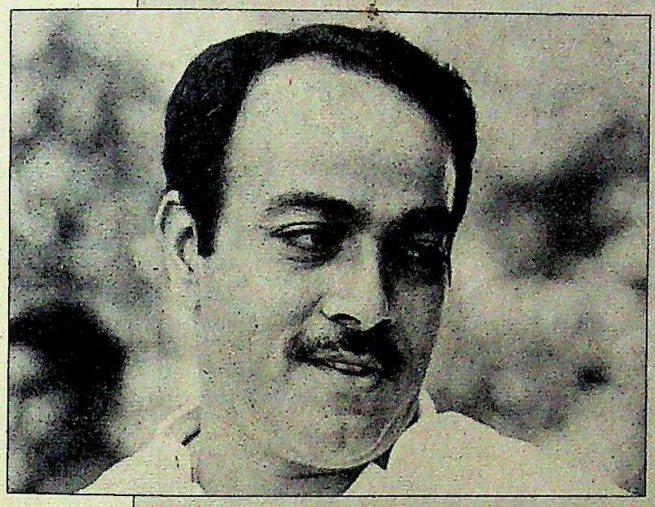
The tension is as palpable as is the pressure, especially on Harijan MLAs. In late July, 22 of the 75 Harijan legislators signed a memorandum addressed to the PM(I) chief pledging their support to Singh as 'they had lost confidence in the party leadership'. The chief minister called a meeting of these MLAs on July 31—all turned up. They signed a statement, which was later issued to the press, that they had full confidence in the leadership of the prime minister and the chief minister. Again on August 6, 20 Harijan legislators issued a statement from Delhi that they were with Singh. But once again a signed contradiction appeared a few days later. Interestingly, 20 names were common in the two statements—the first supporting Singh and the second expressing confidence in Rajiv.

But one thing is certain in the Uttar Pradesh battle. The opposition parties have not agreed on a common strategy and, least of all, on whom to install as chief minister. While some are preparing to offer a helping hand to the Congress(I) dissidents in toppling the Bir Bahadur Government, others are looking forward to a mid-term poll. Said Kalyan Singh, president of the BJP which has 16 members in the Vidhan Sabha: "Bir Bahadur is in a minority already. The Government will fall before you turn the September leaf in your calendar." He says his party will demand that the governor announce a mid-term poll but will not join hands with the Congress(I) dissidents in forming a new government. The Lok Dal(B) which has a strength of 30, is however, thinking in terms of helping the Congress(I) dissidents in forming the new government as are the factions of Lok Dal(A) and the Janata Party. Said Lok Dal (B) General Secretary Mukhtar Anis: "The opposition parties should actively support Congress(I) dissidents as they are fighting against corruption." It is not the Congress(I)'s better game plan or image but the disjointed opposition which may keep the Congress(I) in power in Uttar Pradesh for a longer period.

SANJAY SINGH

"I will topple Singh"

SANJAY SINGH was known to be one of the very few ministers of Uttar Pradesh who knew the Gandhi family at a personal level. He was the only state minister who has accompanied both the former and the present prime ministers when they flew in and out of the state, a prerogative generally reserved for the chief minister. Ever since Bir Bahadur Singh took over, Sanjay Singh, as his transport minister, assumed the additional role of being his main detractor. Last fortnight, Singh spoke to Senior Correspondent DILIP AWASTHI *about his resignation, the prime minister, the chief minister, state politics and his future plans.*



Q. *What factors led to your sudden decision to resign?*

A. There is nothing sudden about my resignation. In fact, the controversies involving the Bofors deals, Fairfax, etc and the accusing fingers pointing at the prime minister had shaken my confidence in him quite some time ago.

Q. *Do you think that the Congress(I) is no more a party which can win elections?*

A. They will themselves see this in 1990. Not one of their leaders will return to the Lok Sabha or the Vidhan Sabha, at least in Uttar Pradesh.

Q. *But going by your past statements, your differences were mainly with Bir Bahadur Singh.*

A. He is too small a fry to figure if one considers the national issues, and the party and its leadership. He is a non-issue if you see things in a broader perspective. He hardly enjoys the support of a single MLA.

Q. *What did Rajiv tell you during your meeting with you?*

A. He just said that he did not plan to remove Singh right away.

Q. *So that is why you resigned?*

A. No, this added up to all other factors which led me to believe that there was no sense in continuing.

Q. *Now what are your plans?*

A. To topple Singh's Government.

Q. *Do you have enough support from MLAs to make this possible?*

A. You must have seen the 22 MLAs who were on the dais with V.P. Singh in Bareilly. By September, 25 or 30 more MLAs will come out openly with us.

Q. *Before resigning, did you meet V.P. Singh or any other leaders in his group?*

A. Yes, I met them and told them what I had in mind.

Q. *Aren't your resignation and your subsequent statement against Rajiv proof of the charge of anti-party activities levelled against you by Bir Bahadur Singh?*

A. I never indulged in any anti-party activity before resigning. And now after they have expelled me, I have every right to go into the V.P. Singh plan.

Q. *What are your immediate plans?*

A. We will be holding a state-level convention of Congress(I) MLAs and workers in Lucknow three weeks from now to chalk out the future course of action.

Q. *Do you think that your resignation will have an affect on the chances of Rajiv Gandhi winning the Amethi seat again?*

A. I challenge Rajiv or Bir Bahadur Singh to contest against me from the same seat.

Q. *You mean that the Congress(I) is out?*

A. Can't you see yourself that it is all over?

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4,50,000 debentures totalling Rs 22.50 crores for public subscription, including 45,000 debentures totalling Rs 2.25 crores to be preferentially allotted to employees.

Rs 200 of each debenture to be converted into 10 ordinary shares at a price of Rs20 per share on 31 December 1987.

Interest @ 12.5% payable half-yearly on 1 January and 1 July. Redemption by drawal of lots in five equal annual instalments commencing at the end of five years.

INDAL

Indian Aluminium Company, Limited

Registered Office : 1 Middleton Street, Calcutta 700071

FROM ALUMINIUM COMES OUR CONFIDENCE, FROM TECHNOLOGY OUR FUTURE

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BOFORS KICKBACKS

Unresolved Tangle

Correspondence raises more questions than answers

The Bofors issue presented a confusing mosaic last fortnight. In New Delhi, the Government tried to seize the initiative by disclosing its correspondence with both Bofors and the Swedish government. The letters showed Bofors in poor light even as the arms company faced a full-scale inquiry by the Swedish public prosecutor. Meanwhile, investigations in Geneva showed that the Government had yet to get cracking on a promised Indo-Swiss treaty for tracing Indian money in Switzerland, while Indian investigators made little headway on getting their hands on the elusive Win Chadha, Bofors' former representative in India. A special package of reports from New Delhi, Stockholm and Geneva:

WHEN K.C. Pant rose to reply to a six-hour debate on the unending Bofors saga in the Lok Sabha last fortnight, no one had expected the mild-mannered defence minister to spring a surprise. But in a move that caught the Opposition flat-footed, Pant placed on the table of the House the entire set of 26 letters exchanged between the Government of India, Bofors and the Swedish Government since mid-April.

The decision to place the papers was clearly meant to signal the Government's increasing confidence in tiding over the crisis that was precipitated by a Swedish Radio bombshell more than four months earlier.

But the letters failed to answer the basic question: who made money in the Rs 1,700 crore Bofors gun deal signed in March 1986? To the Government's credit, the correspondence did show that it had not been pussy-footing on the issue. And it certainly did not prove the Opposition charge that payments were made to ruling party members or government officials. Said Pant in a highly emotional speech: "Let the people now judge. We have nothing to hide."

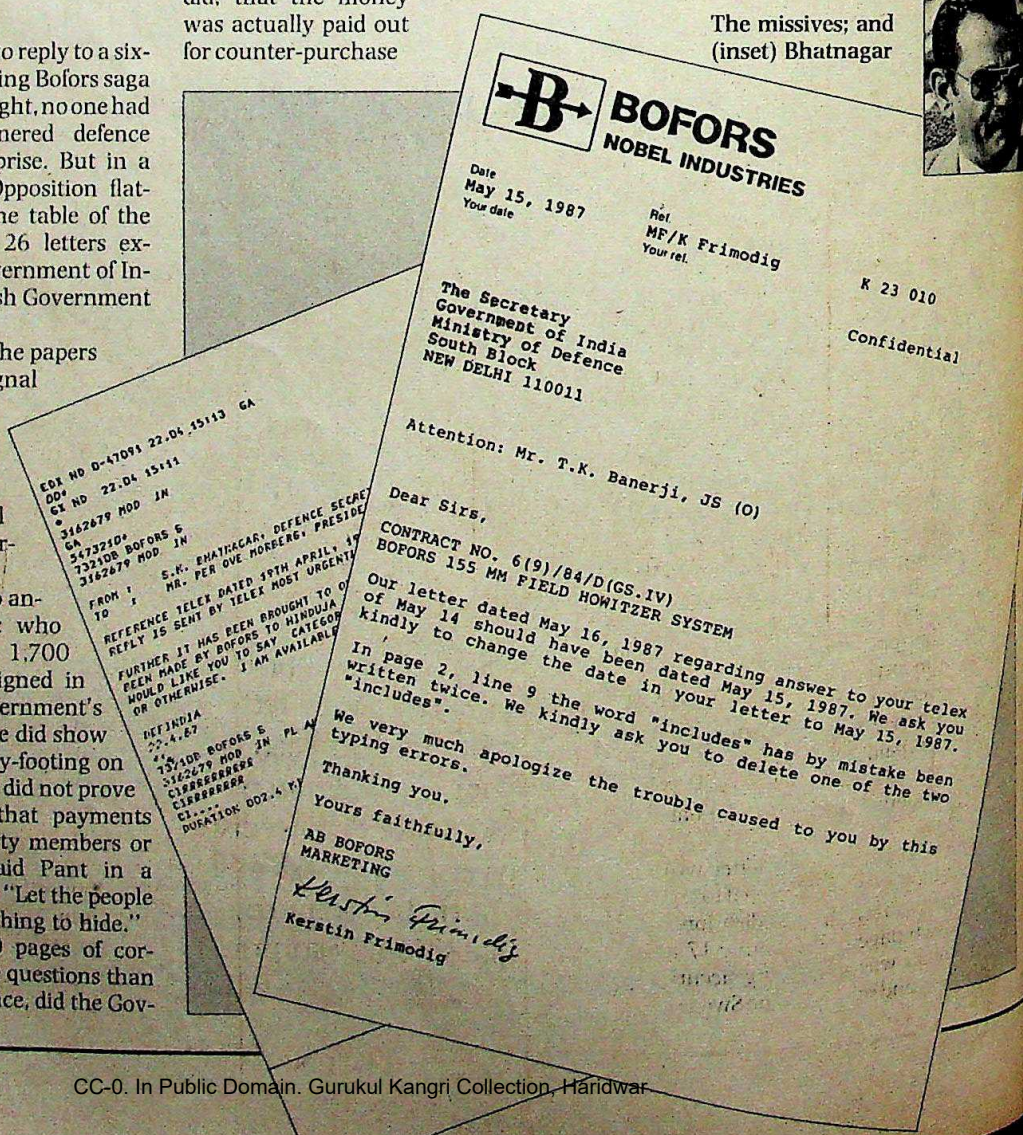
Nevertheless, the 70 pages of correspondence raised more questions than answers. Why, for instance, did the Government in a telex message ask Bofors specifically whether any payments had been made to the Hindujas (the telexed reply was in the negative), but not ask similar questions about several other people mentioned in connection with the payments? And why, despite clear evidence that Bofors was dissembling and constantly shifting its stand, did the Government stick to asking polite questions and not get on the aggressive?

Certainly, Bofors emerges from the pages of the correspondence with little credit. At various stages, the company's spokesmen deny that payments were made, then admit that they were; that the payments did not have anything to do with the Indian contract, and that they did; that the money was actually paid out for counter-purchase work and then (when it turned out that no counter-purchases had taken place), for technical consultancy; and finally, that although the payments were made without the Government of India's knowledge, it did not mean that these payments inflated the cost of the gun to India.

Most intriguingly, the company said that the damning report of the Swedish National Audit Bureau Report was wrong in some places, and also that there was a company abroad, doing international marketing work for Bofors, which too had its contract with Bofors cancelled as a result of the Government's insistence that there be no agents involved.

What this company was, why international operations had to be terminated, and how the Swedish National Audit Bureau Report was wrong remained unanswered. Indeed, while the company insisted that the payments had to be made only because of the Government's insistence that no agents be involved, there was little doubt that the armament manufacturers had deceived the

The missives; and (inset) Bhatnagar



BOFORS
NOBEL INDUSTRIES

Date
May 15, 1987
Your date

Ref.
MF/K Frimodig
Your ref.

K 23 010

Confidential

The Secretary
Government of India
Ministry of Defence
South Block
NEW DELHI 110011

Attention: Mr. T.K. Banerji, JS (O)

Dear Sirs,

CONTRACT NO. 6(9)/84/D(GS.IV)
BOFORS 155 MM FIELD HOWITZER SYSTEM

Our letter dated May 16, 1987 regarding answer to your telex of May 14 should have been dated May 15, 1987. We ask you kindly to change the date in your letter to May 15, 1987.

In page 2, line 9 the word "includes" has by mistake been written twice. We kindly ask you to delete one of the two "includes".

We very much apologize the trouble caused to you by this typing errors.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully,

AB BOFORS
MARKETING

Kerstin Frimodig

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Government, its customer.

Throughout the correspondence, the company refused to answer certain specific and repeated questions from Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar, pleading grounds of commercial secrecy. It was quite clear that Bofors was trying to obfuscate the issue.

In its first reaction to the Swedish Radio broadcast, both the Government and Bofors denied any payments and involvement of middlemen in the deal. Bofors in its first letter dated April 24, 1987, to India's Ambassador in Sweden, Bhupatrai Oza, wrote that the company had not paid, or conspired to pay, any bribes in connection with this order. But the company admitted that certain payments had been made "in accordance with the contract for the reimbursement of consultant services within the areas of marketing and counter-purchasing". It also disclosed that the payment was paid to a Swiss company—a fact never disclosed earlier.

The correspondence and associated papers establish that the Swedish Audit Bureau was asked to go into the deal at the Indian Government's request for a probe, with Rajiv Gandhi speaking personally to the Swedish prime minister, following this up with a letter in June. And, when the Bureau later confirmed that payments had been made, the Government reacted as if stung.

Quickly shedding its earlier stance that no payments were involved (indeed that the allegations of payments were false, mischievous and were designed to destabilise India), the Government now demanded all the information from Bofors. Bhatnagar demanded details on:

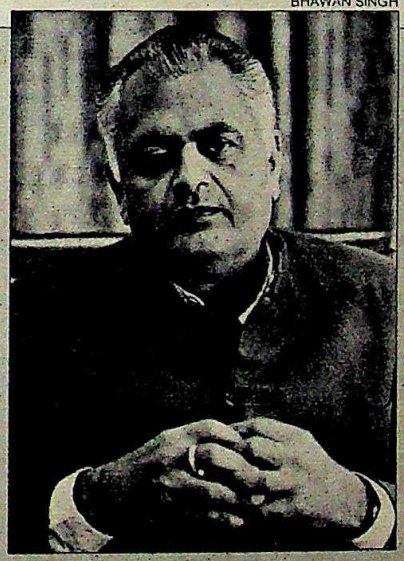
- the precise amounts which have been paid and the amounts which are to be paid by way of commission, secret payments, etc in connection with the Indian contracts;
- the recipients of such amounts, whether they are persons or companies, and in the case of the latter, their proprietors/presidents/directors and place of incorporation;
- the services rendered by such persons with reference to which such amounts have been paid; and
- copies of contracts, agreements and correspondence between Bofors and the recipients.

Immediately after the letter was sent, Oza in Stockholm was directed to present a memorandum to the Swedish foreign office. A two-page note on June 17 alleged that Bofors was not giving accurate information and requested the Swedish Government to pressure Bofors to comply. But the Defence Ministry also made it clear that it would like to place the entire information in Parliament—which may well have been a ploy to ward off cooperation. The Bofors reply provided few answers and instead raised a host of fresh questions.

Earlier, Bofors had claimed that it had terminated its arrangements with Win Chadha, who was their representative in India from 1977. But, in its latest communication, the Swedish company claimed that "long-standing commitments, which were not limited to the Indian market, were terminated in order not to risk to be in conflict with the request by the Indian authorities".

If Chadha was their agent in India, then who was representing Bofors in international marketing, including in India? Why was that company eliminated altogether and not just from India alone? Bofors refused to shed light on this. Pleading secrecy, Bofors President Per Ove Morberg asserted that "from the commercial point of view, any deviation from this principle (of secrecy) would cause the company serious damage both as regards to current contracts and future contracts with customers. Permission is required from every individual contractual party for information classified as secret to be released."

BHAWAN SINGH



When K.C. Pant placed, in the House, 26 letters exchanged between the Indian Government, Bofors and the Swedish Government since mid April, it caught the Opposition by surprise.

The Government was clearly getting nowhere, despite talks between N.N. Vohra, additional secretary in the Defence Ministry, and Bofors Vice-President Bredin. In a fresh letter, Bhatnagar now wanted to know:

- what office was maintained by Bofors' counter-agency in India to assist it with general marketing in India;
- the specific circumstances in which the expenditure incurred by the agency could be as large as 282 million Swedish kroner, as stated in the audit report;
- how general marketing assistance could entail such an enormously large share in the profit/order sum.

Bofors once again took cover behind commercial secrecy but said no payments had been made to any Indian citizen or company (a statement contrary to what the chairman of Nobel Industries, Bofors' parent company, told an interviewer). The correspondence package closed with a letter from Bhatnagar to Bofors on August 24, listing 11 unanswered questions. Bhatnagar concluded by saying: "We would like to make it clear that nothing short of clear and cogent answers to the various points and directions raised would satisfy us."

With Bofors refusing to disclose, the key question is what can the Government do to force the Swedish company's hand. Clearly, writing angry letters is not going to yield much. The only real option, of threatening to cancel the contract, has already been ruled out. Officials explain that cancellation would involve additional expenditure of over Rs 500 crore and delay in the supply of guns from alternative sources.

A third option was also considered, of asking Bofors to refund the amount paid as winding up charges. But the Government has decided against this too, and has set its mind on appealing to the Swedish Government to intervene and to force either Bofors or the Swedish banks to share their information with India.

Whether they will oblige, or whether public pressure within Sweden itself will provoke further disclosures, remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the inquiry initiated by the Swedish public prosecutor could turn up some answers too, and may reveal whether the Indian Government was genuinely hounding Bofors for information on the payments, or whether the entire exercise was an elaborate charade.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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SWEDISH INQUIRY

Twists and Turns

The inquiry corners Bofors but could take time

BTHIS time there seems to be no way out for the recalcitrant artillery manufacturer Bofors. After months of damning allegations, scrutiny and debate, the controversial Swedish firm will have no options left to hide under the cloak of clients secrecy and confidentiality to dodge the inquiry headed by the third highest official prosecuting authority in the land—the public prosecutor. Last fortnight in Stockholm, the official, Lars Ringberg, said: "I have started an investigation to find out if the Bofors Indian deal involved payment of any bribes. I will have access to all aspects of the case and Bofors does not have the right to refuse."

The company had adroitly sidestepped requests from the National Audit Bureau two months ago to cooperate in its investigations which eventually confirmed that between 170 and 250 million Swedish Kroner (approximately between Rs 34 crore and Rs 50 crore) were paid into Swiss accounts. After scrutinising the audit bureau's report, the Prosecutor-General of Sweden Magnus Sgoberg had decided that the case now merited an official investigation and it was then entrusted to Ringberg. Yet, celebrations by anyone in India, politically motivated or otherwise, anticipating a sensational revelation of those who received millions of dollars, by the prosecutor, would be quite premature.

Swedish officials say that unless concrete evidence of payment of bribes is established, there is no guarantee that the prosecutor's findings will be made public. Besides, no Swedish official will even hazard a guess as to how long the public prosecutor's investigations would last. This could take from between two months, to perhaps a year.

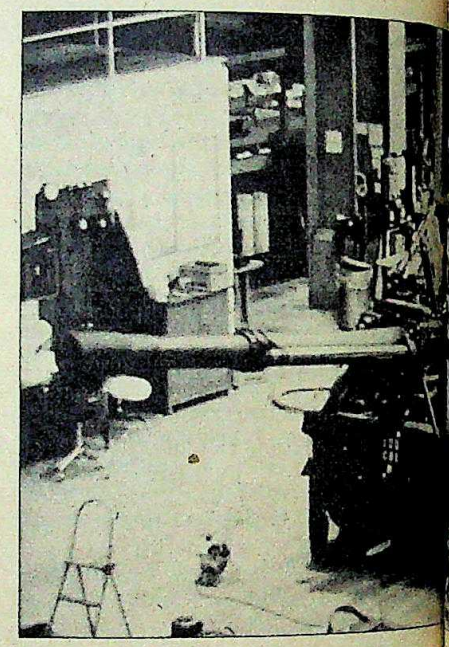
The sense of urgency prevailing in New Delhi to get to the bottom of the affair seems to be colliding against Swedish impassivity—"or Swedish thoroughness"—as the Government here prefers to call it. As Harry Schein, chairman of the Swedish Export Credits Guarantee Corp and the Swedish Investments Bank, pointed out: "We fully understand that in India, people wish to know if one of their officials or politicians were interested in the deal. But we practise a rigid code of conduct in public affairs and cannot flout our laws. There are procedures and practices which we have to scrupulously follow. The prosecutor will launch his investigations. If there is no case for prosecution, then it is likely it might remain under wraps."

On the other hand, if the public prosecutor establishes evidence that bribes have indeed been paid in the artillery deal, then most of the documents—except those termed "sensitive defence documents"—will be made public. There has been some confusion regarding the public prosecutor's powers in Sweden and who he can prosecute should the case have an international dimension, as in the Bofors case that involves India and Switzerland. According to Dr Thorsten Cars, chairman of the Institute Against Bribes and the press ombudsman, the philosophy underlying the new Swedish legislation against corruption is that, in principle, the same rules of criminal responsibility for bribery (bribe-giving) and corruption (bribe-taking) shall apply for any public or private employee.

However, there is a peculiar twist where foreigners are involved. They can also be prosecuted in Sweden, except where the bribe-taker is a politician or a minister. Explains Dr Cars: "An employee of a foreign government can be convicted here—but not if he or she is a politician or a minister. There is no real sense in this, but you see, we have to follow the written code of Swedish law. One might add there also exists no extradition treaty between our two countries. And I wonder if the Indian Government would be willing to make available to Swedish justice an employee of theirs." There is also no precedent of a case involving foreign nationals in Sweden—the Singapore and Indian investigations, both involving Bofors, are the first.

So despite the letters written by a quarter million readers of the *Indian Express*, demanding moral rectitude and probity in public life—or bluntly asking for the names of the Indian politicians who have shamelessly stashed away a fortune in secret Swiss bank accounts—Swedish justice will take its own deliberate course. Swedish officials do provide assurances that the letters will not be ignored, but it certainly has not helped to hasten proceedings.

As for the battered firm, it has put up a brave face yet again. Its customary spokesman, Per Mossberg, blandly spoke of "welcoming" the police investigations. Mossberg, who has consistently stonewalled all the unyielding press queries of the past months, told INDIA TODAY: "As Bofors has made no illicit payments and has not used a middleman, the prosecutor's finding will ultimately justify our stance." Bofors says it will cooperate fully



with the public prosecutor and its books will be "made available" to Ringberg. The company has little choice. Unlike the National Audit Bureau's probe, this one is a police investigation. Mossberg, however, would not comment on whether Bertil Bredin, Bofors vice-president, had offered to send a company team to India when he visited New Delhi.

MEANWHILE, Indian Ambassador Bhupatrai Oza, on whom has fallen the unenviable job of playing go-between with the Indian Government, Bofors and the Swedish Government, emphasised that he had left no stone unturned in his efforts to persuade the Swedish officials to pursue the affair rapidly. He also feels that there is a possibility things might go back to square one if the prosecutor fails to find any evidence of bribery. In fact, there is a feeling in Stockholm that while Bofors might open its books to the prosecutor, it might not entirely cooperate with officials

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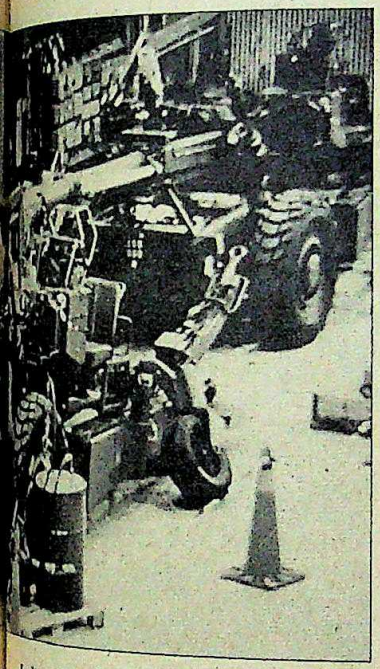
to help speed up the investigations.

At any rate, judging by their past record, the speed with which these investigations have been conducted seems quite abysmal. The first official investigation by a public prosecutor into Bofors occurred when a member of the Swedish peace movement—Svenska Freds-och-Skiljedoms Foreiningen—unearthed secret documents relating to illegal shipments by Bofors of RBS-70 surface-to-air laser-guided missiles. Three hundred RBS-70s were exported to Singapore. The state-owned Singapore company, Uni-



Indian Howitzers at Bofors assembly line

corn International, is said to have re-exported the missiles to Bahrain and Dubai. There was little doubt about its final destination—Iran. The prosecutor's investigation that began in 1985 has spasmodically lurched from one allegation to another, and theoretically, is still going on. Lars Ringberg's investigations will now be the second inquiry into payments of bribes in the Indian deal.

With all these allegations of gun-running, deceit and bribery involving Nobel Industries and Bofors which have shaken the country's conscience and lanced the heart of Swedish ethos—political morality—it remains highly creditable that the Swedish Government has not balked at holding inquiries. A 15-member parliamentary constitutional committee—the "Konstitutions Utskottet"—has been launched to look into the extent to which the Swedish Government has been involved in the 155mm Howitzer gun deal.

Although many more names are likely to be added, four names have been short-listed to appear before the parliamentary committee. These include: Mats Hellstrom, former minister for foreign trade who, along with prime minister Palme, is believed to have closely monitored the Indian deal; Sven Andersson, the present foreign affairs minister; Jorgen Holgersson, head of the Swedish arms directorate which decides the destinations to which Sweden can export armaments; and Harre Schein, chairman of the "Export Kredit Namen" that handles credits and other financial aspects of foreign contracts.

THE precise dates as to when the committee will meet is not clear yet but it will possibly be sometime this autumn. Meanwhile, a citizens' committee, comprising of distinguished Swedes and headed by eminent diplomat Olof Rydebeck, that scrutinises the affairs of the state on behalf of ordinary Swedish citizens, has also decided to begin its own independent inquiry on Bofors.

Foreign Minister Sven Andersson has made it clear that the public had the "right to know" everything about the Indian deal and promised that "all dirty linen will be washed in public". He feels this is guaranteed by the various investigations that have been constituted to investigate the affair. He also felt confident that Bofors will cooperate with the public prosecutor.

A highly politicised aspect of the debate on the Bofors affair in Stockholm has been the mounting criticism, specifically from politicians and commentators from the conservative ranks, that the Government had diverted funds marked for developmental aid in the Third World to finance weapons sales. In the Bofors deal, it has been alleged here that special development funds have been used as credit guarantee for the sale of the 155mm Howitzers. In fact, one critic, Tomas Fi-

If the public prosecutor establishes evidence that bribes have been paid in the artillery deal, then most of the documents—except those termed sensitive—will be made public.

scher, a multi-millionaire, went to the extent of alleging that the Swedish Government had inadvertently financed the bribes and illegal commissions in the Bofors-India deal.

However, there is a fair amount of hair-splitting as well as a ploy for scoring political points in all this. If the financial aspects of the Bofors deal is scrutinised, there are essentially four 'parties' involved—the customer (India), the seller (Bofors), 'EKN' (The Swedish Export Credit Guarantee Corp) and 'SEK' (Swedish Export Credit Institution—owned 50 per cent by the state and 50 per cent by Swedish banks). When the deal was successfully negotiated, Bofors approached EKN for a guarantee for India. EKN examined the customer's credit-worthiness and in this case responded positively. Then Bofors approached SEK which in turn supplied a loan to India with borrowings from the capital market. At the conclusion of the first delivery of the Howitzers, India paid Bofors through SEK. EKN's role in the deal is that it has provided SEK with a guarantee that India will pay its monies back. For this service, it earned a premium from Bofors.

The chairman of EKN, Harry Schein, one of the late Olof Palme's closest friends, told INDIA TODAY: "As far as this question of development funds and arms sales are concerned, we must first of all comprehend how the system of Swedish Credit Guarantees work. Until the late '70s, we had only one system of guarantee which were normal guarantees. An organisation like the EKN and its counterparts in the rest of the industrialised world is not supposed to lose money. But when the debt crisis squeezed us all, we had to take a second look at lending. So a second guarantee was adopted here —called "S.U." guarantee which was meant to promote Swedish interests and Swedish society—be it in the form of helping Swedish employment, our long-term markets, trade, etc." In this S.U. guarantee, he added, "we are permitted to take slightly bigger risks in order to further the development in another country. India has always fallen under this S.U. guarantee. And in the Bofors deal, it is again a S.U. guarantee since it falls under the criteria of aiding employment here."

However, while the S.U. guarantee permits higher risks it also involves a higher premium. Schein would not say precisely what the premium was in the Bofors deal. The question of development versus weapons sale is one more issue that has cropped up in the Bofors debate.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Stockholm

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SWISS LAWS

Changing Image

India is yet to seek specific information

THE confusion surrounding Delhi's efforts to persuade the Swiss Government to lift its veil of secrecy over the bank accounts of Indians in Switzerland is worsening by the day.

An official Swiss spokesman told INDIA TODAY that the Indian Government has not yet made a request to Berne for a legal aid treaty. Nor has it asked for a temporary memorandum of understanding pending the conclusion of such a treaty.

Jorg Kistler, spokesman for the Federal Justice and Police Department, which would handle such a treaty said: "Nothing has happened. We have not yet had a request from the Government of India for negotiations (up to August 25)." He added: "There have been no bilateral talks so far either on a treaty or an exchange of notes or a memorandum of understanding."

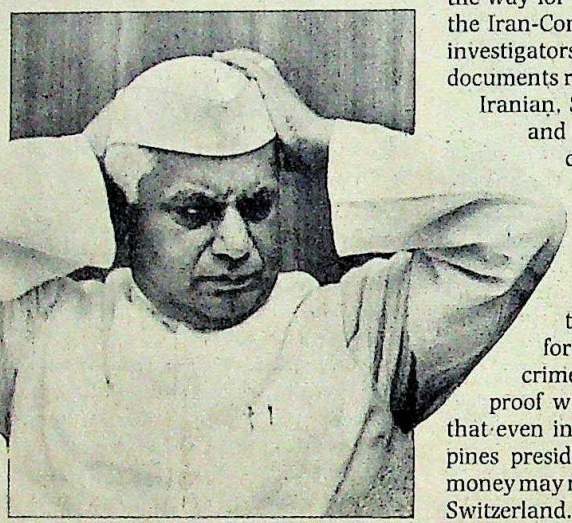
Switzerland will supply information if certain conditions are met even without a treaty or a memorandum of understanding. But Delhi has not yet asked for any specific information although it has repeatedly sought explanations of how that might be done, he added.

These surprising revelations contradict the impression created by the Government, in particular by Finance Minister N.D. Tiwari, in the Lok Sabha during the Bofors debate on August 6. Tiwari then declared: "The Government has decided to enter into a treaty for mutual assistance in criminal matters with Swiss authorities," and that pending such a treaty the Government would enter "into a memorandum of understanding with Swiss authorities for assistance in specific cases of Indians having accounts in Swiss banks." The finance minister had then added: "We are intimating our ambassador in Switzerland to inform the Swiss authorities of this decision." Clearly, the Government has moved quite slowly on this.

The impression in Switzerland is that the Gandhi administration is trying to buy time in its arguments with detractors by pretending that Swiss procedures are too difficult and complicated to bring quick results. The Swiss have, on the contrary, been very cooperative so far.

In fact, if the Indian investigators are well briefed they could succeed not only in getting information about bank accounts, but also in recovering some of the money. All this could be done even in cases where the offences are not crimes in Switzerland, without offering strict reciprocity, and without a legal aid treaty. The reasons lie in the terms of the law covering legal aid, Berne's willingness, and recent developments in interpreting the law arising from Swiss aspects of the US Iran-Contra affair.

The Swiss Government seems determined to make its cooperation with India an example of its distaste for flight capital from poor developing countries. A drying up of funds from Indians, which are small by western standards, will not affect Swiss bank profits but could bring large dividends in terms of a better international image and also help disarm the Berne Government's critics in the Swiss Socialist Party. Cooperation with India is expected to go a long way in cleansing Switzerland's image as a nation of unscrupulous bankers.



> "The Government has decided to enter into a treaty for mutual assistance with Swiss authorities. Pending that, we will enter into a memorandum of understanding."
>
> N.D. TIWARI
> *Lok Sabha, August 6*

The latest development was a Swiss Supreme Court ruling on August 21 setting aside banking secrecy and clearing the way for bank documents relating to the Iran-Contra affair to be given to US investigators. US officials will now receive documents relating to as many as 20 US, Iranian, Swiss and Saudi individuals and companies and bank accounts worth more than $12 million.

But official sources in New Delhi said that India did not have the diplomatic clout that the US did, that violation of Indian tax or foreign exchange laws were not crimes in Switzerland and that proof was often not available, and that even in the case of deposed Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos, the money may not eventually be taken out of Switzerland. Also, when a team led by A. Ghosh, deputy governor of the RBI, visited Switzerland, the Swiss authorities offered cooperation but advised the team to have laws enforced in India, so that the Government did not need the help of outsiders.

Despite all this, Indian investigators seeking help from the Swiss may find the going easier than they expect. In fact, there is no need for a mutual legal assistance treaty or even a memorandum of understanding, both of which would have to be based on guaranteed reciprocity between the two countries. India could simply invoke a 1981 Swiss law, to seek Swiss help without offering reciprocity. The law says that an appropriate foreign authority may seek help from Swiss authorities in recovering documents or information relevant to a criminal offence. In most cases the offence would have to be a crime in Switzerland as well, and the foreign government would have to guarantee reciprocity as a pre-condition.

However, in cases of fraud in fiscal matters, the offence does not have to be exactly identical because of differing fiscal regimes, and help may be given even when the specific kind of fraud committed is not a crime under Swiss law. This is contradictory to what Tiwari told Parliament was one of the conclusions of the

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Ghosh team—that Switzerland would not take notice of cases that were not crimes in both countries.

According to Swiss law, reciprocity could be waived because of "the nature of the act committed or the need to combat certain kinds of violations". Information usually kept secret can be supplied "if the violation is big enough and it seems indispensable to establish the facts". But "revelation of a manufacturing or business secret, or of a fact that a bank would usually have to keep secret, is inadmissible when it is feared that the Swiss economy could suffer grave prejudice and when it is not justified in the light of the violation's importance."

Since the information likely to be sought by India cannot damage the Swiss economy, Swiss authorities are likely to cooperate. However, the procedure is that criminal proceedings should first be filed in India against specific individuals and companies alleged to hold Swiss bank accounts. Then requests should be made to the Swiss Justice and Police Department for information to assist the proceedings in India.

The individuals or companies concerned would be free to go to the courts in Switzerland to prevent the disclosures as did the three principals in the Iran-Contra affair. The main reason why a Swiss court might rule against disclosures to India would be the suspicion that proceedings are politically motivated, rather than part of an impartial effort to punish all owners of flight capital, regardless of whether the money is kept in Switzerland or elsewhere.

An official Swiss spokesman says that the Indian Government has not yet made a request to Berne to enter into a legal aid treaty. Nor has it asked for a temporary memorandum of understanding.

In the Iran-Contra case, the Supreme Court rejected the defendants' claim that the US request for information was politically motivated. Thus, the court has set a precedent for allowing disclosure even when the offence is not directly covered by Swiss criminal law but concerns the same area. For India, the interpretation should be that while tax or FERA evasion is not a crime in Switzerland, proof of similarity to fiscal fraud might be enough to persuade Swiss courts to endorse the information disclosure.

The 1981 law's article 63 describes the kinds of disclosures that can be sought. "The mutual assistance includes the communication of information...when it appears necessary for the (criminal) proceedings under way...or to recover the product of violations." This paragraph clearly states that the money kept abroad can be recovered by the Indian Government if it successfully uses the mutual assistance procedures. It is under this provision that the Philippines and Haiti governments hope to recover funds kept in Switzerland by Marcos and Baby Doc Duvalier. The Iranian Government is also using this provision to seek recovery of funds kept in Switzerland by the Shah and his family.

The article also says that "acts of mutual assistance include notification of documents, search of means of proof, the handing over of files and documents, the searching of persons and premises, the seizure (of documents etc), confrontation (with accusing parties), and the transit of persons." Thus, Indian investigators can get help even from Swiss police to hold and search Indians, whether resident in India or abroad, in serious enough cases.

However, an Indian request for mutual legal assistance will not be accepted if there are procedural gaps. Nor will it be accepted if the investigation is politically motivated, or the violations in question are of a political character, or relate to Indian security or defence. It would also be rejected if it is not serious enough or is not a punishable crime or is declared non-receivable by an Indian court.

Presumably, the Ghosh team has taken a copy of the law back with it. If Delhi has not yet made any specific request to Berne for information or for a memorandum of understanding, it can only mean that the Finance Ministry sleuths have yet to find any firm proof of capital flight to Switzerland.

While this long-drawn-out and heavily politicised saga unfolds in India, the Swiss rightly feel that they should not be forced to carry the can for the inability of Indian authorities to keep track of, let alone prevent, illegal capital movement out of the country. The Swiss have never had foreign exchange controls and cannot imagine what devilish problems enforcement entails.

—BRIJ KHINDARIA in Geneva

WIN CHADHA

Legal Hurdles

Pressure for his return

BRENOVATION work in house number 3/33 in south Delhi's Shanti Niketan colony was suddenly called off last fortnight. "The work has not finished yet, but we have been asked not to come," the perplexed labour contractor said, supervising the withdrawal of his construction paraphernalia from the premises.

At the same time, three lawyers in the Supreme Court, standing in front of Chief Justice of India R.S. Pathak, were appealing for "relief" for their client. The lawyers were representing Anatronics General Corporation headed by Win N. Chadha, and the house belongs to his wife, Kanta Chadha. The renovation work in Shanti Niketan was dependent on the relief.

Win Chadha: missing link

The chief justice summarily dismissed the special leave petition which sought to undo the freezing of 16 bank accounts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). All these accounts belong to the Chadhas.

With the money frozen, the pressure is increasing on Chadha to return to India. Orders for his presence in court have already been issued under section 56 of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), and sections 172, 174 and 176 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which pertain to non-compliance of Enforcement Directorate summons to him—too minor a criminal offence to guarantee his extradition. In the absence of a watertight case against him, Chadha continued to remain elusive in the US where he is reported to have a permanent resident status as a 'green card' holder.

Though Chadha's lawyer, the New York based Jonathan Mark insisted that Chadha was not a fugitive from the law and the Government could interrogate him in the US if it wanted, the Directorate's probe against Chadha for FERA violations is grounded. Officials said that though they have circumstantial evidence against Chadha—the admissions of Bofors executives and the report of the Swedish National Audit Bureau that

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money had been paid to Bofors' agent—they need documents to prove that he has violated Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) provisions. A second income tax probe is also under way, inquiring into Chadha's assets and those of his companies. The Shanti Niketan house, it turns out, was bought for about Rs 25 lakh late last year. Significantly, the Bofors payments were made between March and December last year.

The income tax probe is considered important from the point of view of Chadha's extradition from the US. The taxation laws go hand-in-hand with the Criminal Procedure Code, and since the Enforcement Directorate feels it is unable to file a case against him under FERA, a criminal case can be filed against him under the Income Tax Act.

The Enforcement Directorate has been able to frame criminal charges against Chadha for non-compliance of summons issued to him. But this case is not strong enough to guarantee extradition. The Bofors representative has been ordered to present himself in the court of Delhi's Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Bharat Bhushan on this count. The next step the court can take is to proclaim him an absconder, but that will not help in his extradition either.

Reports about Chadha's status as a green card holder in the US have also given a new twist to the investigations against him. While on the one hand his permanent resident status in the US enables him to hold bank accounts and run a business, he is suspected to have flouted Indian taxation laws since he has never shown any overseas profits or holdings in his books. But again, the income tax officers will require documents to prove his overseas business operations before moving the court.

Also being investigated are the two large parties that Chadha hosted in April this year, one at a five-star hotel and another at his Delhi farmhouse. According to investigators, the expenditure at these parties ran into lakhs of rupees.

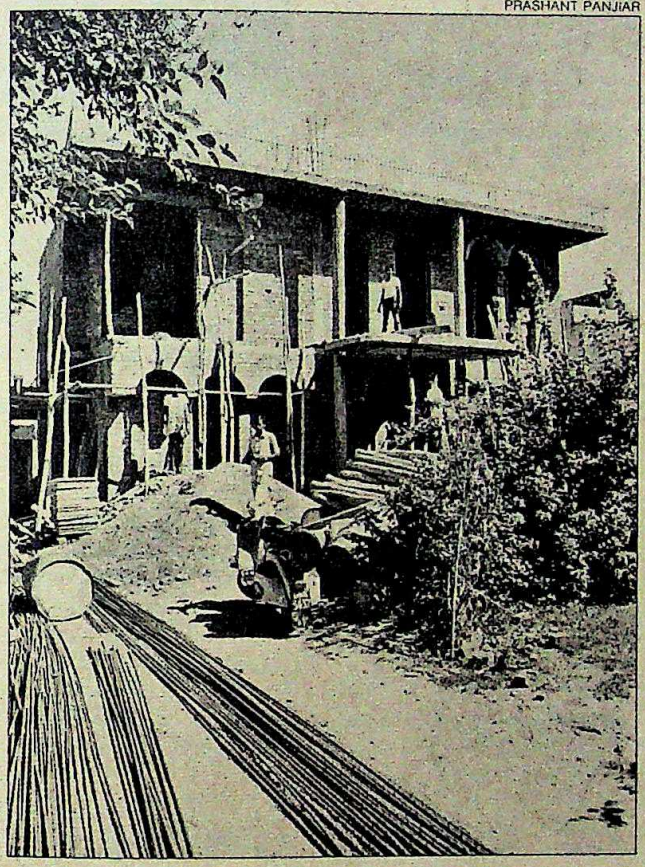
Meanwhile, Anatronics and its seven subsidiaries are in the doldrums. With the Supreme Court declining to unfreeze the bank accounts, Anatronics executives are running around trying to get a limited release on accounts so they can pay income tax, employees' salaries, telephone and electricity bills and other office expenses.

"We have written to all the people that their payments will be delayed, but it cannot go on like this forever," a senior executive said. S. Nandi, chief accountant at Anatronics' has also met a number of government officials in this connection, but to no avail. Anatronics' lawyers charged in court that the RBI had "illegally' frozen the accounts as some were never involved in foreign exchange deals and others were not operated for a long time and so could not have been suspected of violating laws.

Even the hour-long arguments presented in the Supreme Court by the team of lawyers representing Anatronics—headed by Ashok Grover—were dismissed in a cryptic order which did not give the grounds for not entertaining the petition. Earlier, another Anatronics lawyer, P.P. Malhotra, got similar treatment at the high court, where a two-judge bench insisted that Chadha should first come to the country.

Chadha's house: stalled construction

PRASHANT PANJIAR



With the money frozen and cases pending in court, the pressure to bring back Win Chadha is increasing. But the Government is yet to begin the extradition process.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of External Affairs said that it had tapped all diplomatic channels to secure the deportation of Win Chadha and his son Hersh, both of whose passports had been revoked. The Government has been given to understand that according to US law the Chadhas could either be extradited—which is a lengthy process—or judicial help could be sought under the 'letters rogatory' process. By this scheme, an Indian court can request a US court for furnishing information on Chadha. The Chadhas would be compelled to answer all the questions put by the Indian judge in the US court.

The US authorities themselves have yet to decide if they wish to cooperate with the Indian Government in tracing and extraditing the Chadhas. New Delhi has made three requests for this, on July 27, July 31 and August 3. The US Embassy in New Delhi was also awaiting clarifications from Washington. An embassy spokesman said: "If he is a green card holder, all he needs is a smart lawyer to avoid deportation." But he went on to say that there has been "some rethinking" in Washington on the issue.

Given the uncertain nature of the investigations into Chadha's affairs and the absence of information on his precise status in the US, it was impossible to predict whether Indian investigators would eventually be able to get their hands on Chadha. But there is no doubt that his return will go a long way in cracking the Bofors payments riddle.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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Claiming Benefits

IN a most curious case, the Madhya Pradesh Fisheries Development Corporation has filed a civil suit for the recovery of Rs 4.40 lakh from its former chairman Aziz Qureshi, Congress(I) MP from Satna. The corporation alleges that the honourable MP refuses to return the official jeep, furniture and other property, even two years after he has relinquished office. Qureshi, 47, headed the corporation from 1981 to 1984. The suit filed in the Bhopal district court last fortnight states that the ruling party politician owes the state corporation Rs 1.01 lakh as the cost of the new jeep allotted to him on May 18, 1984; Rs 1.47 lakh towards the 'rental' of the jeep during the period of its "unauthorised" use; Rs 1.50 lakh for furnishing his residence; and Rs 41.452 against outstanding advance.

Qureshi: in the dock

The corporation claims that Qureshi refused to return the jeep and other goods in spite of several reminders. However, when the matter was reported in the local press earlier this year, the Congress(I) MP served a legal notice on the corporation's board of directors. In his notice, Qureshi claimed that after he quit the corporation, his successor, Sobran Singh Parmar, a fellow ruling party politician, allotted the jeep to him "for detection of illegal fishing" in the state. Parmar hotly disputes this. "The claim is totally baseless," he said. And to nail the lie, there is no evidence of Qureshi having reported the detection of a single case of illegal fishing in the last 30 months. The MPs claims are certainly fishy.

Misplaced Trust

SEVERAL private engineering and medical colleges have earned the reputation of collecting hefty fees and donations and getting away with it. But last fortnight, the Deccan Medical College, Hyderabad, ran out of luck and into deep trouble with the state Government when Justice P.A. Choudary of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, rejected the plea for immunity from interference of the Darus Salaam Trust that runs the college. The trust—floated by the Majilis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen party (MIM) which represents the interests of the city's Muslims—was making a claim as a minority institution.

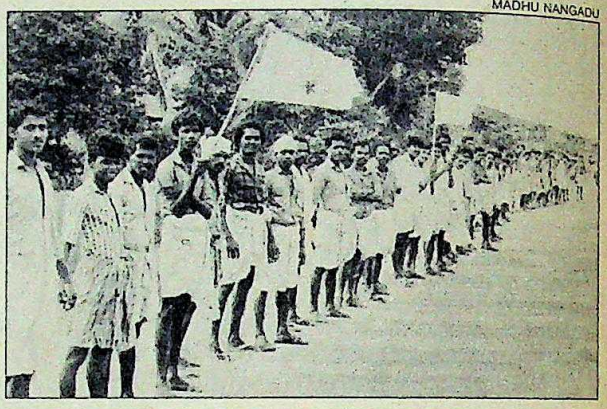
Justice Choudary

The state Government, however, froze about Rs 95 lakh in bank accounts and the state police crime branch, after detailed investigations, discovered that the trust had transferred about Rs 75.61 lakh collected by the college, to several MIM accounts in the city. Rs 15 lakh was also transferred to another religious-educational trust at Gulbarga, Karnataka. The trust now faces charges of cheating and breach of trust under the Indian Penal Code as also of collecting money in violation of the Andhra Pradesh Educational Institutions (Regulation of Admission and Prohibition of Capitation Fee) Act—a law made by the N.T. Rama Rao Ministry in 1983.

Pledging Patriotism

ON August 15, over 7 lakh men, women and children held hands to form a 693-km human chain, from Trivandrum to Kasargod in Kerala. The human chain remained unbroken for 30 minutes as a symbol of patriotism, while the participants took a pledge to fight "divisive and secessionist forces that threaten the nation's unity and integrity". The novel idea, which attracted large numbers of people, was conceived of by the DYFI (Democratic Youth Federation of India)—a Marxist youth wing.

MADHU NANGADU



Section of the human chain: wide response

But detractors were quick to see the whole exercise as an image-boosting gimmick after the public had disapproved of the state Government not celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Quit India Movement because the communists had not been involved. Said M. Vijayakumar, MLA, and president of the DYFI: "The human chain was a unique show that silenced all our detractors. It was in fact a spontaneous participation from almost all people in the state." The DYFI plans to repeat the show of showing their patriotism soon from the Indo-Pakistan border in Punjab to New Delhi.

Calling Attention

A delegation of the All Assam Students Union leaders was in Delhi last fortnight to hold a dharna and protest the Centre's indifference towards the state. The leaders said that although Assam has been reeling under the impact of a third wave of floods in the last two months, repeated requests for Central aid has fallen on deaf ears.

Mahanta: angry

The swollen Brahmaputra and its tributaries have inundated large areas in Barpeta, Kokrajhar, Dhubri and Kamrup districts. A rough estimate puts the damage at about Rs 140 crore. And while 57 people have been killed in the havoc wrought by the floods, 27 lakh have been affected in some 5,000 villages. Over 80,000 houses have collapsed and about 4 lakh hectares of farm land has been ravaged.

Chief Minister Mahanta announced that the state could not afford to waste money on special celebrations to mark the 40th anniversary of Independence. Rushing aid to the marooned and flood hit was their priority.

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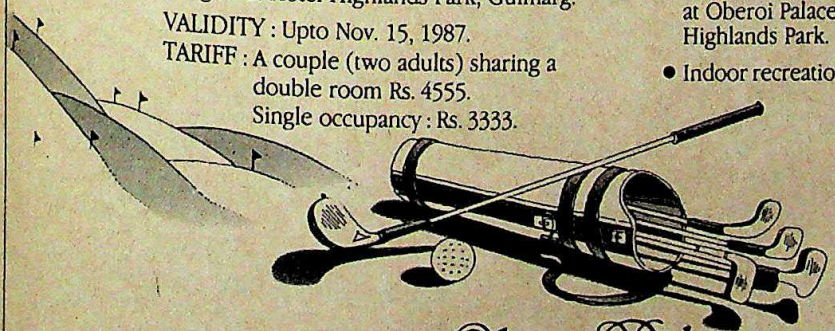

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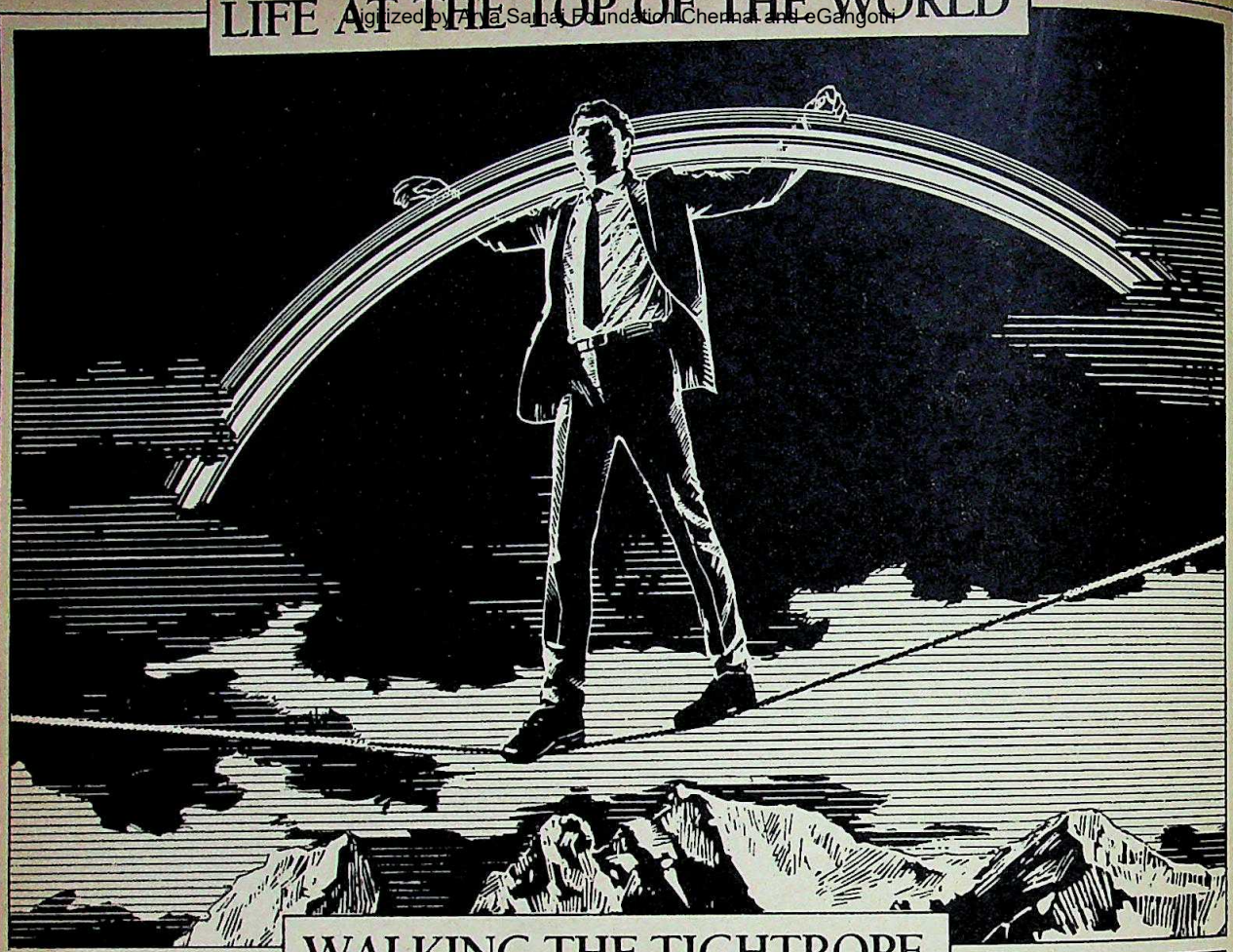

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NO TO PRIVATISATION

THE Rajiv Government may have finally set its face against privatisation of the public sector. A draft white paper on the public sector (promised by Rajiv in his budget speech in February) rules against privatisation, especially the hawking of state-owned companies that are making profits. The draft (which is still to get final approval) also sets the Government's face against nationalisation, with the rider that a take-over will be considered if supported by the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction, the body set up recently to look into the problem of sick undertakings.

The white paper will also state explicitly that the Government is in favour of an arms-length relationship with public sector enterprises, in order to ensure the latter's operational autonomy. For this, a charter will be worked out for each enterprise, which will serve as the basis for annual performance evaluation. Several over-capitalised companies will be restructured financially, with a write-down of capital. If a unit stays sick despite this, the solution will be either merger with another public sector unit, or closure.

AWAITING PAYMENTS

MORE than a year after Swraj Paul agreed to abort his 1983 raid on Escorts and DCM, the London-based businessman is yet to get all his money for the shares he sold. Nandas of Escorts have already paid Rs 7 crore, and the rest is held up due to some court cases relating to Paul's broker, Harish Bhasin. But DCM's management, comprising the Shriram family, has lagged behind in making payments.

The deal negotiated with Paul had been for making the payment in instalments (roughly Rs 2 crore every quarter), but even these instalments have not been paid. Under the terms of the agreement, Paul will get interest on the sums due, if there is any delay in payment. But the question now is whether the payment will ever come, and what choice Paul has if the money continues to be illusory. As things stand, Paul is saddled with dead stock for which he has not even been registered as the rightful owner.

STAYING STEEL PRICES

IT is now 30 months since steel prices were raised, and both the major producers of steel (Steel Authority and TISCO) are getting impatient. TISCO Chairman Russi Mody has even announced that his company's modernisation programme depends on the steel price-hike coming through.

The price increase was agreed upon by the Steel Ministry's bureaucrats. But the man who has refused to sign on the dotted line is the newly-appointed Steel Minister M.L. Fotedar. With an eye on the drought and the inflationary pressures this will generate, Fotedar has decided a hike can wait.

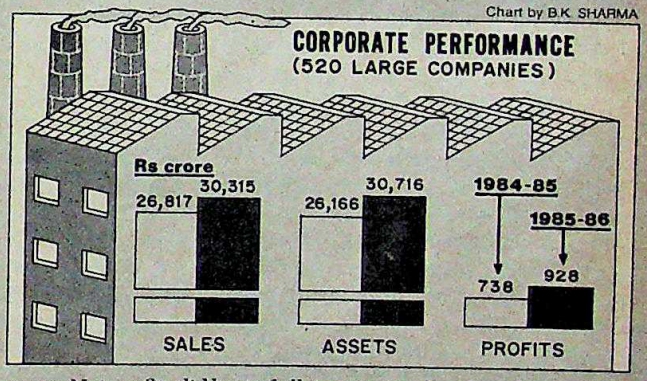
CURTAILING DIVERSIFICATION

AMONG the areas to which Tata Industries proposed to branch out as part of Chairman Ratan Tata's diversification plans, was leasing and hire purchase. But with the market for leasing firms getting rough and the competition getting more intense, Tata Industries seems to have lost interest. An application for a Rs 2-crore leasing venture has now been turned down as the company did not respond to questions from the Department of Company Affairs, although a hearing had been held under the MRTP Act as part of the processing of the application.

ANALYSING THE BOOM

THE corporate sector did very well for itself in 1985-86, as detailed analyses of balance sheets now confirm. A total of 520 leading companies notched up a 13 per cent increase in net sales during the year, to Rs 30,315 crore, while net assets rose even higher, by 17.4 per cent to Rs 30,716

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



crore. Net profits did best of all, increasing by a handsome 25.7 per cent to Rs 927.6 crore. Net profits, as a percentage of sales, improved as a result, from 2.75 per cent in 1984-85 to 3.06 per cent. Perhaps the stock-market boom in 1985 did have a sound basis in corporate performance, after all.

THE GREAT RACE

WITH new entrants leaping in, the race to bag the Rs 120-crore, 50,000-tonne linear alkyl benzene (LAB) project mooted for Vishakhapatnam is hotting up. The latest to jump in is Modi Rubber, which joins others like Hindustan Lever (that had lost out to Reliance Industries in an earlier battle for a LAB project) and the fast growing Nirma Chemical Works of Ahmedabad. The Birlas too are showing an interest in the new petrochemical industries expected to come up. Orient Paper, for instance, proposes to set up a one lakh tonne, low-density polyethylene plant and another one lakh tonne, high density polyethylene plant, in the coastal Andhra Pradesh town. Meanwhile, Tata Chemicals (which already has two giant projects for fertilisers and an oil refinery) too has climbed the LAB bandwagon. It is seeking permission for a Rs 90-crore project at Karnal, to turn out 50,000 tonnes of the synthetic detergent industry's raw material.

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WEST BENGAL

Trimming the Fat

Many companies are knifing bloated employee rolls

IN West Bengal, the day of the long knives has arrived. Several large companies in the state are knifing bloated employee rolls with the help of what is known as voluntary retirement schemes (VRS), while others are busy lobbying the Government for permission to sack unwanted labour.

Companies as disparate as Dunlop India, ITC, Indian Explosives Ltd (IEL) and Tribeni Tissues are handing out attractive farewell presents—up to 30 months salary plus the normal retirement benefits, in one case—to unwanted employees as inducements to quit. Even the government-owned Indian Iron and Steel Company is toying with a similar plan. Its ambitious goal is to slough off 42 per cent of its 24,000 employees.

Nor is the phenomenon confined to the big daddies. Small companies such as Electro Steel Castings and Molins of India have leaped into the act too. The Rs 3-crore Molins wants to hive off half its 240-strong labour force at its Calcutta factory. Last fortnight, the losing cigarette machine company was negotiating with its unions after the state Government turned down a proposal, some months ago, to lay off workers.

Unquestionably, corporations are going on a slash diet. One guesstimate places the number of employees shed by firms located in the state at a minimum of 3,000 over the past three years. The tally will soar dramatically if Indian Iron's plan sees the light of day.

Such trends are striking because, with virtually no competition to speak of, enterprises had flourished effortlessly in the market-place for several years. In the process, many had blithely added on employees to their payrolls, since wage bills didn't pinch. Topping the problem, companies have often found that the staff at the bottom of the totem pole hang on to their jobs till their retirement. The reason for this is, quite simply, because job hopping opportunities are scarce in West Bengal unlike in the rest of the country.

Still, Kuldip Mehta, IEL's chief executive for personnel, insists that bloated labour forces are a hangover of the past. "It's a legacy of the past. We've been employing people on the basis of the need at that time, when there was no competition. So the circumstances were different, the wage pressures were lower," says Mehta.

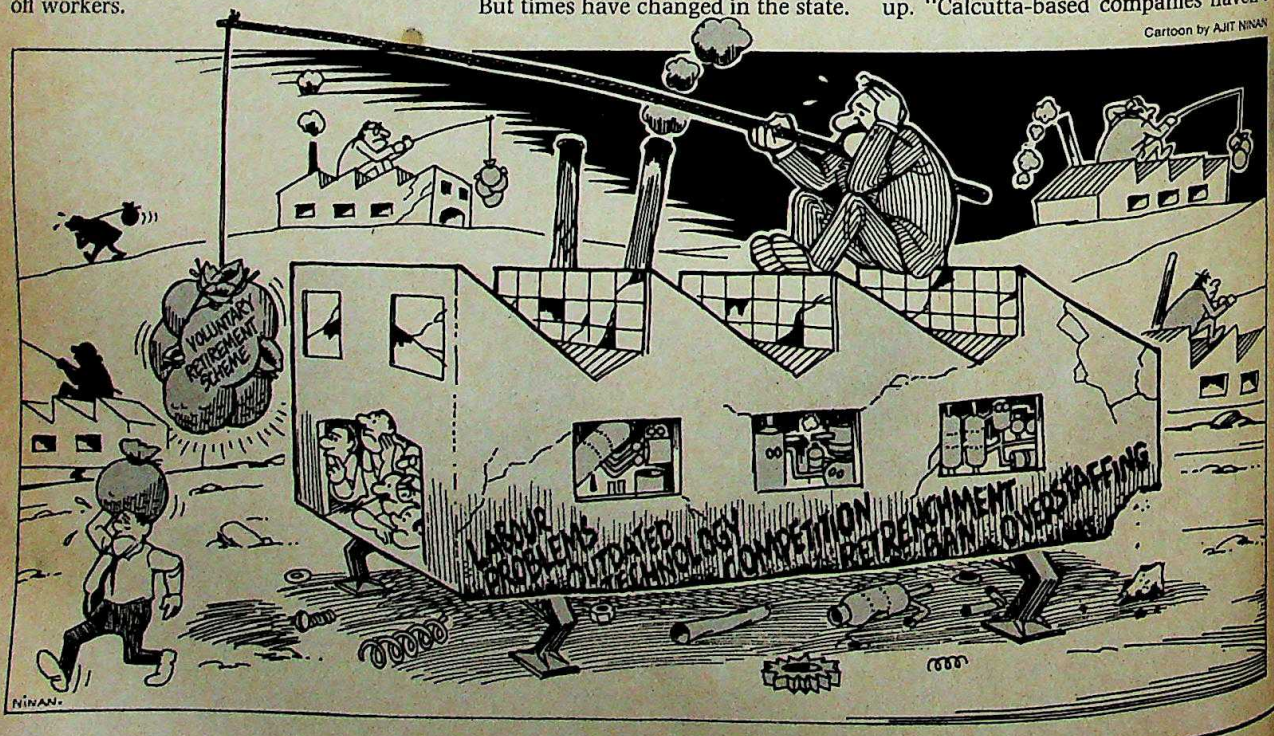
But times have changed in the state. As elsewhere, wages have moved up gradually, and the shoe is now beginning to pinch. In 1971, the average wage in the state's engineering industry was Rs 211 a month. By last December, the figure had shot up to Rs 1,042. "The difference between wage levels in Maharashtra and West Bengal has narrowed," argues West Bengal Labour Commissioner S.K. Guha. "While companies in Maharashtra were always conscious of productivity, this is now coming in Bengal."

Indeed it is. Dunlop India's 27-year-old Deputy Managing Director S. Goenka says that the tyre company's turnover per employee is Rs 4 lakh now, but it should more properly be two-and-a-half times as much. Therefore, Dunlop is now axing what it views as inefficient managers, after offering a VRS to non-management staff last year.

Plainly too, older establishments find themselves at a disadvantage compared to younger rivals simply because they have, over the years, accumulated fat. And they offer heftier employee benefits. For instance, IEL links its dearness allowance both to the basic wage and to the cost of living. The inflation therefore is more than neutralised at some of its factories. One result of this is that the Rs 5-crore wage tag at one of its plants exceeds a newer competitor's wage bill by some Rs 2 crore.

Many firms have also rudely realised that they lag behind the competition in technology and so are now trying to catch up. "Calcutta-based companies haven't

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



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Dunlop is weeding out managers by offering generous severance pay.

kept in line with technological developments. They are now upgrading technologies in one grand leap," affirms Pradip Chanda, president of the Gramophone Company of India, which got rid of some 500 workers through a VRS a few years ago. And inevitably, when modern machines are installed at factories, fewer men are needed to run them.

Then, the bigger units are increasingly farming out low-tech jobs to the small sector, where wage levels are notoriously low. "This results in an immediate impulse to get rid of people," Guha points out.

Logically, managements should resort to retrenching employees. In West Bengal, however, this requires the state Government's prior nod—and retrenchment is a no-no at Writers' Building. Firms do hopefully ask for government

IEL has got rid of over 1,100 workers, but only some 40 managers have quit.

ITC is reportedly focusing on reducing the labour force at its Calcutta factory.

permission, but are forced to seek the relatively painless paths of prodding employees to quit on their own or not filling slots left by retiring staff members.

Companies usually exercise variants of both options. Over the last three years, ITC has refrained from raising the retirement age of 55 for managers and has offered its employees a golden handshake. The severance pay depends on the number of years an employee has left in the organisation. But workers (who retire on reaching 60) are offered generous terms. They are entitled to a lumpsum which can either be deposited with the company—in which case the worker gets 16 per cent interest—or be invested elsewhere. Managers, however, are offered six months' salary and normal retirement benefits, spread out over three years. Not surprisingly, more workers (over 1,150 of them) than managers (roughly 40) have marched out of the Rs 520-crore chemicals and fertiliser giant. The price tag: around Rs 6 crore.

In contrast, Dunlop India has focused on weeding out managers, informally drawing up a hit-list for the purpose. "We make a distinction between doers and sitters and have drawn up a list," confirms Goenka, who declines to reveal how many managers have been axed or how much money the Rs 483-crore firm forked out to get rid of them (union sources claim that 100 of the 252 employees who quit in the last two years were managers). But Goenka does say that Dunlop will recover the sums involved in 18 months, because salaries will be saved.

From the other side of the fence, a parting of ways looks alluring. Dunlop, for example, at times offers as much as 30 months' pay along with a pension and retirement benefits, and an employee can pick up a tidy sum, invest it and yet land another job.

But things are not quite as simple. Dipankar Ghosh (name changed), 47, drew a monthly salary of Rs 5,000 as a sales manager of one of the bigger Calcutta companies till his boss called him and said that he had no future in the firm. So he opted for retirement, entitling him to get Rs 4,000 a month for 30 months, a pension of Rs 750 and another Rs 1.80 lakh eventually by way of provident fund and gratuity. But his children's education will claim around Rs 1,000 a month. Ghosh will have to vacate his company flat by November and pay at least Rs 2,000 a month as rent, apart from selling his car to repay a company loan. And jobs do not come easy in unemployment-stricken West Bengal. Says Ghosh bitterly: "What hurts is that I've given all my life to the company, and more than met my sales targets."

Clearly, such partings are not as painless as most managements make them out to be. Nor does a VRS always work. A Calcutta-based engineering company which considered a retirement scheme, surveyed some nine companies last year and quickly gave up its plan. The reason: an overwhelming 98 per cent of those who responded were high performers whom these firms wanted to retain.

Such findings are further substantiated by the fact that just three or four of Tribeni Tissues' 80 managers have opted for the speciality paper company's ongoing VRS. "It's not very effective," confesses N.G. Chowdhury, Tribeni's chairman and managing director. "People won't go voluntarily."

They will, but only if managements privately give ultimatums to undesirable staff members or offer fat severance benefits. The big boys can afford to dangle seductive bait, but medium-sized firms and the smaller fry cannot. Warns Gramophone Company's Chanda: "If you're a cash surplus company, a VRS makes a lot of sense. The problem is that a VRS is rarely adopted by a cash surplus company. The money for payments may have to be borrowed and interest costs mount."

Two ways out are to diversify or work seven days a week to make maximum use of the surplus manpower. Indeed, some are doing precisely this. How effective this strategy will be is not yet clear.

What is clear is that an overloaded bus cannot travel very far. Managements have been quick to realise this. The question in West Bengal is: has labour? The state's unions seem to disapprove of the chopping of employee rolls, as does the Government in its own way. Given this situation, can turbulence be far behind?

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
in Calcutta

At Tribeni Tissues, the voluntary retirement scheme clearly hasn't worked.

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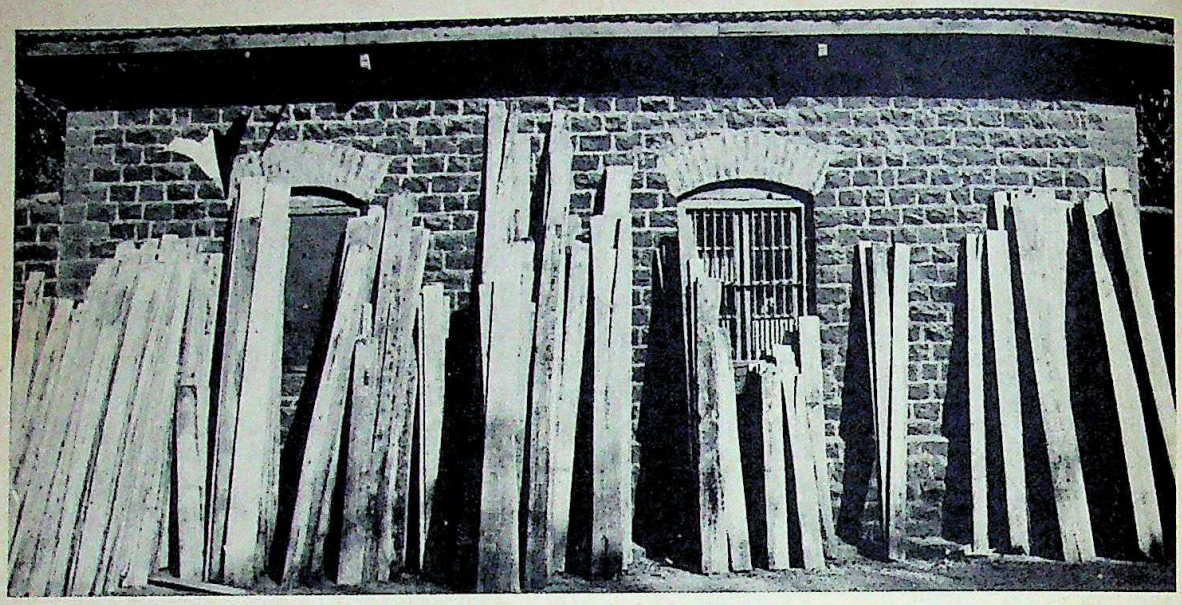
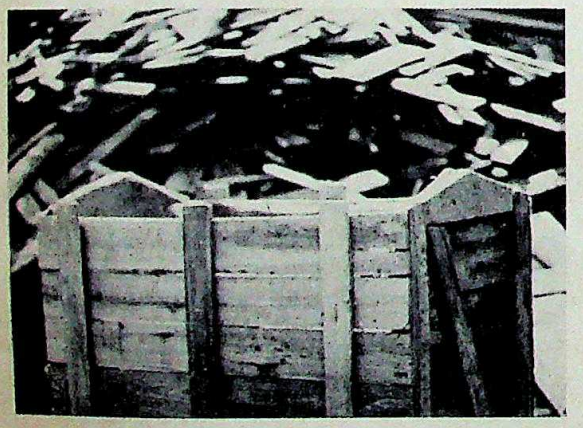
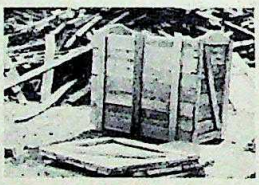


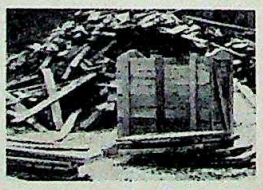
This wood in Pune is going to prove that deformity is not a disability.



Thank you Telco.



Medical help and assurance has pulled hundreds of leprosy patients out of their physical and mental suffering. At the Poona District Leprosy Committee we'd rather not see our patients return to begging in their wooden carts. We combine both the patients and the wood in a more noble cause: self reliance through productivity.



Through the years, hundreds of our cured patients have sheared and chopped logs of wood into sturdy wooden crates that are lovingly lined with water- resistant materials. Telco lovingly buy these from us to pack and ship their products. Worldwide. You can help too. Ask your conscience. Your donations are exempt from Income Tax.

Your conscience will want to help.

Poona District Leprosy Committee

Write to Dr. J.M. Mehta, Hon. President, for details.

Manisha, 2nd floor, Flat no. 35
2-A, Moledina Road, Pune-411 001 INDIA.

JAC

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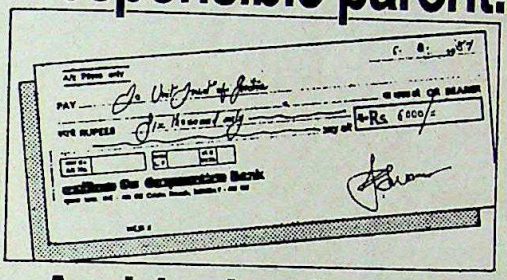
An innocent child...

A responsible parent...



An ideal scheme!

Unit Trust of India has an attractive scheme for securing your child's future – **'Children's Gift Growth Fund'.** As a responsible parent, all you do is, invest a small amount in your child's name.

As your child grows, the investment also grows over 12 times in 21 years! An assured dividend of 12.5% per year, plus, a bonus dividend every 5 years, ensures a big, useful sum on maturity!

Your child can encash this amount, at a time, when he needs it most.
For advanced studies, starting a business or for investing in a house!

- The gift can be given by any adult-parent, relative or friend to a child under 15. A special provision enables you to name another child, under 15 years, as an alternative beneficiary.
- The assured dividend of 12.5% is automatically reinvested in Units.
- Option of withdrawing from the scheme at the age of 18.
- A growth chart sent to you will indicate the number of Units held by the child at the end of every year!
- TAX BENEFITS: Under the Gift Tax Act, gifts made by a person upto Rs. 20,000/- in a year, are exempt from gift tax. Units under this scheme can form part or whole of such gifts every year.
- Income of an assessee from Units upto Rs. 10,000 (Rs. 3,000 additionally from Units and Rs. 7,000 from Units and certain other specified categories of investments) is exempt from income tax, under the Income Tax Act, 1961.

And that's Unit Trust's Children's Gift Growth Fund!

A scheme to secure your child's future

Amount to be invested at different ages to get Rs. 12,000 at the age of 21 years.

Age (Years)	Amount* (Rs.)	Age (Years)	Amount* (Rs.)	Age (Years)	Amount* (Rs.)
At birth	1,000	6	2,100	11	3,700
1	1,200	7	2,300	12	4,100
2	1,300	8	2,600	13	4,700
3	1,500	9	2,900	14	5,200
4	1,600	10	3,300	15	5,900
5	1,800				

** Amount to be invested rounded off to the nearest Rs. 100*

Under this scheme, Units are sold at par at Rs. 10/- per Unit, throughout the year.

Application forms are available from any office, Chief Representative or Agent of Unit Trust, and selected Hindustan Petroleum Petrol Pumps.

Please send me free C.G.G.F. Brochure
Name: _____
Address: _____

Mail coupon to Unit Trust at :
Bombay, Post Bag 11410, Tel: 256887/571964
Calcutta, Post Bag 60, Tel: 239391
Madras, Post Bag 5063, Tel: 27433/20938
New Delhi, Post Bag 5, Tel: 331 8638

UNIT TRUST OF INDIA

(A Public Sector Financial Institution)

APEX 87496

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AHMEDABAD

Blank Screens

City cinemas shutting down

TWO years ago, the marquees would twinkle with lights as crowds milled about at night. But the lights have dimmed on Ahmedabad's Ashram Road. A strange silence descends at night on what is perhaps the swankiest locality in Gujarat. The reason: three of the six cinema houses that adorned the city's hot-spot have closed down.

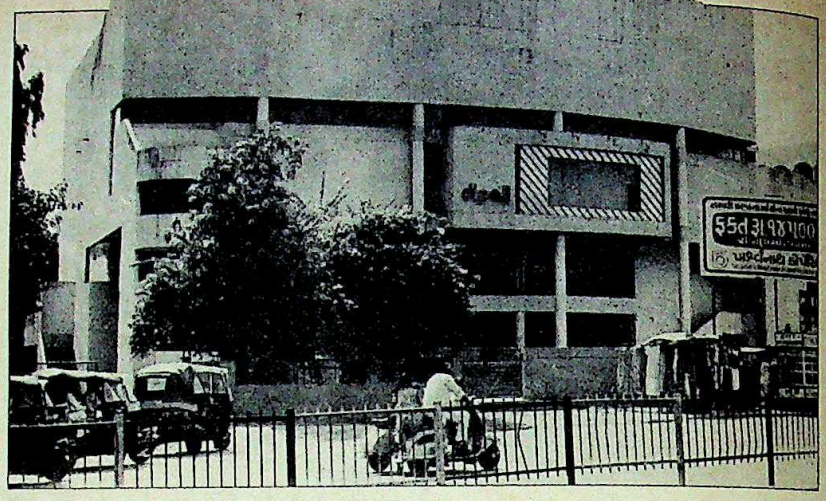
Ashram Road visibly highlights a phenomenon that is sweeping Ahmedabad. Eleven of the city's 59 cinema halls, including eight in the walled area, have downed their shutters. Six of them are being turned into shopping complexes.

Faced with dwindling queues at the ticket counters, theatre owners are increasingly finding it unprofitable to carry on. Instead, they are hawking their halls to builders and sitting pretty on the interest earned from the sales' proceeds. Says Indubhai Shah, 67, owner of a dozen theatres, six of them in Ahmedabad: "I sold Kalpana and Model, and kept the money in fixed deposits. The interest I get now is four times the net profit I made running them."

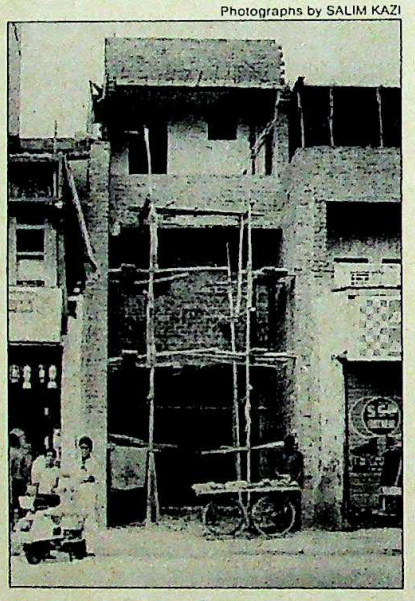
Indeed, most of Ahmedabad's cinema owners want to close shop. But with property prices having plummeted after communal riots intermittently swept the city over the last 30 months, there simply are no takers—as the building contractors who bought cinema halls have discovered to their dismay. So they build one floor and wait for someone to buy it, before going ahead with the next.

The position is particularly grim in the violence-dogged walled city, under curfew for three months in 1985. Not surprisingly, property prices have crashed here, and two closed theatres still wait for a buyer.

The wave of closures is the result of riots in the city, competition from video and television, and the hefty entertainment tax that the Government levies on the industry. One result of the riots is that fewer people visit the city daily from surrounding villages than before. This clearly has meant a loss of business for theatres. So has the textile industry's crisis. Few of the city's 30,000-odd jobless workers and their 1.5 million family members will pay money to go to the movies.



Photographs by SALIM KAZI



Ahmedabad's inoperative Dipali (above); and a shopping complex rising on a theatre site

The video boom too has meant an irretrievable loss of business to theatre owners. Explains M.M. Faruqui, 47, president of the Gujarat Cinema Exhibitors Association: "The cassette of a film newly released in Bombay or some Gulf country is available here within five days. Prints of new films are leaked even from film laboratories. By the time the film comes to Ahmedabad, it is stale." What is more, those who do not have video cassette players at home can go to a video parlour, paying just Rs 3 or Rs 4 as against up to Rs 7 to see a film in a regular theatre. And video parlours sometimes offer far more titillating fare.

Thirdly, television has cut into cinema queues. Five years ago, movie halls were packed on Sundays. A good chunk of the same audience now sits before the idiot box. As an exhibitor puts it bitterly: "In the morning you have *Ramayan* and something like, *Sunil Gavaskar Presents*, which stops cine-goers from viewing our morning shows. In the evening, Doordarshan shows a Hindi film which affects the evening and night shows."

The proverbial last straw on the theatre industry's back is, however, the Government's tax. On an average, entertainment tax accounts for 58 per cent of the ticket's price. On a Rs 7 ticket, the Government share is Rs 4.05, leaving Rs 2.95 to be shared by the hall owner and the distributor. And out of his share, the theatre proprietor has to pay electricity charges (Rs 68,000 in June for Prakash theatre), salaries and maintenance costs.

Cinema owners argue that the entertainment tax is way above all-India norms. While Karnataka raked in Rs 28 crore from over 1,200 theatres in 1985-86, Gujarat netted Rs 40 crore from 600 halls. So they built a case for lowering the tax, promising to cut ticket prices to bring in viewers, thereby ensuring that the total tax collection doesn't drop.

The Government granted some relief two years ago, but is now unmoved by the industry's plight. It contends that the state faces an acute drought and so needs revenue. Says Finance Minister Arvind Sanghvi: "We gave relief once, but every year a case cannot be made out for the exhibitors." He believes that theatre owners are selling their halls simply because they are lured by the profit from sales—something movie hall owners hotly contest.

The wrangling goes on, but going to the movies is now clearly part of the folklore of what's become a video town.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

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When you don't have to go thru' hell... You can tell...

It's Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables.

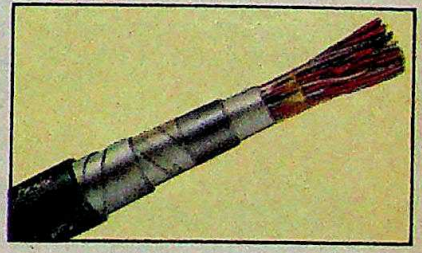
Business is booming. Everyone is on the "Hi-tech" trail. The race is on to link up with the world's best. Direct dialling to most of the advanced countries of the world makes contact so much easier. International calls aren't mind blowing anymore. The lines don't go dead. Calls don't get disrupted.

Is it the 9th wonder of the world? No. It's Finolex at work. Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables - made in technical collaboration with United Technologies Essex Group Inc., USA - are helping revolutionise telecommunications in India.

In most exchanges the very latest systems are being used to facilitate communications. These systems will function only with the latest in cables. To be on par with the world around us it is a must to have the right connections. Finolex Cables are therefore always specified.

In Finolex Jelly Filled Telephone Cables an exclusive insulation compound gives the cable a longer life. The jelly acts as an effective moisture barrier and resists seepage during handling or laying. Also, to prevent electrical interference from outside the cables are provided with special screening. Hence no interruptions no matter how bad the weather.

Finolex gets your message across without getting your links disconnected.



Finolex

Finolex Cables Limited

26/27, BOMBAY-PUNE ROAD, PIMPRI, PUNE 411 018 (INDIA)

Finolex gets people together

PRATIBHA-87-339

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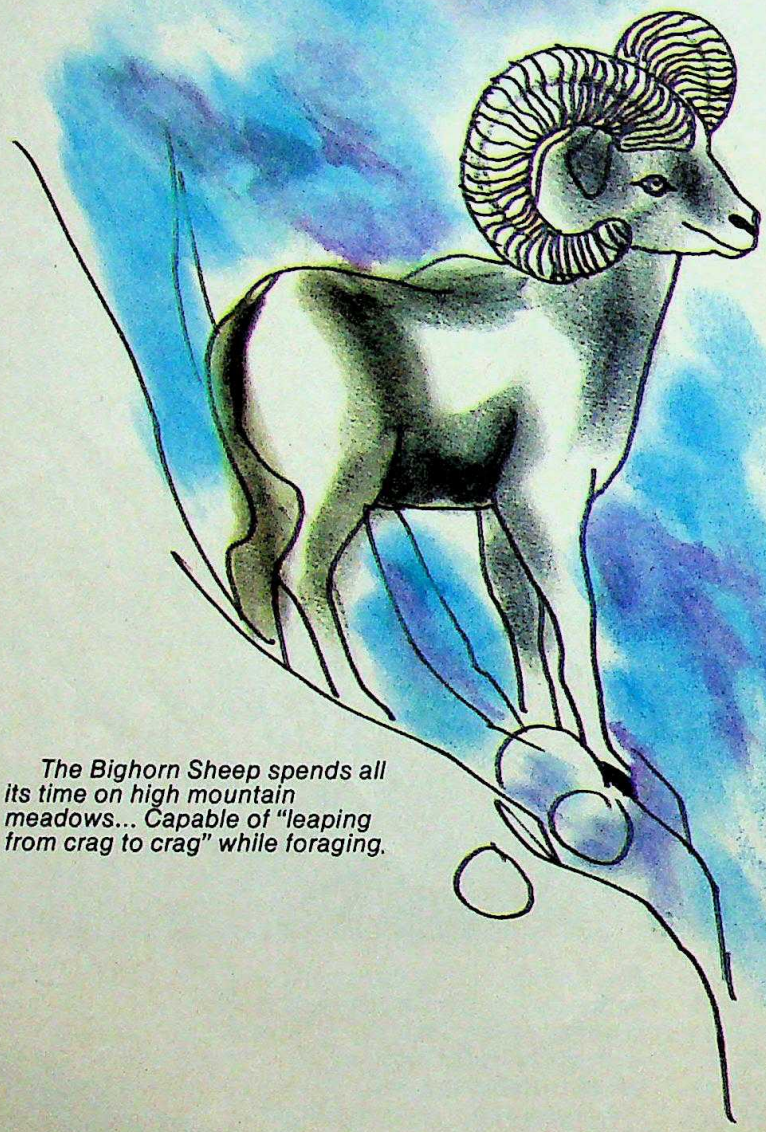
One of nature's most agile machines.



The Bighorn Sheep spends all its time on high mountain meadows... Capable of "leaping from crag to crag" while foraging.

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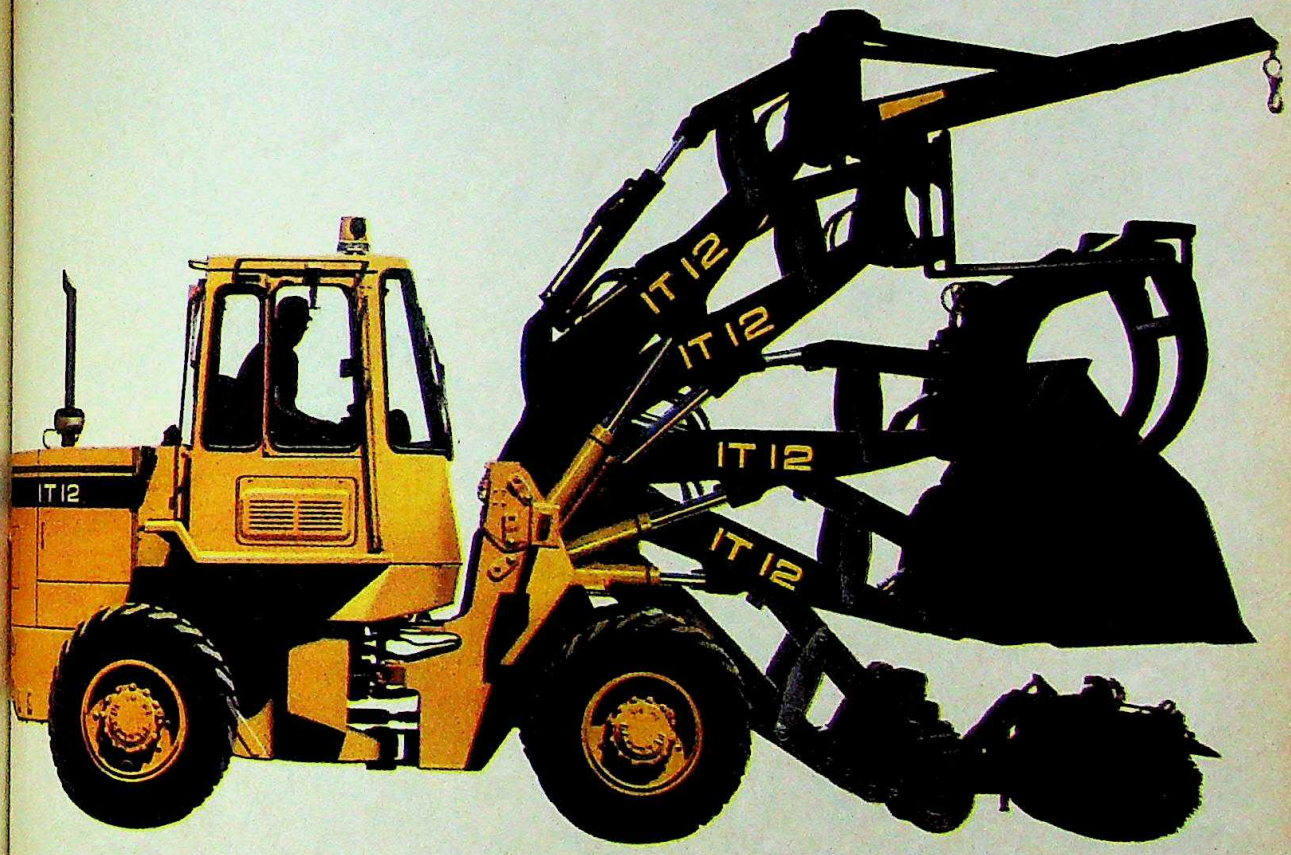
One of man's.



A highly versatile Loader from Hindustan Motors' line-up of advanced earth-moving equipment : made under licence from Caterpillar, the world's largest manufacturer in the field.

Hindustan Motors now offers the most advanced range of earthmoving equipment in the country : 773B and 777B Dumpers ; 966D and IT12 Loaders ; and the D6H Crawler Tractor. Each packed to the skin with sophisticated electronics and hydraulics and powered by efficient 'Cat' engines.

Take the IT12 for example. It's so up-to-date that its speed and direction can be changed 'on-the-go' without coming to a stop. It can be used for twenty different jobs : lifting, digging, stacking ... switching from one to the other in just 30 seconds.

This is the kind of technology on offer from Hindustan Motors today. Technology which helps 'core industries' work more efficiently, more productively.

And, while nature designed the agile bighorn millions of years ago, Hindustan Motors don't grudge her the lead. Because, when it comes to man-made machines, we know how it feels to be one of the best.

HINDUSTAN

Moving into now technology

Hindustan Motors Limited
Earthmoving Equipment Division
P.O. Melnallathur 602 004
Tiruvallur, Tamilnadu

Marketed & Serviced by :
GMM CO General Marketing & Manufacturing Co. Ltd. and TIL TIL Limited

Caterpillar, Cat and ⊞ are Trademarks of Caterpillar Inc. USA.

OBM 206 C

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"The answer is ye
And the shirt did

A heart-winning gesture!

A range of exclusive new designs,
in a smart new fit and style – shirts from Snowhite.

Shirts for those casual overtures

From **snowhite**

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NEW DELHI: 8-D, Connaught Place, Tel : 352762; South Extension, Part-I, Tel : 624009;
Arya Samaj Road, Karol Bagh, Tel : 569507. **SHIMLA:** 5, The Mall.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

BANKING

Self Service

Introducing 24-hour banking

ELECTRONIC banking in India is all set to usher in a new marvel: cash at the press of a button. Two major foreign banks—Citibank and Hongkong Bank—will introduce self-service banking with their recently-installed automatic teller machines (ATMs) in their Bombay branches. For the fortunate holders of the electronic teller cards (ETCs), banking time will be round-the-clock, seven days a week instead of the present four hours a day.

The new electronic gizmos, which are being assembled and marketed by Peico Electricals—earlier known as Philips—have caught the imagination of the banking industry. The oldest foreign banks in India—Grindlays and Standard Chartered—also plan to install the machines now. "Five or six public sector banks have also expressed interest in the ATMs," says Peico Marketing Director V. Ramamrutham. With Philips engaged in modifying the software to suit Indian conditions—displaying messages on the screen in languages other than English, for instance—when-you-like-it banking may soon be a reality throughout the country.

While Citibank plans to have four ATMs in Bombay and two in New Delhi, Hongkong Bank is putting up four in Calcutta, besides two each in Bombay and New Delhi. "They offer a lot of man-machine interface," says Ramamrutham. "After gaining experience, we will be able to provide the electronic machines with additional features to many banks," he adds.

The one-tonne machines, costing Rs 15 lakh each, although fairly sophisticated—they are linked to the bank's main computer system—are "user friendly" and easy to operate. A customer inserts his plastic ETC, no larger than a credit card, in the machine, keys in his personal identity number (PIN)—known only to himself—and, with the machine guiding him, can conduct a range of operations that include withdrawing money, depositing cash or cheques and asking for cheque books and updated information on his account. A customer should be able to complete his transaction in less than a minute.

Even if he loses his card, he needn't worry. The ATM is programmed to swallow the ETC if its secret PIN is keyed in incorrectly more than four times.

Yet, the banks anticipate initial problems with user-acceptance: customers may prefer an inefficient and unfriendly cashier to the anxiety of dealing with a machine. Though now a widespread practice abroad, ATMs faced this problem when first introduced in Britain in the '60s and later in the US in the '70s.

To assist customers in India to familiarise themselves, the banks plan to post staff to help out. "Machines tend to intimidate people, but we expect the ATMs' popularity to rise slowly as people realise their ultimate simplicity," says Jerry Rao, Citibank's country business manager. Adds Vikram Venkataraman, ATM coordinator at Hongkong Bank: "To begin with, we expect the majority of the users to be young executives and professionals already comfortable with electronic machines."

Ultimately, the main selling point will be the convenience of 24-hour banking. "More than 90 per cent of the customers visit a bank to utilise the same basic services that the ATM offers," says Steven Pinto, Citibank's director for marketing and services. At a time, the machine can store about Rs 8 lakh, though the amount varies depending on denomination of notes stored. Initially, both banks plan to limit daily withdrawals—Hongkong Bank will stop at Rs 3,000 while Citibank has yet to decide on a figure.

Citibank also plans to levy a nominal fee on ATM users, though this will be waived for larger deposits. Hongkong Bank has already decided to introduce the machines in all its 21 branches in India, and both public sector and foreign banks will be keenly watching customer response. "The biggest problem is the cost of the machine," says a foreign bank official. "At Rs 15 lakh, it will not pay for itself from the new business it attracts."

Models of the new automatic teller machines: user friendly

Restricted by Reserve Bank of India regulations, ATMs cannot be installed at a public place outside a bank branch as is common in the West. The RBI will not permit ATMs at airports or shopping complexes, as these will be seen as bank branches requiring special permission. The lack of a telecommunications infrastructure, which allows the ATMs to be linked to their banks computer, also restricts their use.

But banking in India is growing rapidly and the ATMs may help the banks spread their nets even wider. Unlike the hard-pressed cashier behind a glass-sheet, the machine is programmed to greet the customer by name at all hours. Its popularity will depend a great deal on how many customers will be attracted to the convenience of round-the-clock banking.

—M. RAHMAN

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ADVERTISING

New Pitch

Video ads catch on

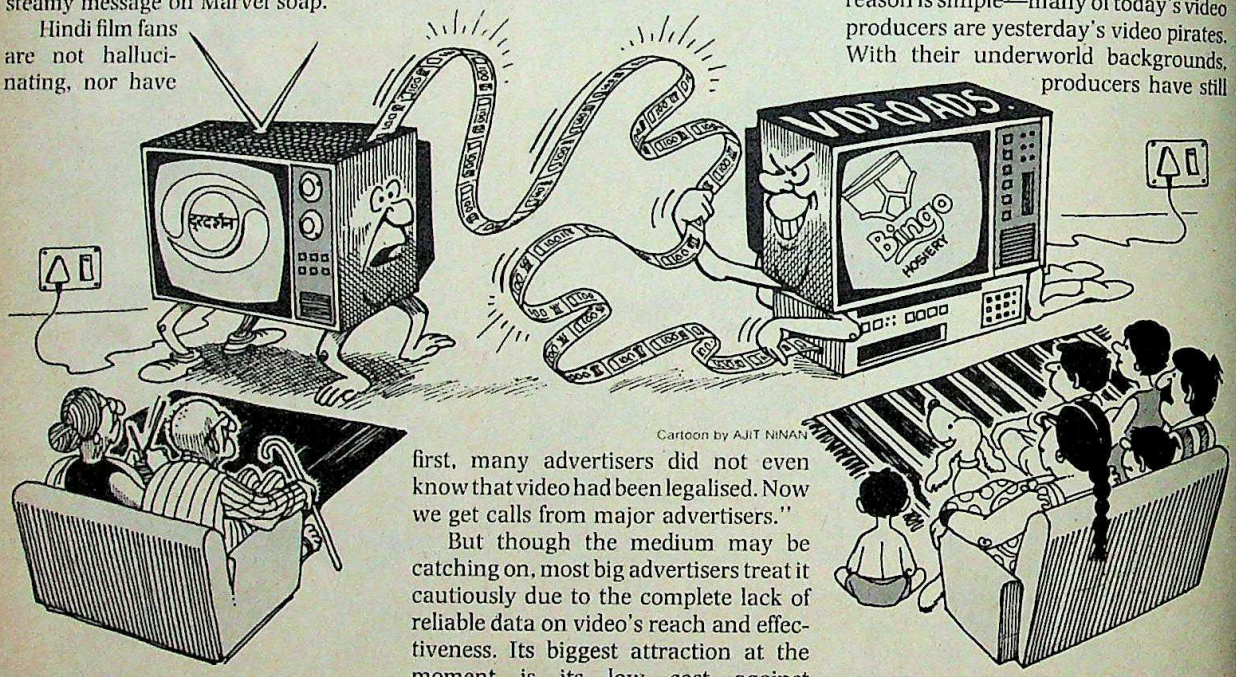
THE medium may be new, but the message can acquire a bewildering novelty. In the Hindi film *Loha*, Karan Kapoor knocks at a hotel room door, and before we know what's what, he is cavorting with langorous models in the familiar Bombay Dyeing commercial. And as Madhavi bathes in a jungle stream in *Loha*, lo and behold—instead of seeing the villain arrive, we get a steamy message on Marvel soap.

Hindi film fans are not hallucinating, nor have the producers gone crazy. The merchandise has quietly slipped in between cinematic situations, thanks to the imaginative efforts of agencies exploiting a new kind of advertising medium—video films.

Ever since October last year, when Hindi film moghuls finally realised the futility of fighting video pirates and set up their own video company, there has been a steady increase in the list of advertisers queuing up for a spot on the video tape. The list reflects an impressive variety—from Hindustan Lever and GTC to Vicco Vajradanti and Friendship Sari Shop. Says Amol Bose, chief of Amol Bose Advertising: "It's a growing medium with fantastic possibilities; if Doordarshan doesn't watch out, it is going to be in trouble."

Advertising on video, became a real possibility for the vast Indian market only when videos went legal last October. Besides Star Video, set up by Hindi film producers, there are several other companies meeting the demand for video films, including Nari Hira's Hiba Films, Gold, Magnum, Bambino, and the official NFDC label retailing foreign films.

"In the beginning, advertisers needed a lot of convincing about this new medium. But now we have gone past the introductory stage," says Ratnakar Rai, who set up Prime Time, the first company to promote ads on videos. Adds Vineet Handa of Multi Channel: "It was with the success of three films—*Jalwa*, *Loha* and *Jiva*—on video that the medium really took off. At first, many advertisers did not even know that video had been legalised. Now we get calls from major advertisers."



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

But though the medium may be catching on, most big advertisers treat it cautiously due to the complete lack of reliable data on video's reach and effectiveness. Its biggest attraction at the moment is its low cost—against Rs 70,000 for a 10-second commercial during prime time on Doordarshan, an ad in a video film can cost as little as Rs 10,000 for 20 seconds.

According to an analysis by Hi-Response, the video advertising concessionaire set up by Nari Hira, the cost of advertising for a thousand viewers on one of his video films is just Re 1, against Rs 15 for Doordarshan. But then, Hi-Response bases its estimates on its own assessment of the video market. With 1.2 million video recorders in the country, 17,000 video libraries and 15,000 video parlours, it sees the total video viewership at 16 million. "Advertisers may not be rushing in because of the lack of authoritative data, but Doordarshan is helping us with its atrocious rates," says Sam Mall, Hiba Films' advertising manager. "Eventually, however, advertising on video films will also be sold on the basis of the star cast."

Two recent films—*Satyamev Jayate* and *Shahenshah*—have demonstrated that top stars may mean both higher sales and better advertising for video films. "The video ads business is beginning to take off. With the market expanding and with more and more official releases coming up, there are bound to be more systematic studies of the reach of the medium," says Sam Balsara, head of Mudra.

But it may take some time for video producers to realise the importance of providing authentic market data to woo major advertisers in a big way. The reason is simple—many of today's video producers are yesterday's video pirates. With their underworld backgrounds, producers have still to pick up really professional business practices.

Zapping of ads by irritated viewers is another major problem. Uniquely, video is one medium where the viewer can skip the ad entirely by simply pressing the fast forward button. Initially agencies clubbed ads together, but now most new video films have only solus ads, ensuring shorter interruptions.

Whatever the viewer's response, legitimate video has come as a godsend to those advertisers whose products were either banned or relegated to late hours on Doordarshan. Cigarettes, hair dyes, underwear, sanitary napkins, condoms, can all be seen on the small screen, thanks to video. Video will be an attractive alternative for Doordarshan's untouchables, and for several others too.

—M. RAHMAN

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Meet this South Indian

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Yes, she is one — at heart. Like all good South Indians, she too relishes her cup of pure coffee. Especially during those moments when she needs to be stimulated into action.

For, pure coffee — black or white, light or strong — not only satisfies, it also stimulates. Whether at home or abroad, it gets all Indians going!

PURE COFFEE

It gets you going!

COFFEE BOARD

Coffee Board
Bangalore

Sista's-1462/87

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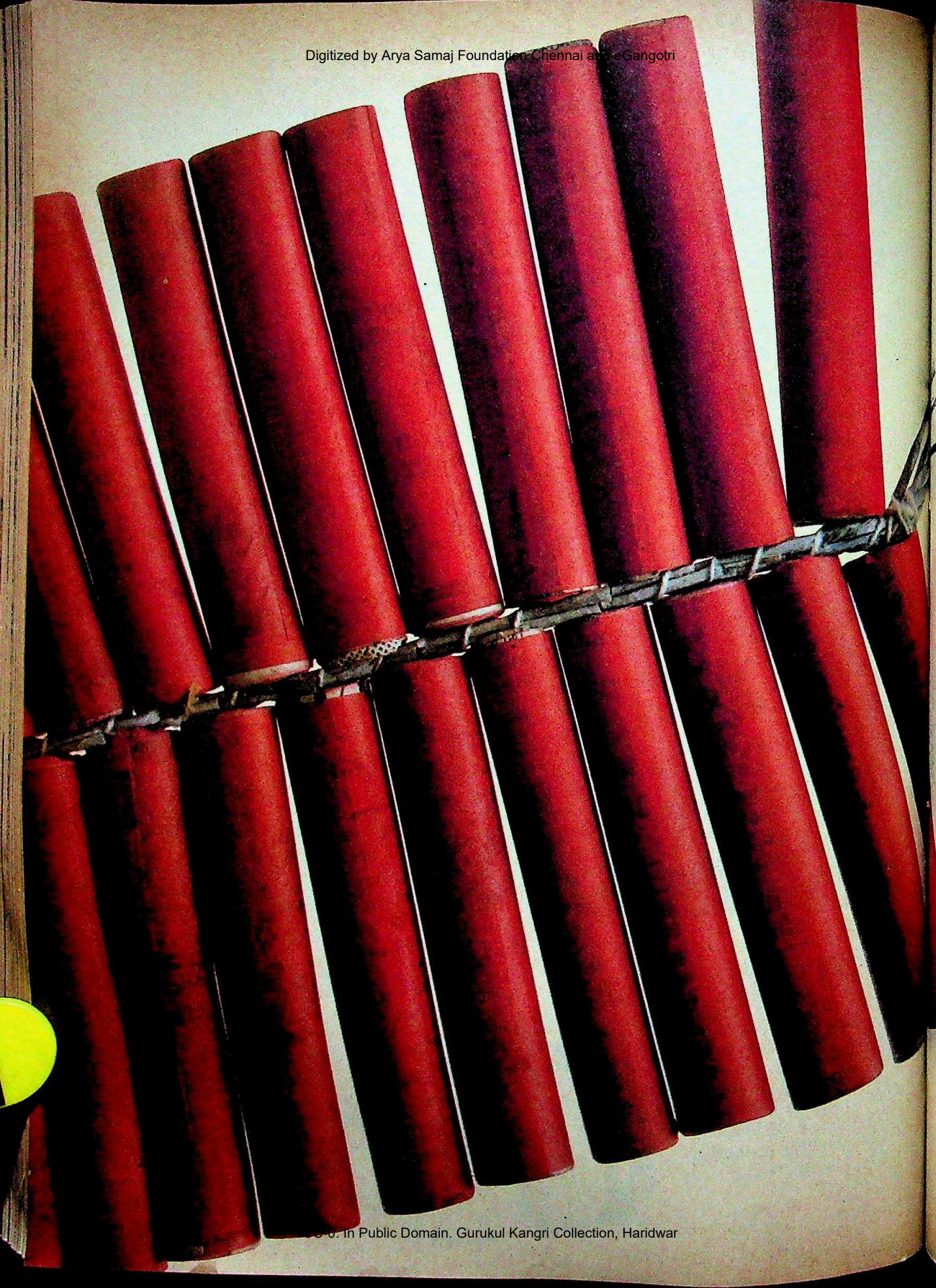

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

A spark from the SCL Unicorn computer can set your child's mind on fire.

Most children are in the dark about a lot of things.

So they constantly shoot questions at you:

How does light travel?

What is the capital of Tonga?

How do chemicals react?

To avoid injury from these questions, you've evolved stock answers.

You tell him: 'Read your textbooks properly. You'll find the answers there.'

Or you give him a very theoretical answer which you yourself have at best taken for granted.

Now computers can help you answer these, and many other questions. Right in front of your child's unbelieving eyes.

A lively demonstration on the Unicorn computer helps your child grasp a lot of unexplained facts.

And once his imagination catches fire, he goes on to discover greater, more complex things.

At SCL, we did a lot of homework before evolving many such educational programmes.

To help children of all age groups learn better and faster.

Easy to operate, all these programmes can be used on SCL Unicorn computers, now extensively used in many schools under the Government of India's Computer Literacy and School Studies' (CLASS) programme.

'User Guides' with the SCL Unicorn make working on it simple. Even for children.

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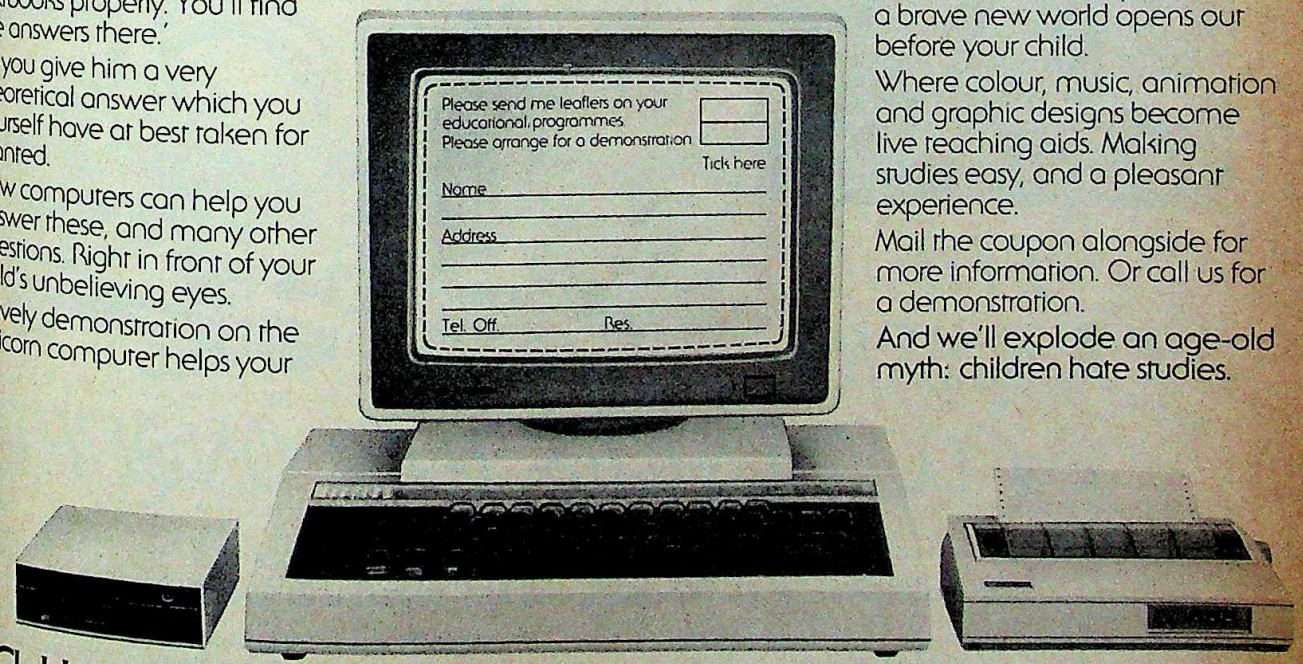

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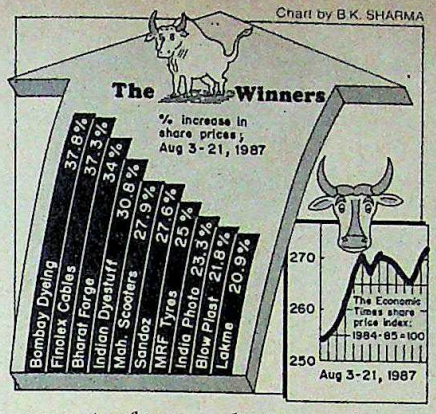
THE MARKETS

Cashing In

EXCITEMENT has finally returned to the stock-markets, and investors—sensing at last that money can be made once again—are flocking back eagerly into the trading ring. The stock-market index quickly climbed to successive new peaks. And even the primary capital market has revived, helped by the fact that new issues are being floated by several well-known companies (Garden Silk Mills, Cable Corporation of India, Gujarat Heavy Chemicals and Shriram Honda).

Perhaps because of the continuing ban on forward trading, investors made a bee-line for cash scrips which are normally not fancied. So while several market leaders languished, shares like Bombay Dyeing, Finolex Cables and KSB Pumps did very well for themselves. The late revival of the monsoons also helped add some cheer.

Nevertheless there were several clouds on the horizon. The drought has almost certainly written trouble into the



accounts of tractor, fertiliser and pesticide companies, and perhaps other industries too (like textiles), as all of them will face a slump in demand. Fertiliser shares did poorly last fortnight for an additional reason: there were reports that the pricing system might be changed in an effort to reduce the fertiliser subsidy. As a result, both SPIC and GSFC lost ground. With the ruling out of a steel price hike TISCO prices dropped sharply from Rs 810 to Rs 700.

Meanwhile with a new drug price policy in the works, several pharmaceutical companies did very well in the trading ring: Ranbaxy, Sandoz and several others notched up handsome gains. Cement companies did well too, following a boost in open market prices, and ACC climbed up the charts. Elsewhere on the industrial front, light commercial vehicles seem to be pulling out of their prolonged slump, and several companies (like Ceat Tyres) reported encouraging results. The negative factors may also have been neutralised by the fact that the Unit Trust continued to be a buyer, and there was at some stages of trading a shortage of good scrips.

All this notwithstanding, the cheer in the trading ring will vanish as the effects of the drought makes itself felt. Government spending on non-drought programmes will be squeezed, affecting overall demand, prices will rise, and several industries will face a slump in demand. Industrial growth (buoyant earlier this year) will almost inevitably nosedive as growth in GNP slows down dramatically. And the economy will remain depressed at least another year.

No stock-market can remain cheerful for long when faced with such a scenario. But the mood last fortnight, seemed to suggest that investors wanted to make hay while the sun shone.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 21.8.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	37.00	28.00	36.00	nil
Associated Cement	241.50	138.00	190.00	26.00 +
Atlas Copco	152.00	60.00	67.00	11.00 –
Associated Bearings	1410.00	500.00	1205.00	30.00 +
Bajaj Auto	5600.00	3950.00	5475.00	400.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	172.50	200.00	10.00 –
Bata India	160.00	64.00	74.50	3.00 –
Bayer	785.00	375.00	390.00	5.00 –
Bharat Forge	136.00	63.00	134.00	19.00 +
Birla Jute	58.00	44.50	47.00	3.50 –
Blow Plast	178.00	92.50	167.50	35.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	127.50	40.50	127.50	32.50 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	101.00	123.00	4.00 –
Brooke Bond	105.50	77.00	103.00	7.00 +
Ceat Tyres	71.00	45.00	61.00	9.00 –
Century Enka	1175.00	815.00	1120.00	137.50 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	85.50	5.50 –
Cinergia	75.00	53.00	68.00	5.50 –
Colgate	415.00	215.00	235.00	6.25 +
DCM	47.00	23.00	31.00	5.50 –
Dunlop	79.50	71.25	77.00	1.00 –
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	51.00	nil *
Escorts	84.00	39.25	40.00	0.50 –
Finolex Cables	377.50	114.00	377.50	72.50 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	163.50	3.50 –
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	25.50	nil
G.E. Shipping	33.50	16.00	33.50	4.25 +
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	90.00	97.00	5.00 –
Graesim Ind.	118.00	80.00	102.00	16.00 –
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	119.00	13.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	245.00	5.00 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	82.00	85.00	7.00 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	19.60	21.60	1.50 –
Hind. Derr	407.50	202.50	225.00	60.00 –
ITC	64.75	45.00	50.00	1.50 –
Indian Organic	78.00	38.00	39.00	2.50 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	60.00	4.50 –
Indrol	510.00	160.00	277.50	47.50 +
Ingersoll-Rand	360.00	265.00	345.00	12.50 +
ITC	78.00	40.00	51.00	nil
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	57.00	2.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	250.00	15.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	55.00	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	412.50	220.00	397.50	15.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	90.50	12.50 +
Lipton	79.50	57.00	71.00	2.00 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	13.00	16.00	0.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	50.00	1.00 –
McDowell	105.00	41.50	105.00	10.00 +
Motor Industries	595.00	317.50	575.00	45.00 +
Mukand Iron	89.50	62.00	82.00	3.00 +
National Organic	577.50	382.50	460.00	42.50 +
Nirlon	26.00	7.25	10.00	1.50 +
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	29.50	35.00	3.50 –
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	40.00	1.00 –
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	210.00	20.00 +
Ponds	405.00	222.50	375.00	35.00 +
Premier Auto	30.00	17.00	29.00	3.00 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	115.00	21.00 +
Raymond	109.00	48.00	102.00	3.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	225.50	143.00	220.00	15.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	110.00	120.50	3.50 –
Richardson Hind.	350.00	210.00	280.00	27.50 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	33.75	7.25 +
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	92.50	17.50 +
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	94.00	2.00 –
SPIC	53.50	36.00	37.50	0.50 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	607.50	700.00	65.00 –
Telco	665.00	350.00	450.00	nil
Wimco	56.50	30.00	31.50	1.50 –

* ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.3531	9.2539
Austria	Schilling	100	102.9215	101.8221
Bahrain	Dinar	1	35.3280	35.2128
Bangladesh	Taka	100	44.3233	44.2661
Canada	Dollar	1	9.9187	9.8167
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8763	1.8564
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3700	9.3100
France	Franc	1	2.1929	2.1381
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6809	1.6630
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0810	0.0800
Iran	Rial	100	18.2400	18.2100
Italy	Lira	100	0.9800	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	9.3500	9.1000
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8000	0.7800
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.72	46.68
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1990	5.1435
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0000	0.9800
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6301	0.6000
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.4153	6.3486
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7830	0.7600
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.2428	6.1766
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1040	0.0999
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4600	0.4490
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0623	2.0402
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.7366	8.6443
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2000	0.1900
Thailand	Baht	100	49.4000	47.9000
UK	Pound	1	21.3225	21.1925
USA	Dollar	1	13.1225	12.9925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.6230	3.5900
USSR	Rouble	1	20.8100	20.7300
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.3313	7.1479

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 24.8.87.

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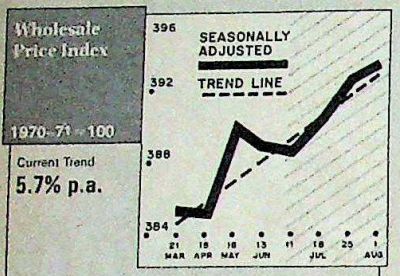
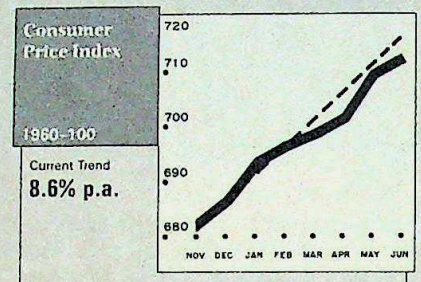
THE trend inflation rate, measured by the wholesale price index, continues to creep up. The sharp increase in the latest fortnight reflects expectations of a poor harvest. The rise since June in share prices and gold prices, has also been above the inflation rate, providing some consolation for investors. The export sector looks particularly rosy.

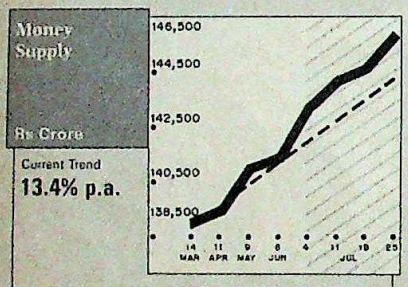
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.



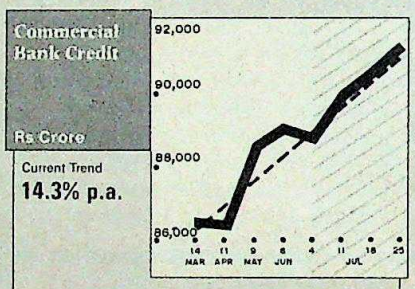
Wholesale prices have spurted with the last two weeks witnessing a rise equivalent to 20 per cent annually. The drought is beginning to bite.



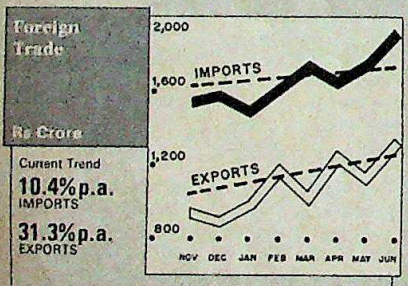
Consumer prices slowed their climb in June, during which month the rise was at an annual equivalent of 5 per cent.



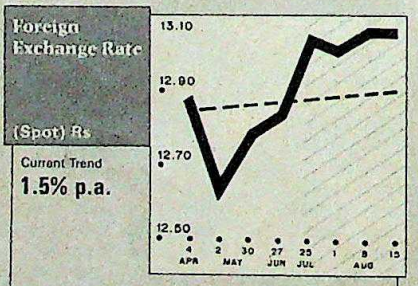
Money supply remains under control so far, but with a step-up in government expenditure on drought relief, this situation could change.



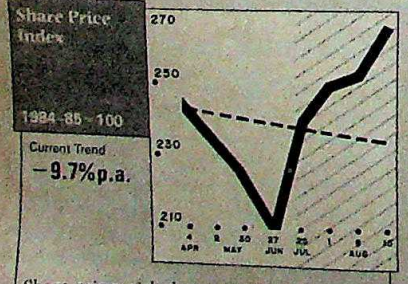
Liquidity for the commercial sector improved during July, with a sudden spurt in bank credit.



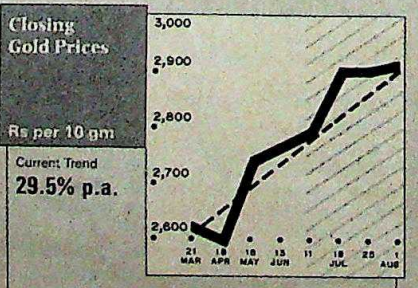
Imports went up fairly sharply in June, but exports picked up equally well, and the trade outlook is bright.



The rupee remains fairly stable against the US dollar, with, if anything a slight devaluation since early May.



Share prices picked up over the last fortnight continuing the revival in the stock-market that started in early June.



Gold prices moved up steadily in the second half of July, after the spurt in May failed to be sustained in June.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items between July, 1-15, 1987

	% Growth
Hides Raw	23.58
Oranges	11.79
Turmeric	10.94
Rape & Mustard Seed	9.30
Mustard Oilcake	7.44
Tapioca	7.13
Maize	6.49
Linseed	6.29
Bajra	5.91
Tyres	5.26
Linseed Oil	5.22
Moong	5.20
Mustard Oil	4.90
Bananas	4.88
Tubes	4.63
Iron Ore	4.37
Masoor	4.29
Milk	4.10
Gingelly Seed	4.03
Arhar	3.24
Rubber	3.05
Transformers	2.55
Cotton Seed	2.08
Meat	1.83
Groundnut Oilcake	1.78
Pet Crude & Natural Gas	1.63
Jowar	1.40
Cotton Yarn	1.39
Aviation Spirit	1.39
Electricity	1.24
Coconut Oil	1.15
Mining Machinery	1.12
Hides Tanned & Leather Belting	1.04
Betel-Nuts	.98
Cotton Raw	.9
Machine Tools	.88
Coir Yarn	.87
Gingelly Oil	.87
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	.86
Plywood	.81
Tractors	.8
Silk Raw	.77
Zinc	.76
Handloom & Powerloom Products	.74
Barley	.71
Lubricating Oil	.7

Of the 139 series considered, 93 of them with a total weight of 53.951 had a positive growth and 46 of them with a total weight of 32.67 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal Thousand Tonnes, July	12260	11541
Saleable Steel Thousand Tonnes, July	632.3	600
Cement Thousand Tonnes, July	3000	2904
Petroleum Crude Thousand Tonnes, July	2571	2532
Petroleum Refinery Products Thousand Tonnes, July	4290	3760

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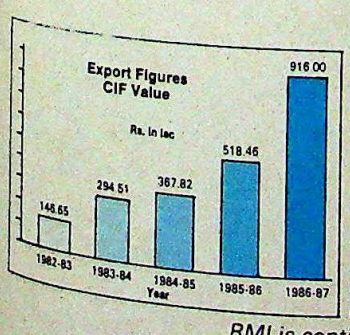

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What's more, RMI is the first Indian company to set up its own factory abroad—in Uganda. And even earn foreign exchange through technical know-how provided to others. Feats no other Indian bicycle manufacturer can match.

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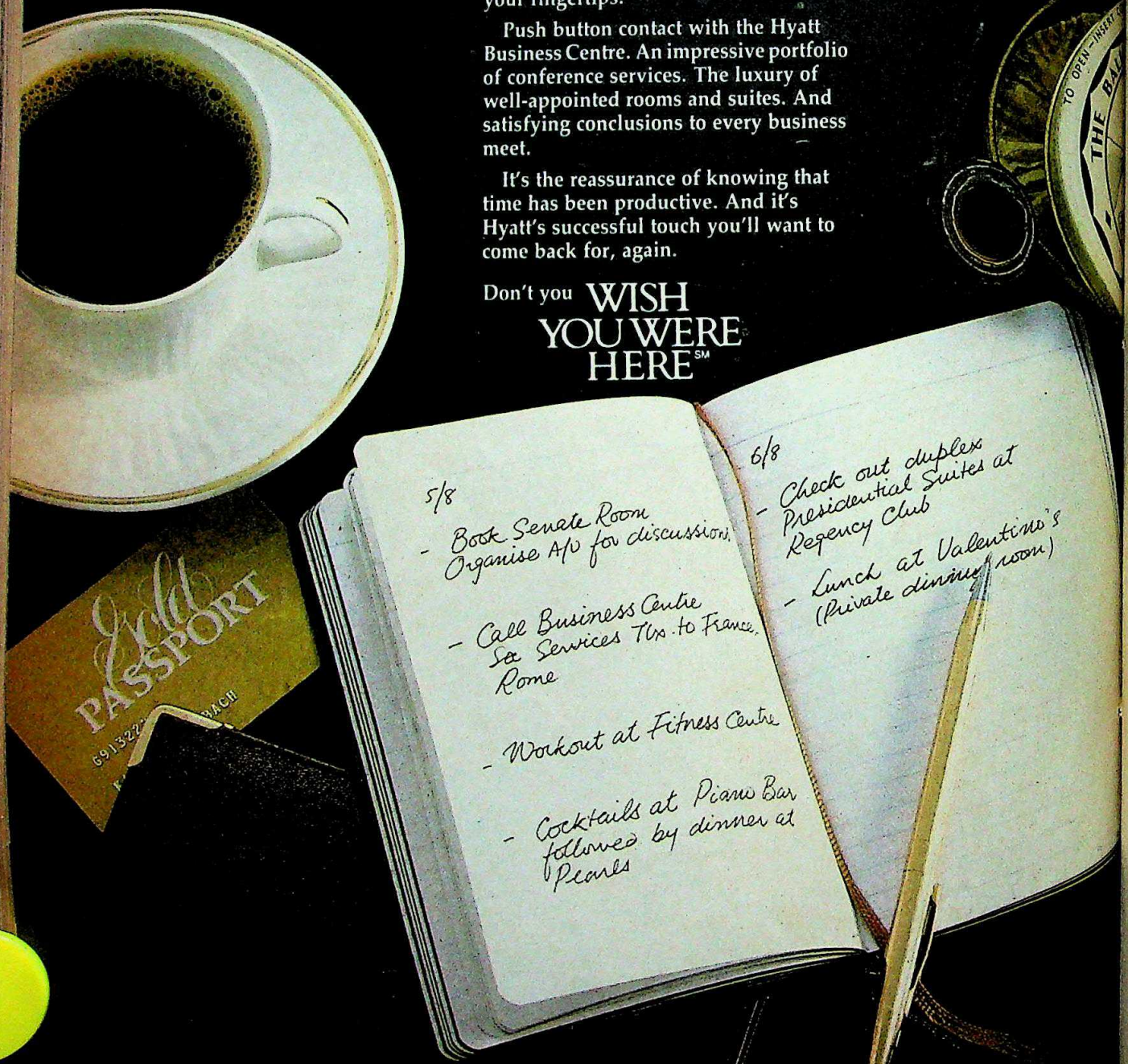

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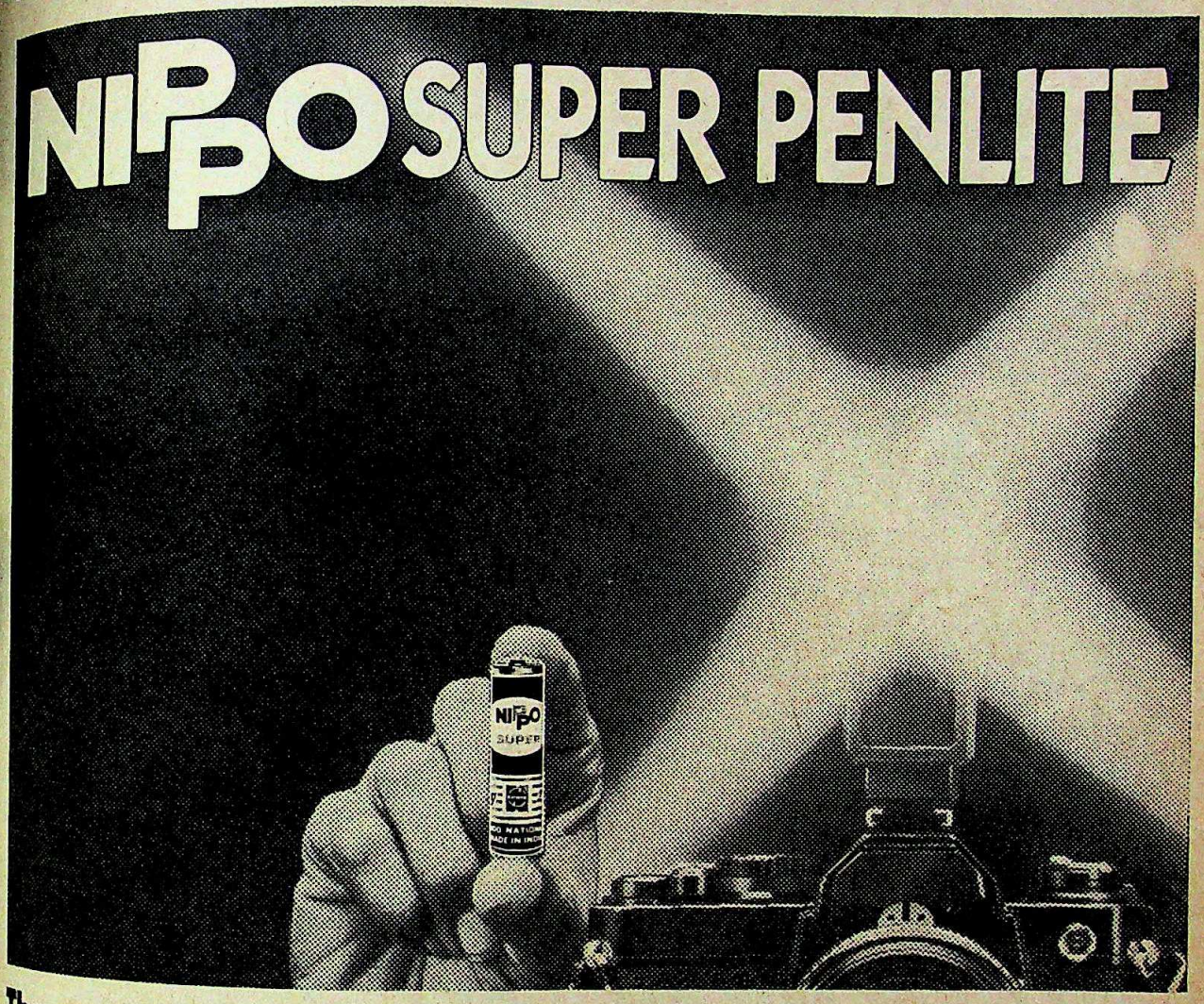

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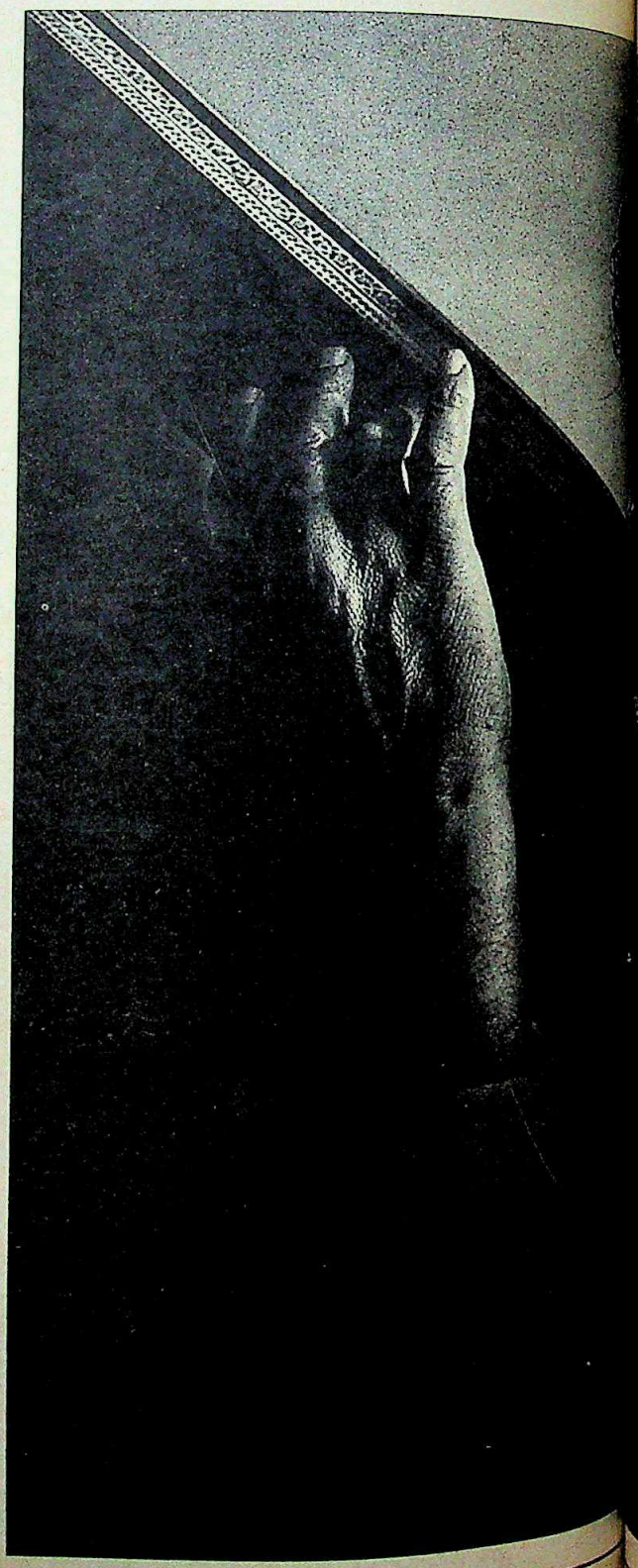
BHIM SEN JOSHI

THE MASTER'S VOICE

The only living doyen of the *Kirana Gharana*, Bhim Sen Joshi, 66, has given a new depth and dimension to the very horizons of Indian classical music. Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR met this classical vocalist in the continuing series on the great masters of Indian art and music.



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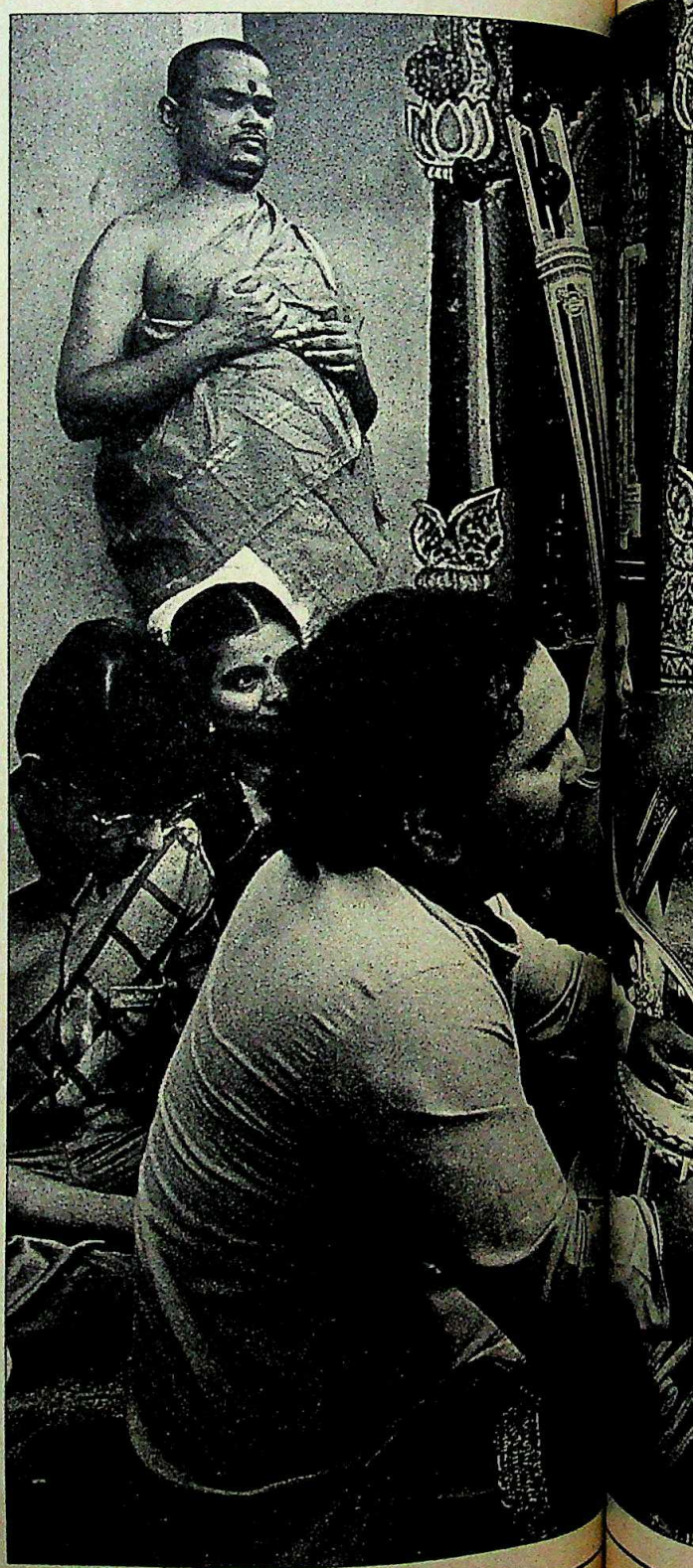
HIS is a strange face. Mundane, almost expressionless, and serene to the point of irritation as he goes about his routine chores, jesting with his family, or taking long drives along tortuous mountain roads in his 20-year-old Mercedes or his Model '48 Pontiac. At 66, Bhim Sen Joshi is the quintessential south Indian Vaishnav grandfather, pottering about the house in a kurta and lungi. He lives in benevolent contentment within the apex of a family that still fusses around him in reverential solicitude, as if his fame was acquired but yesterday and must be jealously guarded around the clock.

But within the core of this work-a-day serenity, lies a bubbling lava of molten creativity and artistry—a veritable sunburst of musical fire whose heat has irradiated the very horizons of Indian classical music. During ordinary conversation, Joshi's voice has a gravelly edge, as if he has been chewing on sandpaper instead of the *supari* and tobacco he so relishes. But in song, in the classical *khayaal*, in the Kannada and Marathi bhajans, his voice has the depth of yet undiscovered oceans, the mystery of mountain storms. It is his rendition of these that has made him the only living doyen of the *Kirana Gharana*—a tradition of vocal shastriya sangeet established by the late Ustad Abdul Karim Khan.

The change in his physiognomy is electrifying as he metamorphoses from householder to artiste. He is in his practice room in his modestly appointed bungalow in Pune. His daughter, Shubadha, is strumming on the tanpura. His son, Jayanta, sitting across the room, stares at his father as if transfixed for the moment. Outside, a brisk breeze has swept a pre-monsoon drizzle into the garden. Joshi's eyes are glazed. His face is contorted in concentration in search for that strange inner inspiration that all artistes like to talk about but fail so miserably to describe in words. The deep folds in his neck now form a crater as he sucks in a deep breath that expands his chest to what seems twice its size. His right hand starts moving, the fingers as delicate as a surgeon's, making patterns around his lap. Lines appear on his face: deep, mysterious furrows. It is as if some muse has carved musical notes on him.

You can see him singing before you actually hear him. It is a



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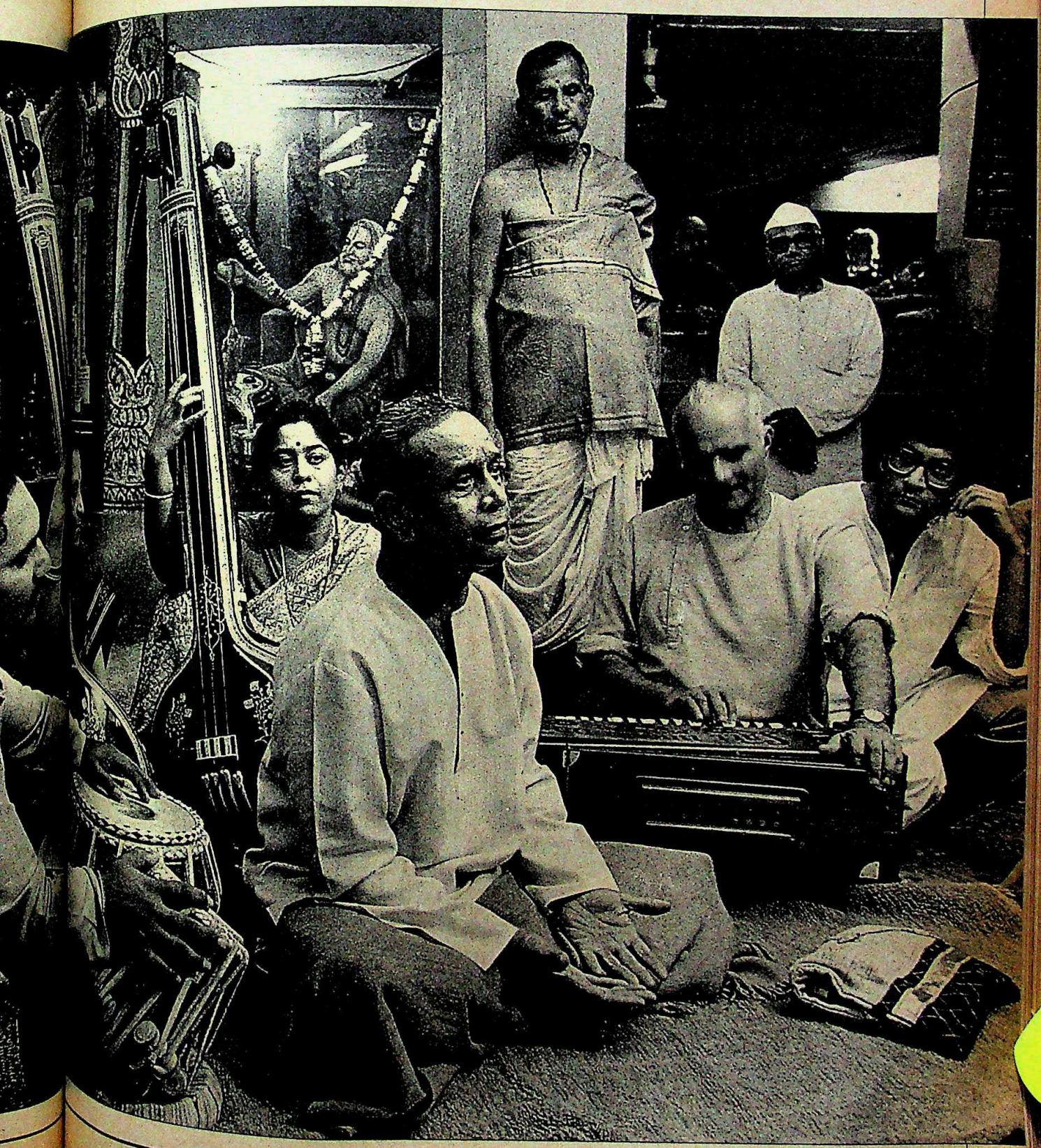

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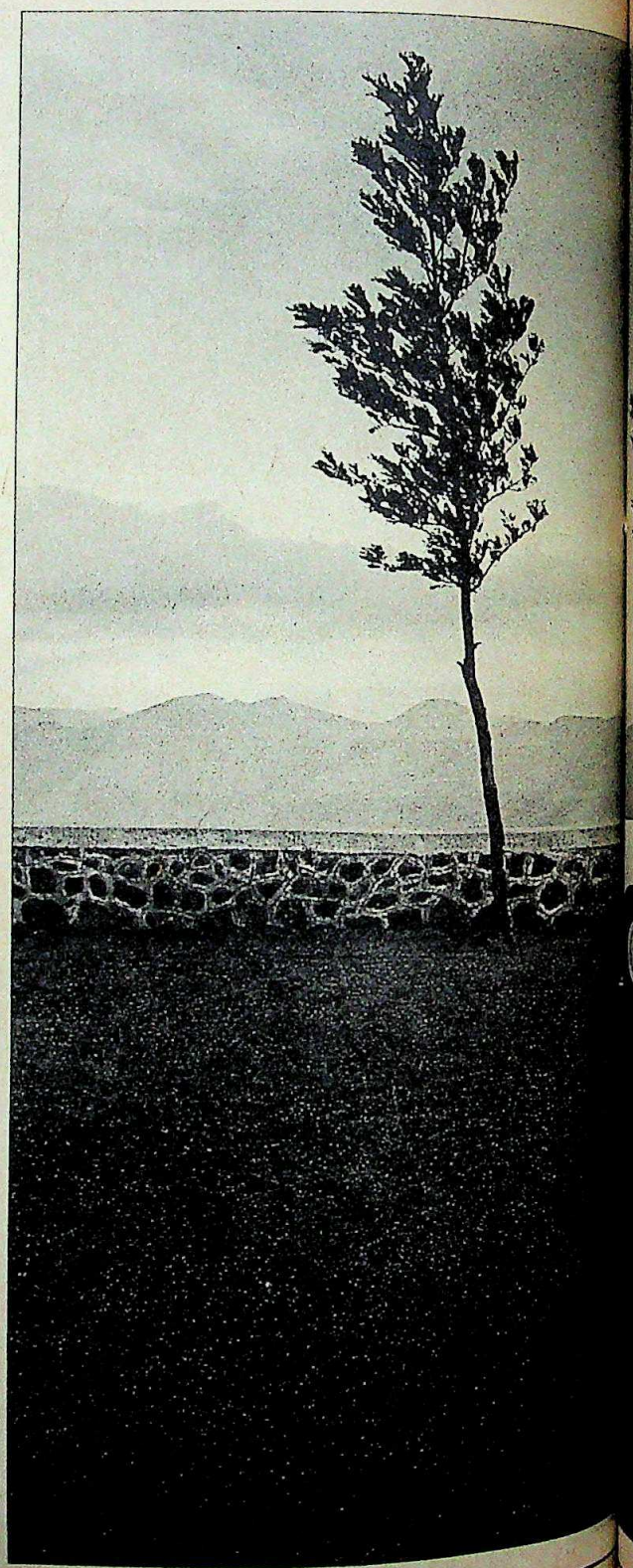
Kannada bhajan. A lament, whose refrain, *Deva deva sad guru deva*, seems to emanate from his entire body. His eyes, lips, hands, fingers, torso are one large, swaying mountain of music. Nearly an hour later, Joshi wrenches himself away from his music. The serene *grihasthi* (householder) has been reincarnated once again from the bosom of the artiste. To his admirers, he says: "Sangeet must appeal. It cannot be dry. And in order to have appeal, it must have emotion. I think what you sensed was the emotion. Yes, the body does become an instrument. And each instrumentalist is a singer. The song is everywhere. It is in the heart. It is in the head. People use different instruments to sing what is in their minds. My instrument just happens to be my throat."

NOT for nothing did Joshi's parents name him Bhim—after the intrepid and adventurous character from the Mahabharata. Since he was three years old, he was utterly uncontrollable, running after shehnai players and marriage bands, listening to their music and even spending days on the road with them. His father, a headmaster in Bijapur district (the Joshis are originally a Kannada-speaking family, though they settled in Maharashtra and adopted the language), would pin young Bhim's name and address to his shirt so that he could be brought home by some charitable person.

One of the few phrases Joshi will reluctantly utter about himself is: "I have always had a dashing mentality. Music is an adventure. It is like diving into the unknown without the fear of being swept away. I like adventure." He proved the truth of these words when he was but a strapping lad. On impulse one day, "just for the heck of it", he says, he jumped into the swollen Ghataprapha river in Karnataka. He could not swim. He nearly drowned. But he somehow managed to recover and wade ashore. "But you know," he recalled, "the strange thing is that even while I thought I was drowning, there was never any fear in me. I suppose I've always been abnormal. You just have to keep swimming. It is like *riaz* (practice). Later in life, there were times when I saw nothing in the future for myself. Not even a concert ar-



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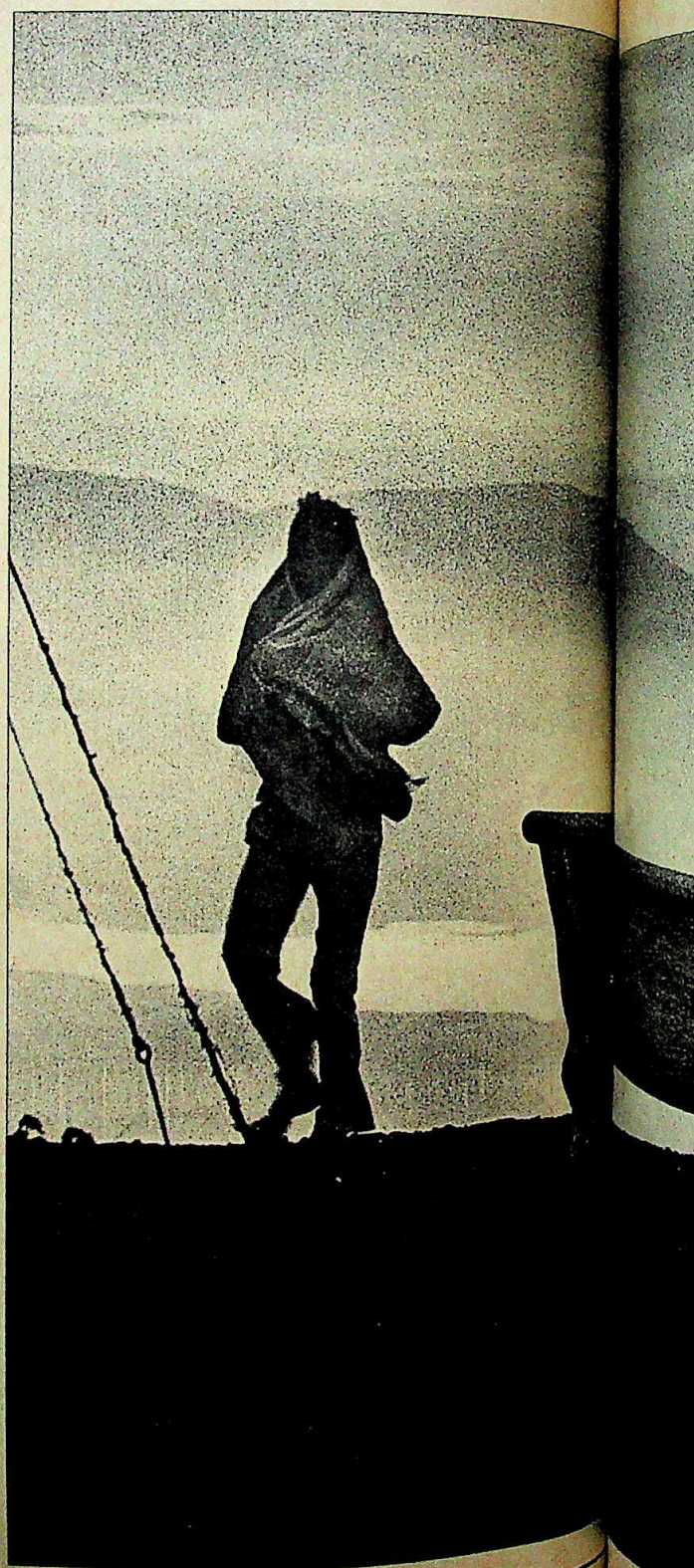
ranged. But I would continue with my *riaz* for eight hours a day."

It was probably some deep disappointment that drove Joshi to drink, at times heavily, until more than 10 years ago. Since then, he has been completely abstemious. But even his memories of those drinking days are sometimes droll. During a phase of prohibition in Bombay, Joshi, already famous but happily inebriated, occupied a front airplane seat that had been reserved for Morarji Desai. When asked politely to vacate the seat by the airline staff, he simply responded that he did not believe in VIPs. Desai quietly took the seat next to his and looked askance at the contents of the glass Joshi was cradling in his hands. The maestro replied loftily that prohibition was a matter for the earth and not the skies. But Joshi's love affair with Bacchus ended because he himself willed it. "Life and life's timings were becoming upset. Besides, when I drank and sang, I could never judge my own performance, which was essential to me as an artiste."

THAT Joshi has this rough edge to his character is because his life has been rugged and peripatetic. The orthodox traditions of his family were hardly conducive to a career in music. It was not just the wedding bands that grabbed his interest. He had always been fascinated by his grandfather's recitals of the Puranas and the Mahabharata. And, at the age of 10, a recital by Savai Gandharva Rambhau Kundolkar, the disciple of Abdul Karim Khan, at Gaddag, where Joshi went to school, made a deep impression on him. But an even more profound influence was a recording, made by Odeon Company, of Karim Khan singing "*Pia bin nahin awat chaain*", in raag Basant. "I would listen to it over and over again," Joshi recalls. "He sounded so different from all the *gharanas* I was familiar with. I knew in my heart that I must know and master that style."

Shortly afterwards, Joshi ran away from home. Living the life of a rootless beggar, he wandered from pillar to post in search of someone—anyone—who would have the patience to teach him classical music. He even did several stints in jail. He roamed about in Bombay, and then went to Gwalior, where he sought tutelage



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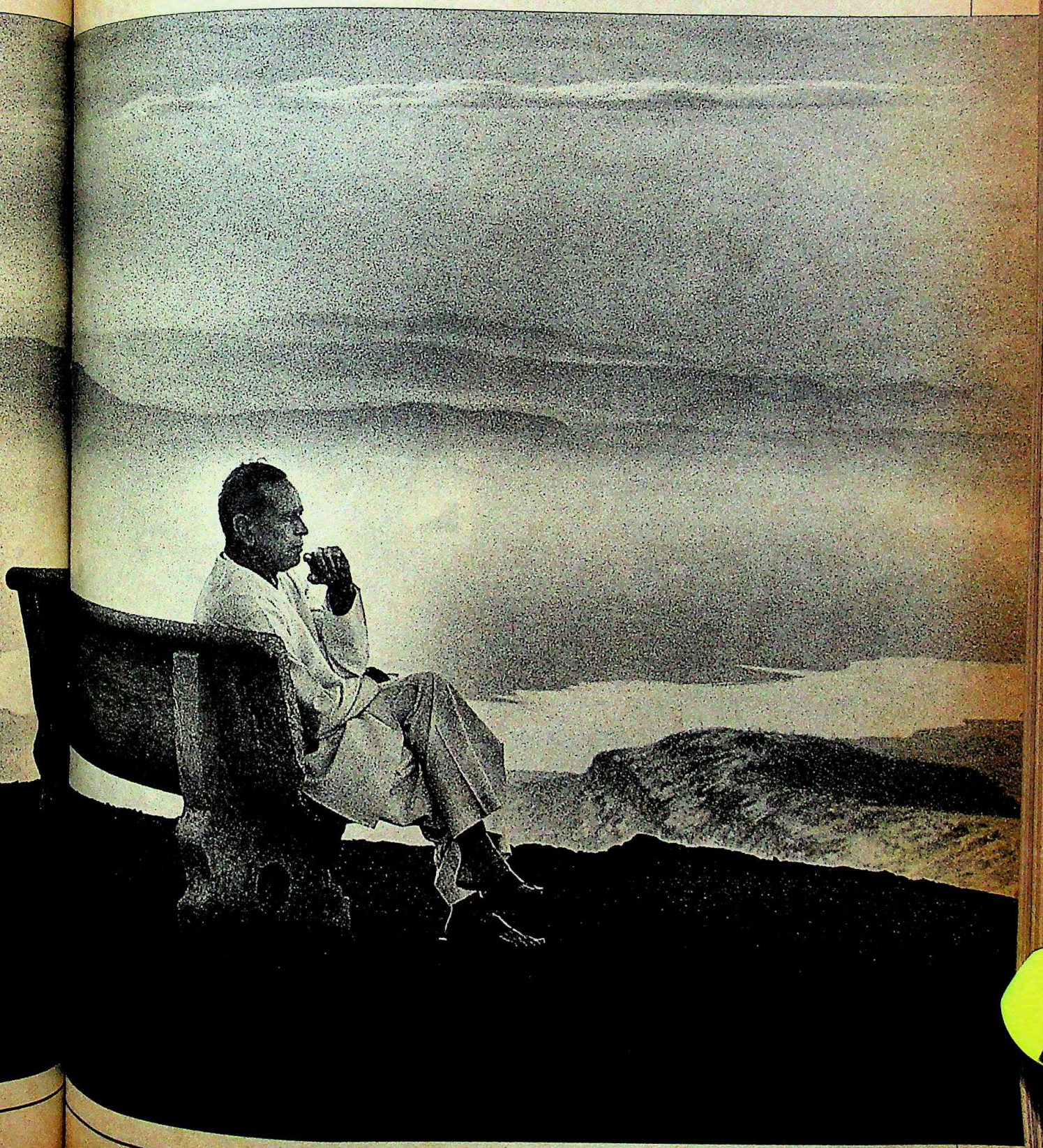

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from the great Hafiz Ali (Amjad Ali Khan's father). "But at least I was able to eat. Whoever learnt music at Gwalior was given one free meal a day from the state." From there, he migrated to Kharagpur where he tried to enlist himself under Mukund Lukhe. "He used to teach a lot of people and so had very little time." He went onwards to Delhi and then to Jalandhar, where he found the patronage of Bhagat Mangat Ram. But Joshi's primary musical education came from Vinayak Rao Patwardhan with whom he would sit for hours and strum at the tanpura. It was Patwardhan who informed him that Savai Gandharva, who had so influenced Joshi before he began his peregrinations, was teaching close to his hometown near Gaddag. And there Joshi was accepted by Gandharva, his final guru.

FOR five years," recalls Joshi, "all that my guruji wanted to know from me was whether I was serious about learning music. In fact, he used to keep repeating the phrase: 'If you're not serious, go, just go and leave me alone'." But he stuck to his guru with the tenacity of a leech. *Riaz* carried on for almost as long as 12 hours a day, year upon endless year. In the mornings, it was raag Todi, in the afternoons, raag Multani, and at night raag Purvaiya. There were breathing exercises that started at 4 a.m. and throat preparation calisthenics that went on throughout the day to enable Joshi to produce that extra *ghamak* (the vocal rhythmic vibration). Even though Joshi had practised and sung some *dadra* and *thumri*, it was to *khayaal* that he finally gravitated. The others were just a shade below the singing of pure raags.

This was the ultimate challenge for him—to take the classical frame of the *khayaal* and infuse it with soul and emotion and to be able to reach out with equal intensity to connoisseurs and laymen alike. "Never tire your audience or try to dazzle it with technical gimmickery," Joshi's guru had always preached. And it was also within the parameters of *khayaal* that lay the beauty and myriad possibilities of the *alaap*—the early intonation of the *sur* that creates the atmosphere for the raag. "*Alaap* is the root," says Joshi.

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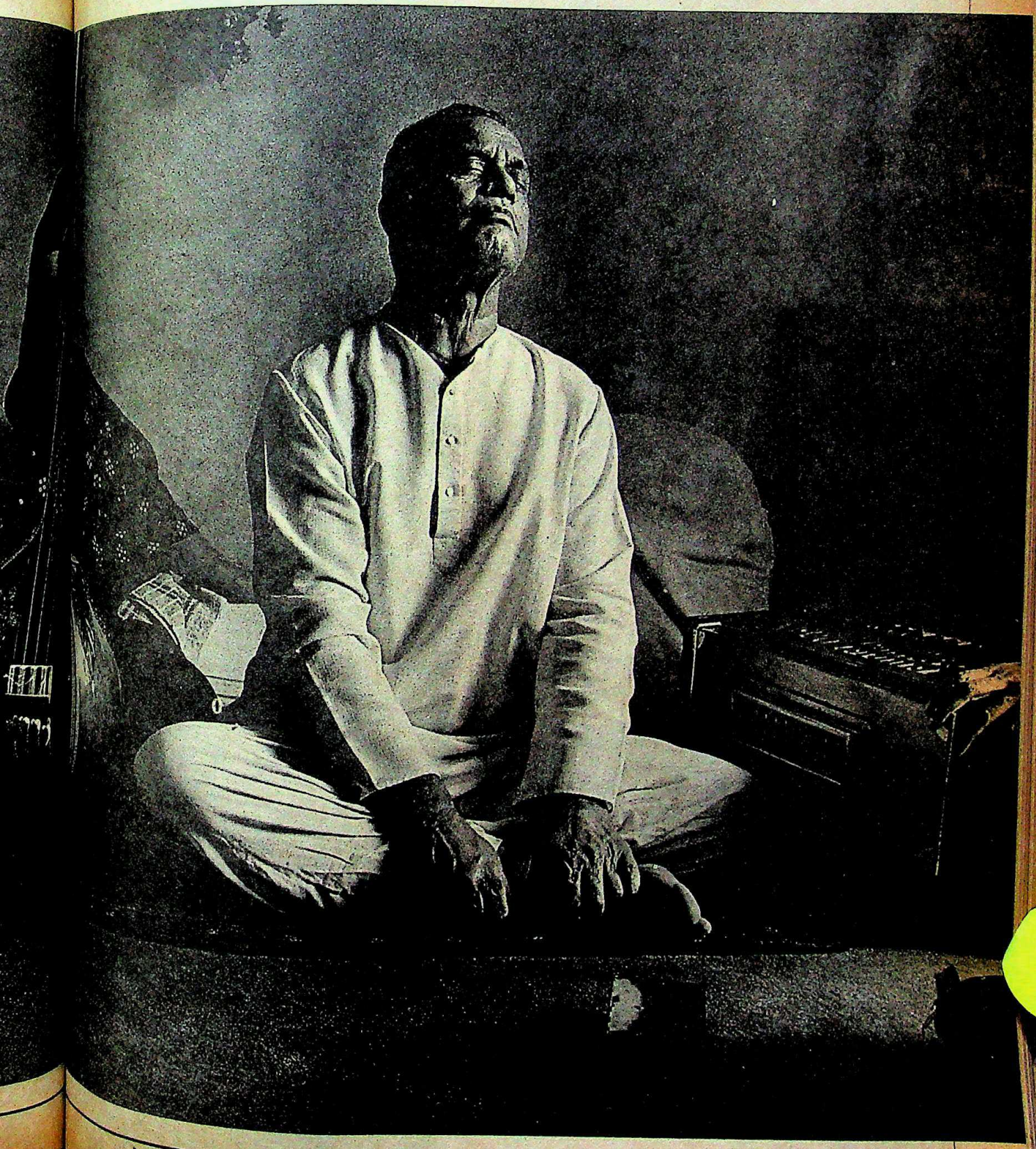

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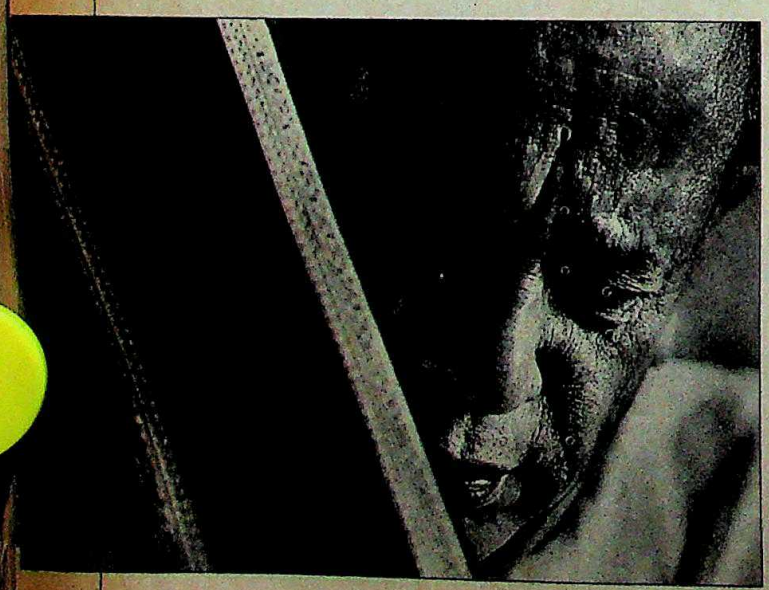
"*Alaap* is the life-force of the song. It is only the *alaap* that is capable of capturing the temperament of the artiste. If the artiste is *shaant* (at peace) and *gambhir* (serious), like Amir Khan was, the *alaap* will represent the core of his very being."

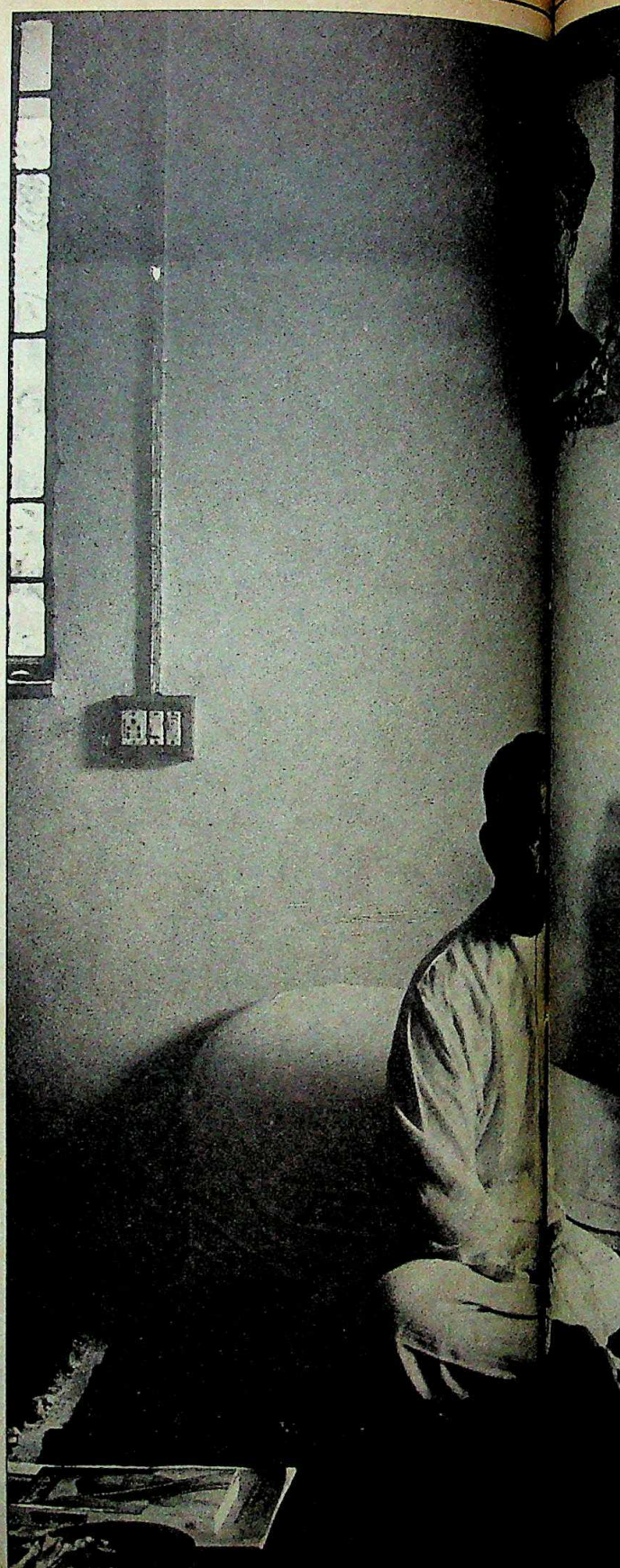
REFERRING to the long period of his *tapasya*, Joshi says: "I never really reached a stage where I could judge myself. I gave performances and pleased audiences, but I could never say how good I was." In 1946, on the 60th birthday of his guru, there was a musical programme in a small town in Karnataka. Savai Gandharva was indisposed, and his other disciples were unable to attend. It was left to 24-year-old Joshi to represent his guru. He sang only briefly, for about half an hour. He remembers it was raag Malhar. But he knew he had sung exceptionally well, and had captivated the audience as he had never done before. And he also knew that it was the turning point in his career.

Memories of performances, when the artiste knows that he has performed at his creative best are few, but they remain indelibly etched in his mind. The 1946 concert is one of perhaps only a handful of similar memories for Joshi. Another is of a Bangalore performance in the late '50s. It was at dawn on a Sunday. "I remember I sang raag Todi. And from somewhere within me there came an emotion that I cannot describe but which infused the entire performance. A feeling of sadness and stormy restlessness overwhelmed me. Later I found that my mother was dying at the very moment that I was performing." And at an all-India musical conference in Kolhapur, Joshi was to receive an unprecedented compliment from his peers. His performance was to be followed by that of the legendary sitarist Ustad Vilayat Khan. But Khan refused to play on the grounds that Joshi's performance had said all that needed to be said and that no other recital should be allowed to interfere with the hypnotic spell he had woven.

Neither drink nor age has mellowed or weakened his voice. Joshi now has 14 LP's to his credit—he earned his first platinum disc last year from HMV. So prodigious is his stamina that he once completed the recording for four LP's in one marathon sitting that lasted from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. without a single retake. And the honours poured on him—the Padma Shree in 1972, the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1976, and the Padma Bhushan in 1985, the year he performed in Paris for the Festival of India.

Unlike several virtuosos of Indian classical music, Joshi





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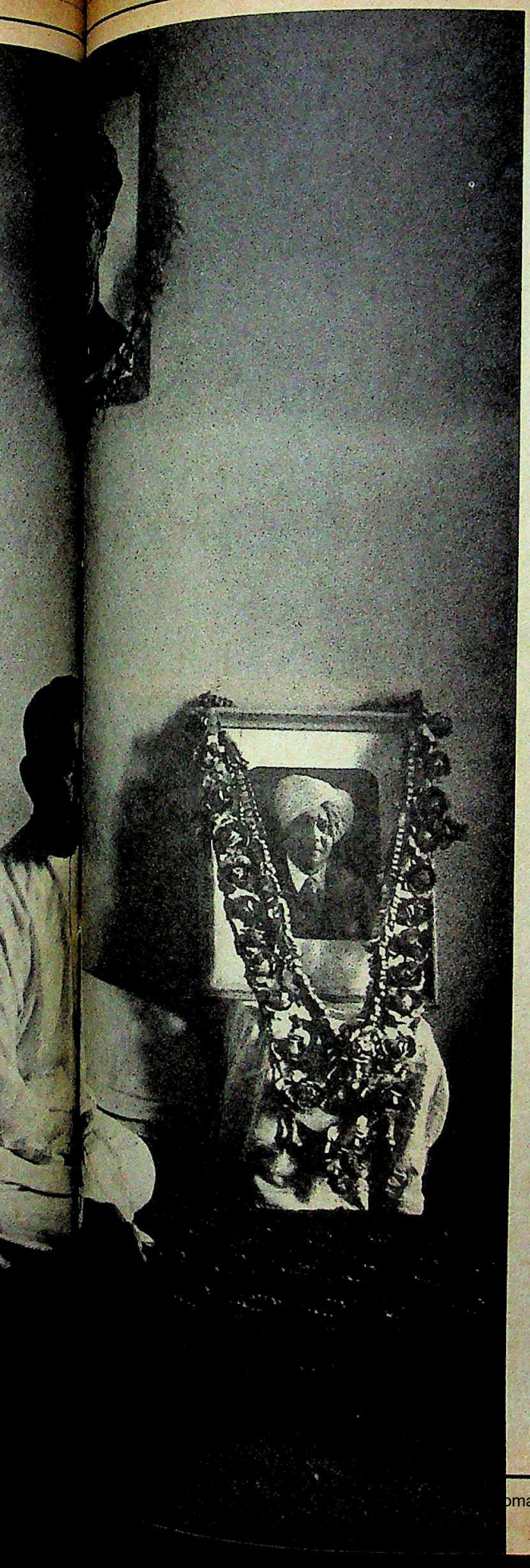

prepares extensively before each performance. "I do not leave things to chance," he says. "I follow extensive *riaz* patterns in the way my guru taught me. Before a performance, I keep thinking all morning about what to sing. I keep singing in my mind the whole time. Yet, I know that I must be different. I must be myself. The grammar should be absolutely perfect, as passed on by the masters, but I must not simply imitate them. I must create afresh."

On a recent pre-monsoon June night, Joshi and his family quietly make their way into a small temple in Pune. The temple is dedicated to Raghavendra Swami, who lived in Tamil Nadu about 700 years ago, and in whose powers Joshi has immense belief. In the temple, in the stillness of the night, his wife Lakshmi and daughter Shubadha strum the tanpura, the temple priests stand around like silent pillars of watchfulness, and Joshi devoutly sings to his swami. First a bhajan, *Brij me dhoom machaai Kanha, kaise jaaon apne dhaam*, in raag Bhim Palasi. His body rocks, it sways. Then another bhajan, *Pandhari nivaasa tatha Panduranga*. He is an oarsman steering his powerful voice over seemingly unsurmountable musical waves. He rows and he pushes, and wave after wave, the voice glides forward, riding the breakers like a celestial ship.

In the end, he sings for *Vitthal Deva*, an incarnation of Shankar Bhagwan. He calls out in rage, in sorrow, in adulation, "Vitthala, vitthala, vitthala....", his eyes half-closed and searching, sorrowful. Later, he says: "It is a very strange sensation. When I sing that song, I really see him. He is elusive. He seems to run away. Then I call for him, and he appears, and I hold on to him in song."

The next morning, at home in his practice room, after a session of *riaz*, Bhim Sen Joshi is tired. But only in the way a musician can be tired. His eyes reflect a vortex of musical memories as he cradles his tanpura lovingly, plucking a string flirtatiously every now and then. He cradles it, then places his cheek against it with tenderness, as if it were a visible part of his soul. He hums some lost, lonely melody, barely audible. Outside is the monsoon drizzle and the shrill madness of a lusty-throated koel.

"This is the strangest journey of all," he says, with a smile. "There's no end to it. There's still that gnawing compulsion: I must perfect myself, I must perfect myself. There is no end and sometimes there is no satisfaction." As his legacy, he will probably leave behind one disciple, Madhav Gudi from Dharwar, who, Joshi says "has shown a lot of seriousness". His children are musical but are not likely to become his musical heirs. "I cannot force them," he says. "After all, I chose my own life even though my father wanted me to be a graduate. But I chose my life even when I didn't even know I could sing. Today's younger generation has an interest in classical music. They have knowledge, but not the energy, *shakti* and stamina needed to awaken them. How does one find a disciple these days? If I tell someone to sit here for four hours a day and to play the tanpura and not to move, he will consider that a punishment! City life has destroyed the solitude of *tapasya*. Today, young people want everything instantaneously. They want to be ready to perform in a year. How can that be so?"

For artistry, he says, is divine penance. "And ultimately, when you perform, this penance gives you the power not only to decorate a deity but to decorate and redecorate the entire Universe with a raag Yaman or Bhairavi." The artiste, he says, cannot be a non-believer. His artistry grows with increasing devotion. "He may be an atheist, but he must believe in something," Joshi says. "He may believe in nature. An artist is always in agony. He keeps thinking: I'm nothing, I'm nothing. Then he prays for *shakti* to get over the hurdle of his nothingness. Before I start singing, I invoke my God, my guru. I'm nothing, I say, give me strength, I'm nothing. And then the strength begins to seep into your pores and you can feel the glowing of your soul."

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SRI LANKA

Coping with Peace

A return to normalcy but fears for the future

ARO Hara, Aro Hara. The devotees chanted as the deity of Lord Muruga was taken out of the 170-year-old Nallur Kandaswamy Temple and placed on the intricately carved chariot. The hail to the lord reached a crescendo. It was as if four years of pent up feelings were bursting out in a cathartic sigh of spiritual and emotional exhilaration.

It was August 23, the occasion of the car festival, and the most important day in the 25-day-long festival in the Jaffna peninsula's holiest temple. Never before had such a crowd been witnessed. Almost half the peninsula's population of 700,000 people had shown up—more than double the turnout in the preceding war-torn years.

It was after a long, long time that holy incense and not billowing black clouds of destruction was rising into the air. The people were exuberant, not cowering in terror. Every one was experiencing the delicious thrill of mobility and freedom, instead of tensely pricking a ear to detect the sound of aircraft and run for cover. The massive turnout and *joie de vivre* of the festival was the most touching tribute to the peace and security brought to war-ravaged Jaffna by the accord.

The leash of terror in the peninsula has, at last, snapped. In just two weeks, life is back to what it was before the July 1983 riots. There is no shortage of essential commodities. Refugees are returning home, bringing happy reconciliations. Many households are preparing to send their children to school and college when the term begins on August 31. And, as Jaffna businessman Sankaran Hariharan, whose annual turnover slumped from Sri Lankan Rs 60 lakh to Rs 50,000, said: "Business is picking up."

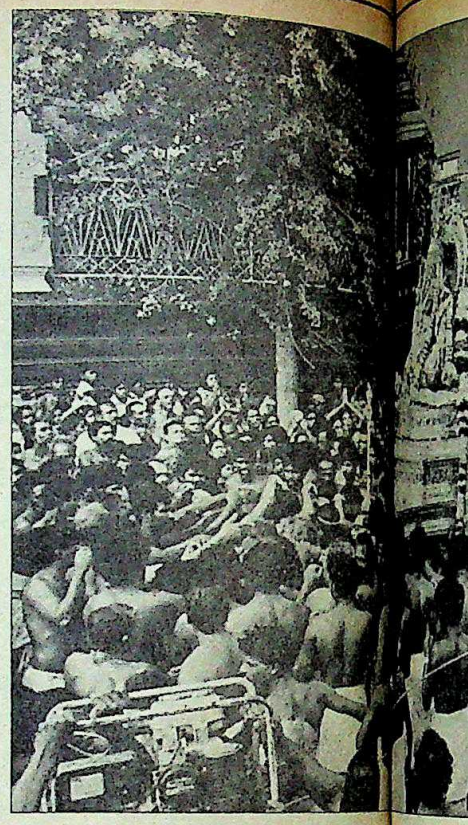
Yet the people suffer no delusions. "We feel free and easy now, but we feel it's a temporary truce," remarks Varadaraja, a farmer of Allaipatti village who had migrated with his family to Jaffna to run a small shop. He now plans to go back to his 1.5 acre tobacco farm. A government servant expressed a similar sentiment: "This is only the start. We have got only half freedom. We wonder how long it will last." Trapped in a vicious cycle of violence, people are finding it psychologically difficult to believe that peace will last.

With the initial euphoria waning, as is inevitable, two crucial problems have emerged in the post-accord phase. Firstly, as Jaffna Municipal Commissioner C.V.K. Sivagnanam said: "Till now, the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) did the policing of our society. But now with their disarmament, there is a vacuum in discipline enforcement. Antisocial elements are beginning to exploit the situation and crime has gone up."

> **Trapped in a vicious cycle of violence, people in the northern province are finding it psychologically difficult to believe that peace will last.**

Second and most crucial, is the urgent need for reconstruction and rehabilitation. On June 6, two days after the Indian air drop, the Sri Lankan Army based in the Palali camp devastated Valalai village in a brutal retaliatory attack. The house of Alagendra Raja, a small farmer, was attacked and set on fire. Raja's family, along with 15 other families, fled to seek refuge in a school in Chavakacheri. Two months later Raja returned to his village. But he is now penniless and homeless.

Anton Sudhakar, a fisherman of Gurunagar, was detained at the Boosa camp for ferrying TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation) members. The accord enabled his release and a joyous reunion with his family. However, two short weeks later, he faces grinding poverty. His electricity has been cut off for



The car festival in Jaffna (top); and LTTE men with cyanide capsules: hope and uncertainty

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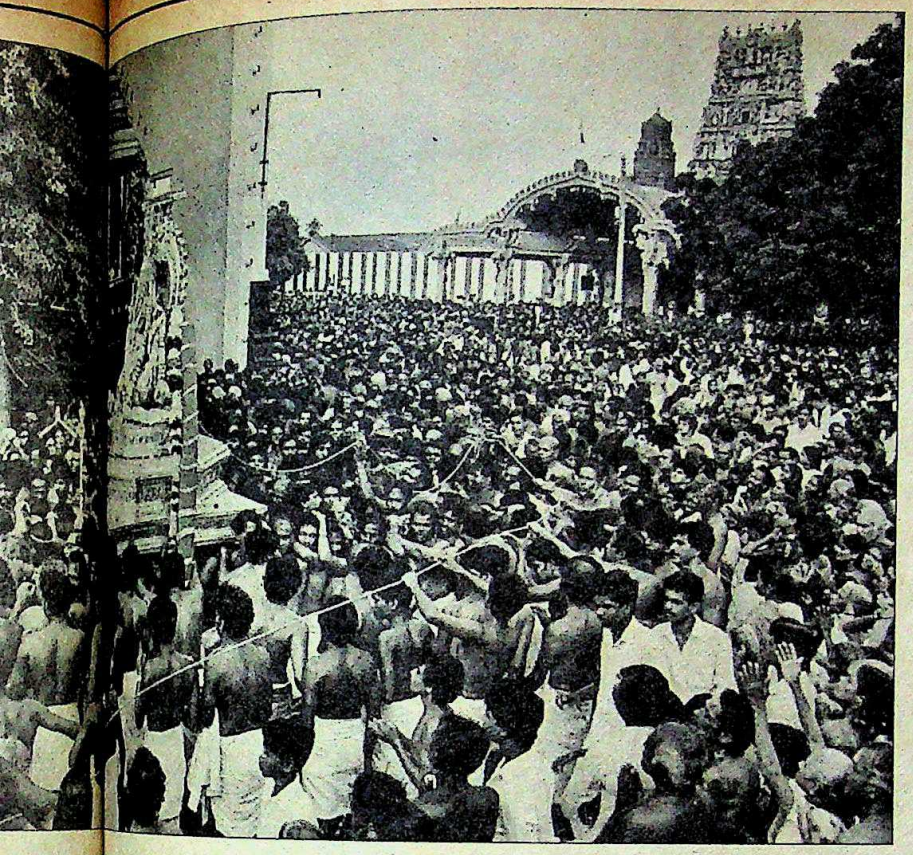

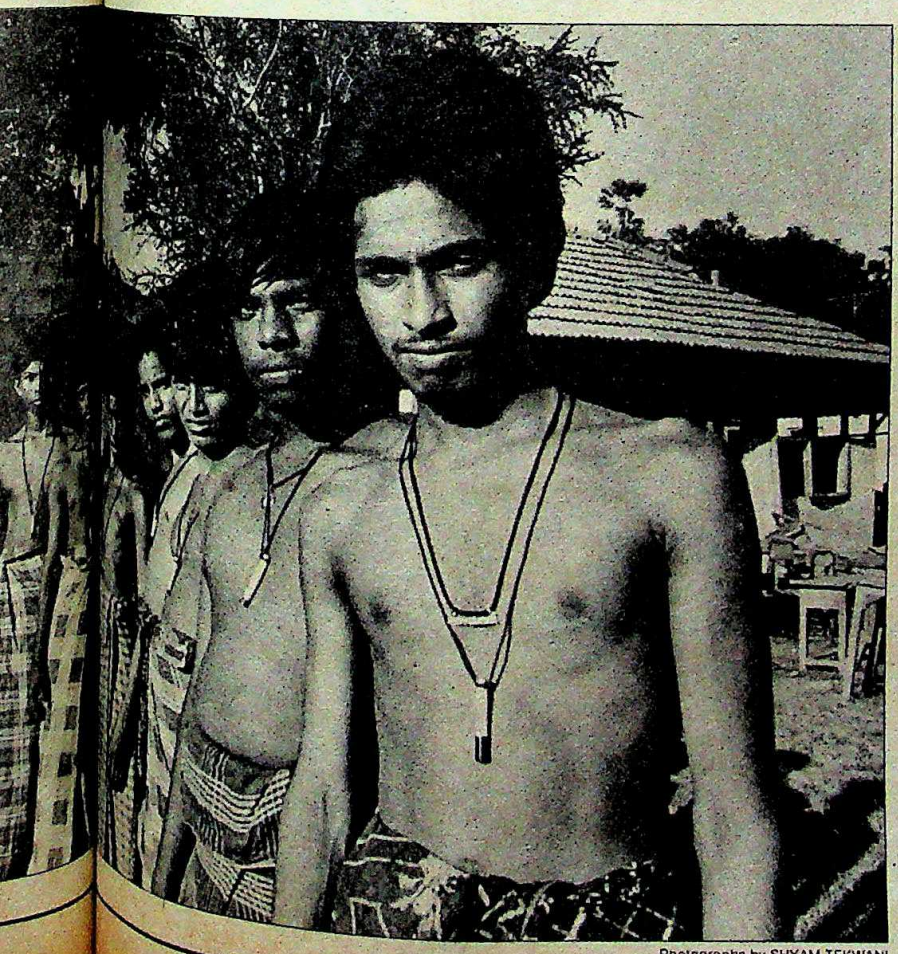

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

non-payment of bills and his few possessions have been sold already. His boat has been impounded and he sees no way of earning a livelihood.

Rehabilitation is an aspect of the peace accord that demands urgent attention. For if neglected, the goodwill of the public can turn irreversibly. Peace can assuage tense minds, but cannot fill empty stomachs. During the horror-filled days of the carpet-bombing, the sole preoccupation was finding safe shelter. Now, with the chance to pick up the threads of life once again, people lack the means to buy food, to rebuild their homes or start business.

Indian officials in Colombo, aware of the problem, talk in terms of Indo-Sri Lankan joint economic cooperation to set up some large projects to solve the problem of unemployment in the north and east of the island. While this is essential, the most pressing need at present is to provide the basics—food, shelter, clothing and the tools of trade.

Only the LTTE has so far risen to the task of rehabilitation though it is constrained by limited resources. A new party reconstruction and rehabilitation wing has now focused on these activities. LTTE cadres have begun construction work in ghost towns and villages like Velvettithurai, Point Pedro, Valalai, Vasivilan and Urupiddy. Squads go about clearing debris, cutting timber and transporting other essential items in the northern province.

In fact, the LTTE cadres seem to have taken to civilian life quite easily. As Kanagamma Arumugam, a teacher of Hindu College in Chavakacheri, said: "The Tamil Tigers will have no problems adjusting to civilian life. They are used to a life of hardship and, in any case, they have been running a parallel government here for sometime."

Though the group's militant members still carry their cyanide capsules and feel "orphaned without arms", their discipline and fierce loyalty to leader V. Pirabhakaran has ensured their obedience to embrace civilian life. The change from living in secret jungle hideouts to the free bustling town area has been a marked one for most LTTE men. Yet, as Puliendran, the Tamil Tigers area commander in Trincomalee who took part in at least 500 guerrilla operations, explained, he had all through spent time cultivating paddy along with his military duties—thereby driving home the point that normal civic functions were very much a part of guerrilla existence.

There is no doubt that the LTTE holds complete sway in Jaffna. Even in Trinco-

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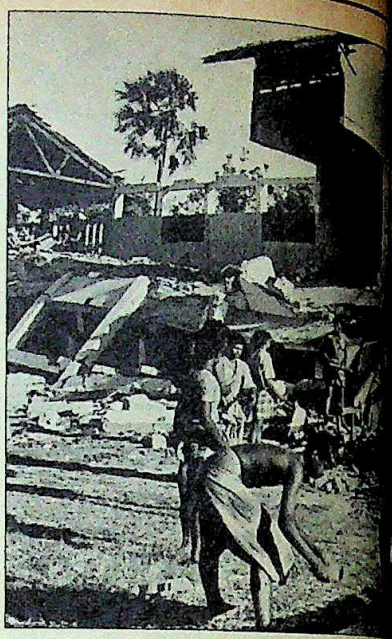
malee, the LTTE is the most popular group as the others have earned opprobrium for indulging in criminal activities and are also suspect as being fronts propped up by the Indian Government. But at the same time, there has developed an interesting shift in public perception when it comes to governance. The public recognises the sacrifices and the consistently disciplined behaviour of the LTTE. But they do not unreservedly accept it as their ruler. N. Manickam, an electrical superintendent of Urumterai, owes his life to a local LTTE leader who advised him on how to construct bunkers outside his house to survive the bombing. Yet, Manickam now says: "The LTTE deserve the top positions but none of their cadre have the education required to go with such posts."

On the other hand, though the more moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) commands less respect, it is recognised as having greater political maturity and experience. Echoing popular sentiment, Varadarajan, the small-time farmer, said: "We would like TULF and LTTE to share power. TULF has experience and LTTE has idealism. A combination would be in our best interests." But as matters stand, Pirabhakaran is more inclined to reward his cadre who have sacrificed so much. At the same time he does recognise the need to field eminent public personalities to counter the general charge of the inexperience and lack of education of his men.

PIRABHAKARAN still firmly believes that with the accord, "the Tamils have become victims of India's geo-political interests". Understandably, the LTTE is resentful of the presence of the Indian Army, whom they see as usurpers of their role. What is worrying India, however, is the anti-Indian propaganda they have begun to



THE ACCORD

Fragile Frame

THERE is a divine power that is keeping this accord alive," says the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo J.N. Dixit. He is not exaggerating. The accord would have been destroyed had Rajiv Gandhi not ducked in time on July 29 or had the grenades lobbed into the parliamentary hall on August 18 not bounced off President J.R. Jayewardene's table before exploding, killing one minister and injuring 16 others.

The blast revealed the chilling capacity of the anti-accord forces to infiltrate the nerve-centre of government. But miraculously the blast seems to have only strengthened the resolve of the President and his colleagues to push through the accord. M.D. Premaratne, deputy minister for sports, convalescing from back and leg injuries, said: "Of course I will support the accord. This is the last chance we have to solve this problem." Said the MP from Mannar in the deep south, S.K. Piyadasa whose house was attacked on July 29: "We won't be frightened. We cannot allow future generations to suffer for our cowardice."

The Patriotic People's Movement, believed to be a front organisation of the Janata Vimukti Permuna (JVP), claimed responsibility for the blast. Even though the police have arrested four employees of the parliament complex and interrogated 700 persons, they still cannot fathom how the grenades were smuggled into the complex, breaching the concentric rings of security. Frank Silva, DIG(CID) who is in charge of the investigations commented that "one of the grenades was Chinese and the other Singaporean, the kind that is imported into the country for military use". The JVP had conducted three raids in the last five months on military installations and escaped with arms including grenades. But as Neelan Tiruchelvam, ex-TULF MP pointed out "a few more nasty incidents like this and the UNP MPs will be gravely demoralised."

Admitting that it was an "inside job" Silva said "the threat is from within not from outside. That is a matter of real concern to us." There are many who believe that the accord has only shifted violence from the north to the south. In fact, contrary to foreign perceptions, riots in southern Lanka are to be "anti-Jayewardene and not anti-accord" to quote a prominent Buddhist priest, the Rt Rev Madihe Pannasiha Maha Nayaka Thera, 75, head of the Amarapaura sect, because, as he says: "The public feel that the President has trampled upon Sinhalese interests and pushed the accord through without prior intimation."

Luckily the blast did not throw the mechanics of accord implementation out of gear though it did slow it down. The Sri Lankan Government which was expected to lift the Emergency by mid-August could not do so. The Government was also slow in releasing Tamil prisoners—only 1,300 of the 5,700 detenus have been released so far. But the Tamil militants have also been tardy with their arms surrender. It is learnt that while the LTTE has surrendered 85 per cent of their lethal weapons, they have handed over only about 45 per cent of their small arms. It seems the LTTE is hiding a cache of firepower, wrapped in

"We will not be frightened. We cannot allow future generations to suffer because of our cowardice."

S.K. PIYADASA
member of Parliament

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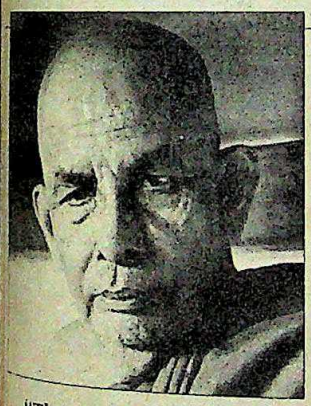
Rebuilding homes in Jaffna: key issue

indulge in. At regular political meetings organised by the group, they explain the accord as suiting only India's geo-political interests. While most Tamils want the Indian Army to stay on and some, in fact, even talk in terms of India starting a permanent Ceylon regiment, the LTTE has been pointing out the dangers of a prolonged stay of an "outside army". They take the line that "an army is an army" after all—insinuating the possibility of Indian soldiers misbehaving with the local girls among other things. Realising the havoc this can cause, Indian jawans have been sternly warned not to mix with the local people and to keep a low profile.

But that warning could apply to the Tamil militants as well. Barely had the ink dried on the accord when LTTE flags began mushrooming all over Trincomalee, Sri Lanka's once famous and now battered port-town. Predictably, the LTTE's red flag with its yellow emblem of a roaring tiger framed in a coat of arms was a red rag to the local Sinhalese. Trouble was sure to follow and it did—first on August 6 and then more dangerously, on August 24.

On August 6, a crowd of jubilant Tamils carrying LTTE flags and bursting crackers ran into an antagonistic Sinhalese crowd on the N.C. National Highway. In the fight that ensued a Tamil was killed. The Indian Army then instructed the Tamils that no flags were to be kept in public places and dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed.

The second incident occurred 18 days later in Madathady junction, on the outskirts of Trincomalee. Some Tamil taxi-drivers were gossiping idly under a huge tree, atop which two LTTE flags were fluttering gaily, when a group of Sinhalese arrived and demanded that the flag be taken down. The Tamil taxi-drivers re-



"The public feel the President has trampled upon Sinhalese interests and pushed the accord without prior intimation."

NAYAKA THERA
Amarapaura sect head

...ogether and buried underground, as a kind of safety valve should something happen to the accord.

The accord has thrown up two new problems which have to be urgently tackled. Firstly there is evidence of demarcation in Trincomalee by the Sri Lankan Government since the accord was signed. There have been reports of Sinhalese families being resettled in Kantalai, Selaipaiaru, Nilapali, Nilavali, Dehiwate, Sumithra, Allai and Alliolluve in the district. Considering that the eastern province, which includes Trincomalee, is to vote for a merger with the Tamil-dominated northern province, the Tamils will naturally view this as an underhand way of ensuring that the majority vote will be against the merger. This is because the Muslim and Sinhalese population together will far outnumber the Tamils in electoral terms. Secondly, the Indian Government has come to the conclusion that 37 of the 60 Sri Lankan Army camps in the east should be withdrawn to enable the refugees to return to their villages in safety and security.

The demilitarisation, the first phase of the accord, has gone off better than expected as have the moves for the setting up of the interim administrative council. Jayewardene had accepted all three Tamil names for the interim council suggested by Pirabhakaran. The council is expected to come into being very soon.

Simultaneously talks were held by constitutional experts on residual matters of devolution in Colombo and Delhi. It was not entirely smooth-sailing for according to an Indian official "Sri Lanka's understanding of the accord does not quite tally with ours." But at this juncture patience is the name of the game and Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayake said: "Surely the Tamils must have faith in the President who has staked his life for the accord." The drafting of the legislation is expected to be over in September after which it will be put before the Supreme Court to judge its constitutionality. It is then put before the Parliament for vote.

Both Sri Lankan and Indian officials do not expect any cross-voting as the UNP does not have a history of defections. Moreover, the President is comfortably placed—for a two-third majority he requires 113 votes. He has 141 MPs in the House of 168.

The only guarantee required is the physical safety of the President and his MPs. Despite many having received death threats, the UNP MPs are sitting ducks since none of them have been provided with even elementary security. Six weeks after the legislation is passed, the elections can take place for the setting up of the interim provincial council for the north and east.

There are, of course, a number of factors that could eventually dilute the accord, mainly the proposed referendum in the east for a merger with the northern province to which the Muslim population in the east holds the key. The accord provides for the referendum to be held by December 31, 1988, though Jayewardene has been given the option to postpone it if he wishes.

But there are still many stages to go through before that, each fraught with dangers that can sabotage the accord. As Dixit says, the accord could do with all the divine help it can get.

—ANITA PRATAP in Colombo

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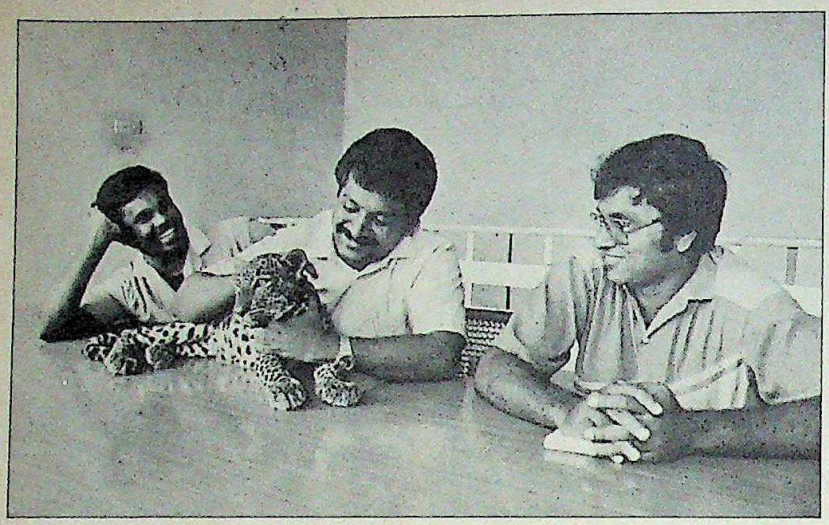

Pirabhakaran with aides: no illusions

fused, saying provocatively, "your time is up, now it is our time". The fight snowballed, and before long there was heavy stone-throwing. At this point, a joint patrol of the Indian Army and Sri Lankan police chanced by. Persuasion and firing in the air did not work and finally the Indian Army had to open fire, injuring two Sinhalese.

The agitated Sinhalese rounded up the 60 home guards of the area and two hours later, at about 8 p.m., returned to Madathady. They ransacked and set ablaze the house of Kanapathi Pillai, a Tamil port worker. Anticipating trouble after the firing incident, the Pillai family had fortunately fled from their house and hidden in the Saraswathy cinema theater, in the Tamil dominated Sivan Koil which is located just behind Madathady. Gazing disconsolately at the charred remains of his house, Pillai said: "We had thought there would be peace after the accord. We are still so scared. We will feel secure only if the Indian Army sets up an outpost in Madathady."

But that would only be adding fuel to already inflamed Sinhalese passions. There is smouldering resentment to the Indian presence among the Sinhalese, stemming perhaps from a feeling of being threatened by the Indian Army. For, their position is now reversed—until now, the Sinhalese were the ones who had felt secure due to the presence of Sri Lankan home guards and security forces. Said Vimal Hewawithanrana, 33, a home guard of Vijithapura village, menacingly: "Your army fired at our people. Why should your army attack our people only?" And when asked about the burning of Pillai's house, Vimal's response was typical: "The Tamils burnt their houses themselves and simply put the blame on us." What is disturbing is the fact that the police had arrested Pillai's Tamil neighbour, Thanaraja, 27, for suspected arson when in reality, he too had fled to Sivan Koil at the time of the incident.

> "If our people are attacked again, we will return to arms. We are prepared to start again, from scratch."
> V. PIRABHAKARAN

The situation in Madathady is now very tense, particularly because the Sri Lankan Government has, in the last two years settled several Sinhalese families and home guards in the temple lands which adjoin the five temples nearby.

It was significant that neither the Tamil nor Sinhalese refugees in their camps at Clappenberg and Cod Bay in Trincomalee district felt safe enough to return to their villages. "We are dying to go back. But as long as the Sri Lankan Army camps are around, we do not feel safe to return," said K. Periathamby, a Tamil refugee from Muthur. Added E. Nageswaran, another refugee: "Now that the militants have been disarmed, we feel even more insecure." Visibly frightened and too insecure to even talk freely to an Indian, Sumana Seyana, a Sinhalese refugee from Podokattu village who returned to his camp after a recent trip to his village, says: "I am too scared to go back because when I went to my village a group of Tamil youths came and wamed me not to return." Declares another refugee: "I have no faith in the accord because there will still be violence." Even though they have to pay a price for it, the Tamils in Trincomalee are in no mood to bring down their flags. "It is about time our flag went up," says E. Rasalingam. "After all, we are putting it in our territory. All our suffering would have been in vain if we brought down our flag at this point."

In Sivan Koil, and other Tamil-dominated areas, the Tamils are somewhat heady with the breath of confidence and security they now feel due to the presence of the Indian Army. But unlike in the Jaffna Peninsula, which is solely populated by Tamils, any show of exuberance by the Tamils in Trincomalee, which has an equal number of Sinhalese and Muslims, can be gravely counter-productive. Sensing the growing hostility of the Sinhalese, joint patrols have been increased to five per locality daily, and no Indian Army jeep dare ventures out alone. Today, Trincomalee epitomises the tinderbox that Sri Lanka has become. Any event—be it assassination attempts or routine disputes—now have the potential to blow up the fragile accord.

The urgent need for rehabilitation in the battle-scarred areas cannot be overemphasised. One fact that both India and Sri Lanka cannot afford to gloss over is that most Tamils believe the accord is only a truce and that a Tamil Eelam is finally the permanent solution. Father Singharaya, a Catholic priest who was released from the Welikada prison after the accord, is one of them. "After all that the Tamils have gone through, I feel Eelam is the only solution," he says. His view was endorsed by almost every single person spoken to in the peninsula.

Psycologically, it has become impossible for the Tamils to trust the Sri Lankan Government. Gently stroking his leopard cub Sita, Pirabhakaran said: "If our people are attacked again, we will return to arms. We are prepared to start all over again, from scratch." And Ramesh, 21, who is a second lieutenant in the LTTE hierarchy, agrees wholeheartedly: "My whole life is reverted to the recall to arms." The only way this attitude can be kept on a leash is by ensuring that rehabilitation and development quickly follow the newly-found peace on the island.

—ANITA PRATAP in Jaffna

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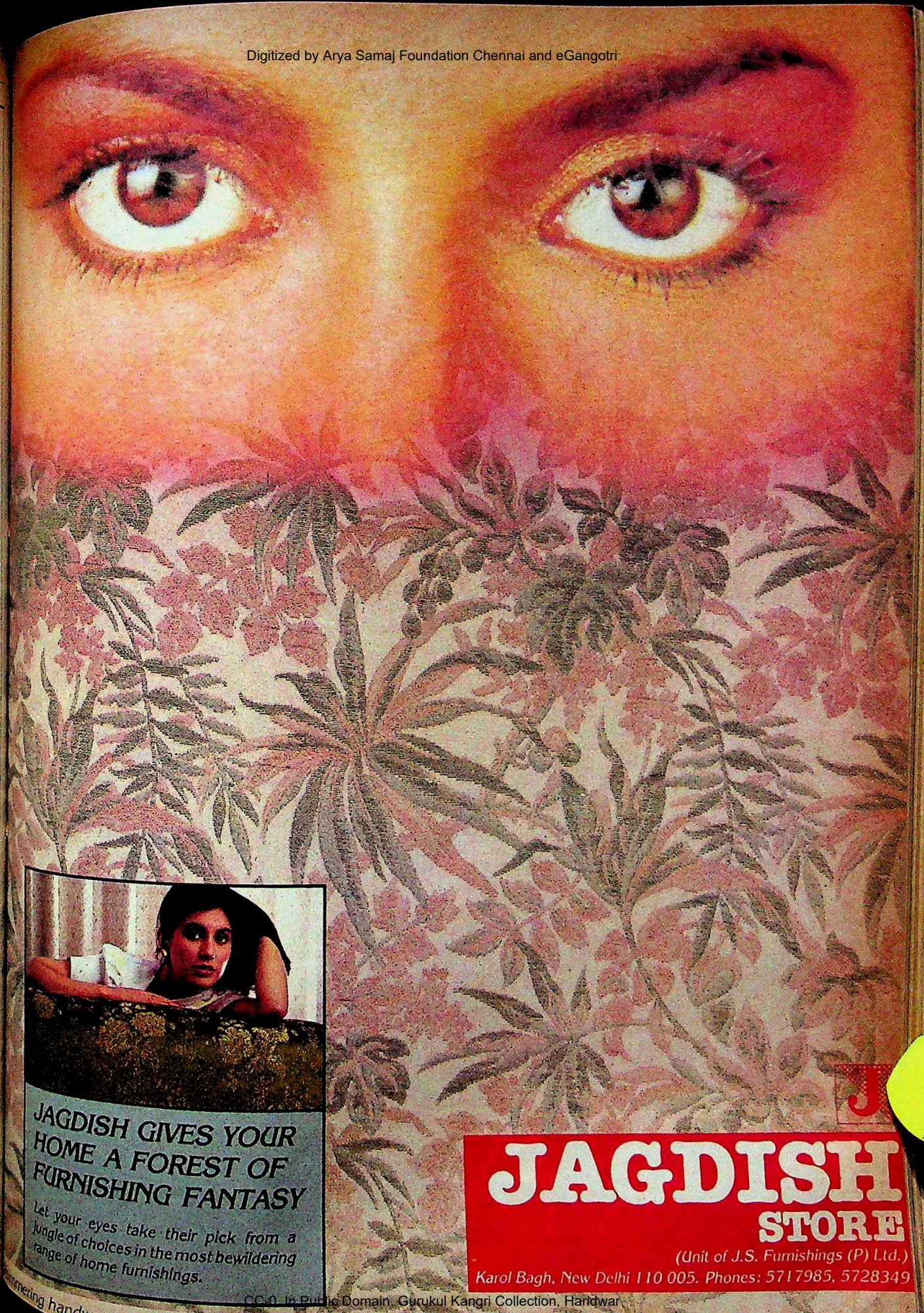

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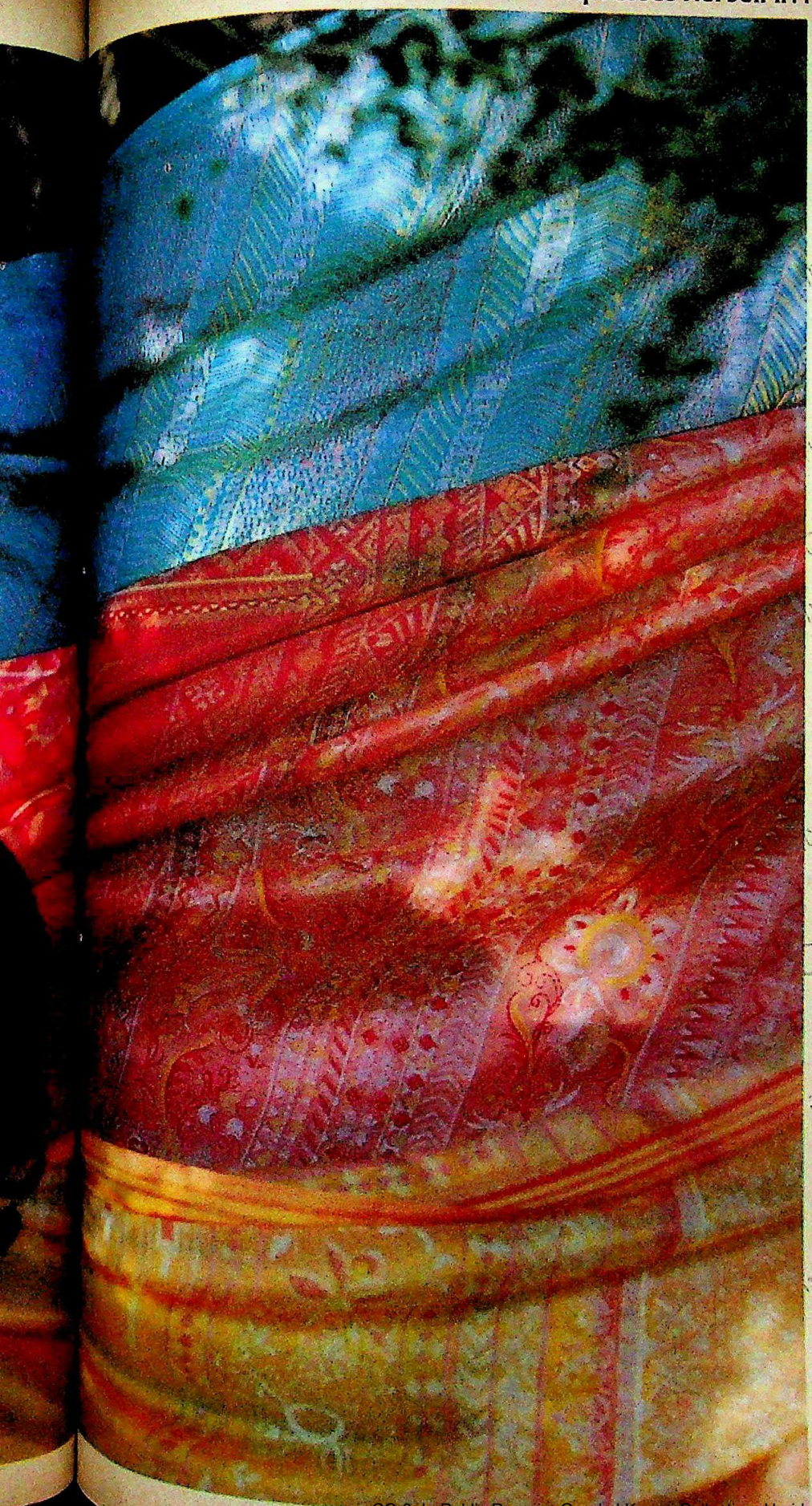

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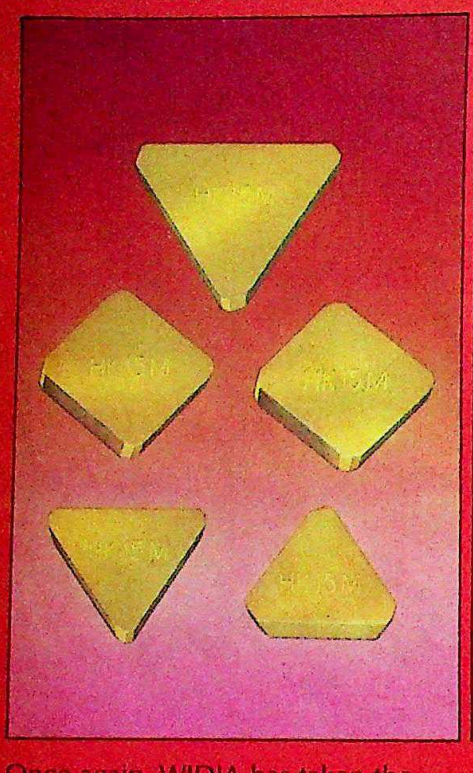

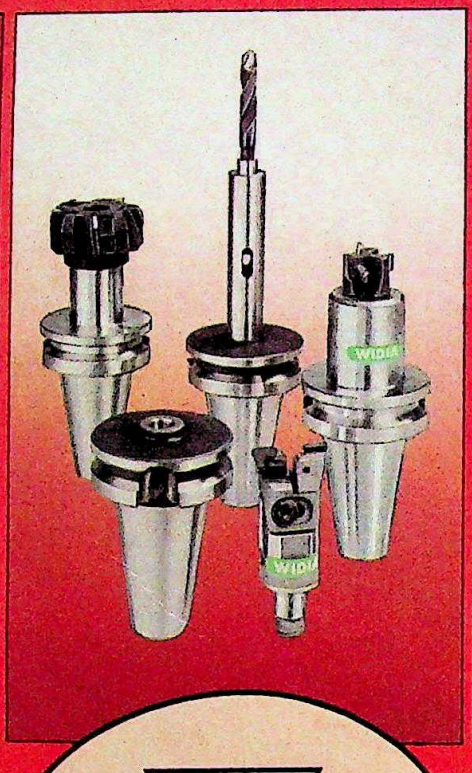

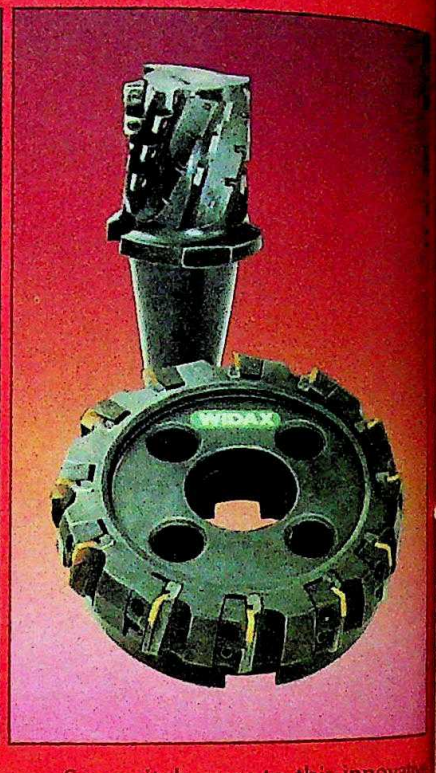

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REHABILITATION

Helping the Blind

A low-cost project shows remarkable results

WHERE high-investment projects to rehabilitate the blind have stumbled in the past, an innovative low-cost training scheme has made a cheerful beginning in Gujarat, and spread to other states. In the last two years, over 2,100 blind people have benefited from this rural-oriented project, brainchild of the National Association of the Blind (NAB).

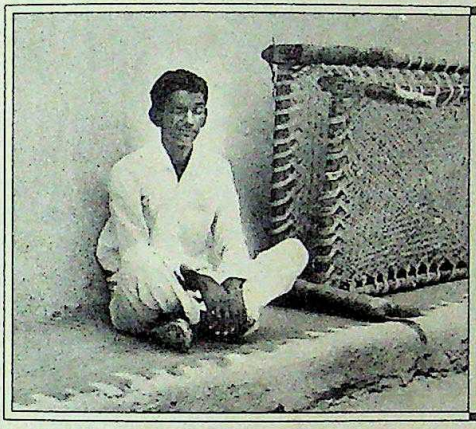
The failure of traditional institutions for the blind is well known. After spending almost Rs 50,000 to Rs 70,000 training a person over five or six years, social prejudice prevents them from finding jobs they are trained for. Rambhai Rabari, trained as a carpenter, and Karsan Vaghela, who actually learnt physiotherapy, both cane chairs in Ahmedabad.

Often, the blind themselves are reluctant to give up the protection that institutions offer and are unwilling to return to their rural homes. Says Bhushan Punani, managing director of the Blind Men's Association (BMA), Ahmedabad, which also runs low-cost projects: "We have to stop building palaces in the shape of institutions. What we require is need-based, non-institutional, rural rehabilitation projects."

Aware of this, the NAB reasoned that instead of spending huge sums, it made more sense to identify the blind in a village, consider their backgrounds and train them for a skill which could sustain them in their environment. To keep costs low, young field workers were trained intensively —initially working blindfolded so they could empathise with their charges. Then each was put in charge of villages in his or her taluka.

NAB's first pilot project was in Ahmedabad's Dholka taluka in 1984. Field workers identified 312 blind persons in 117 villages. Of them, 80 per cent who were 45 years or older could not be admitted to an institution. As the scheme caught on, blind children began attending school—after the authorities were persuaded to accept them—and adults became self-employed, making products ranging from ropes to vermicelli.

Delighted by the success, the NAB started projects in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan. The per capita cost of training and rehabilitation worked out to a meagre Rs 500. Says Nandini Rawal, NAB joint secretary: "If we pool in the money used to run institutions, we could rehabilitate thousands of the rural blind. Institutions mainly rehabilitate the staff."



Valji Chamar has a tanning business—which brings him Rs 900 a month—and he travels alone to town on work.

Galabhai Odh, blind for more than a decade, now runs a brick kiln employing five labourers, and supports his family.

For little Kanti Kanji, training has not only meant learning Braille, but also the thrill of being able to fly a kite.

Photographs by RAMESH MENON

Examples of a new confidence abound. After two years' training, Valji Chamar, 41, now has a tanning business which fetches him Rs 900 a month and he goes into town on his own to inspect raw hides. Galabhai Odh, blind for more than a decade and a drain on his family's resources, now runs a brick kiln employing five workers—and supports his family. For Kanti Kanji, 11, training has meant more than just learning Braille—much to his delight, field workers also taught him how to fly a kite.

The project hinges on a socially inclined person who is put in charge of the field workers. Although the workers are paid only about Rs 300 per month, most are highly committed to the job. Says Ram Jadhav, a field worker in Gujarat's Viramgam taluka: "Every time we help rehabilitate a blind person, we feel that we have given him a new life. It is a very satisfying job."

The spread of the project all over India is bound to take time, considering the limited finances of voluntary agencies. But there is little doubt that Dholka, a name unknown outside Gujarat, will over the years become a symbol of hope for millions across India.

—RAMESH MENON

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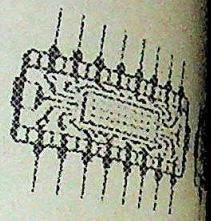

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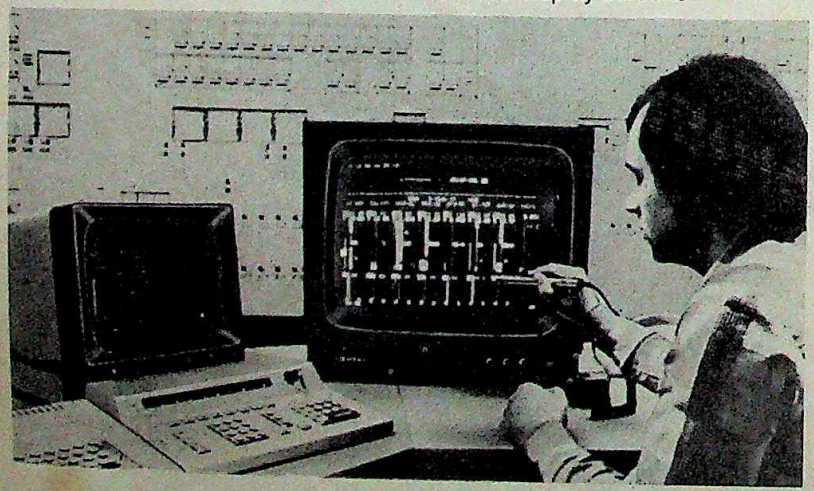

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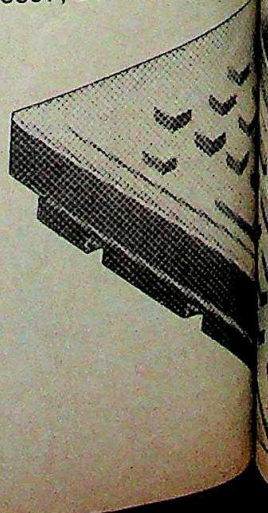

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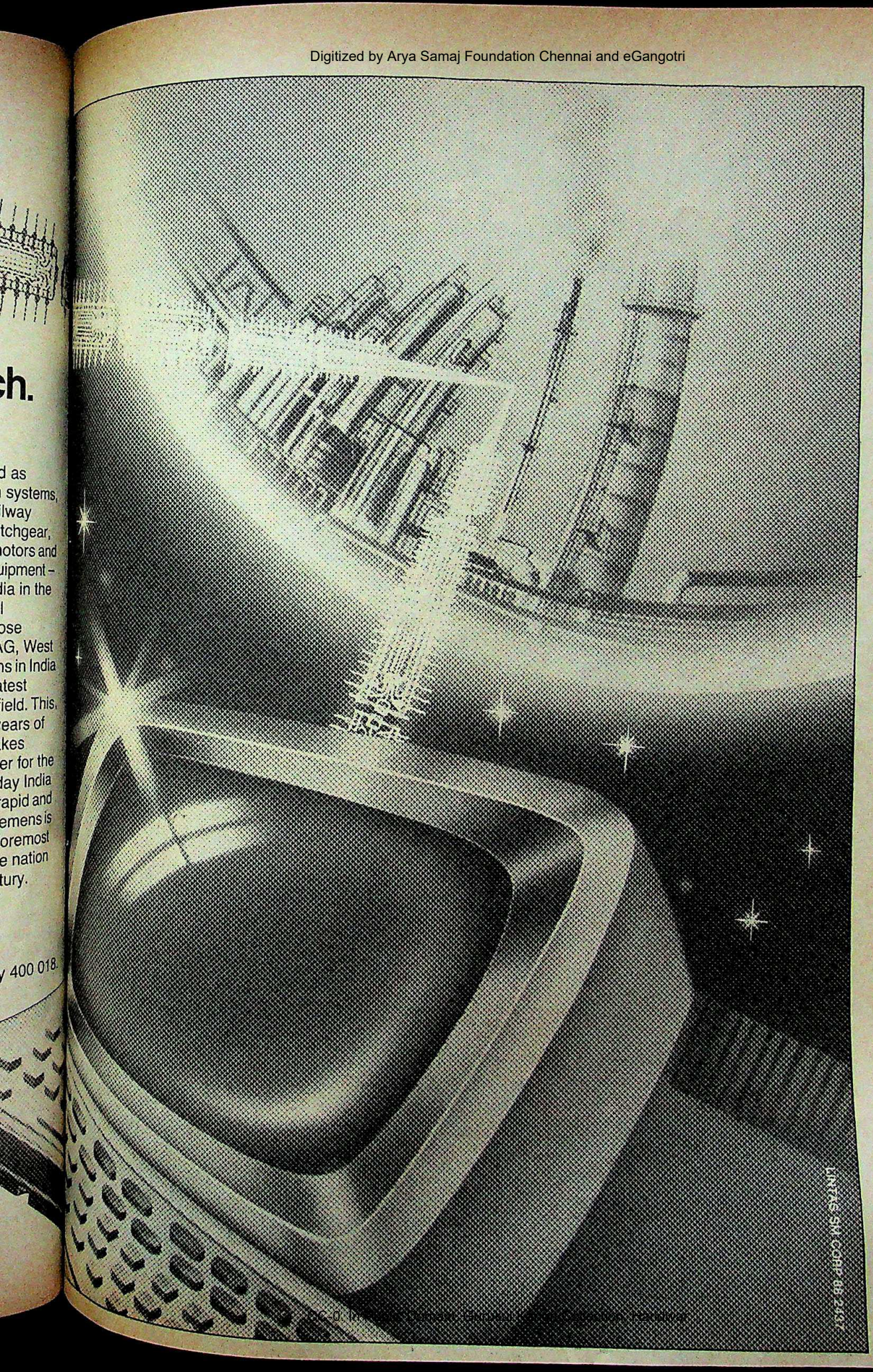

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CHITRAKOOT

A Secular Legend

A temple with a proud Muslim legacy

THE bearded priest of a small temple in Chitrakoot has two valuable possessions. One is a gold idol, which he refers to as Balaji or Thakurji. The other is an imperial document dating back to Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's time.

At daybreak every day, Mahant Narayan Das bathes the deity and places it at a haloed spot amidst the singing of bhajans to Lord Rama. Till dusk, the deity, cushioned by a satin cloth, remains on public display.

However, it is the other treasure that Narayan Das guards more zealously. Wrapped carefully in layers of hardboard and clothes, he keeps it under the seat of the idol. And only a few, persistent visitors can have the parchment's darshan which has almost attained the stature of an idol.

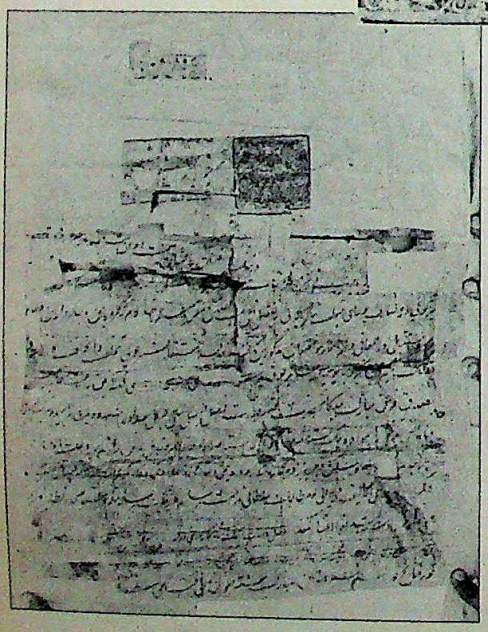
The 17th-century document begins with the symbolic *Allah-o-Akbar* (Allah is great) incantation. Below the invocation is the royal seal of Aurangzeb, whose orders saw the destruction of several Hindu shrines. And then comes the farmaan (regal notice), extending royal patronage to the Balaji temple and its erstwhile priest, Mahant Balak Das. Penned on the 19th day of Ramzaan in the 35th year of Aurangzeb's tenure (June 16, 1691), the farmaan is now a part of Chitrakoot's folklore.

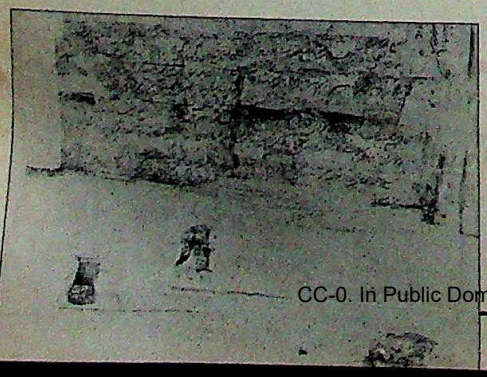
Collegians and doctors, Hindus and Muslims, everyone in Chitrakoot takes pride in the document. They believe that Aurangzeb was on one of his raids to conquer and loot Hindu temples when he reached Chitrakoot. As his masons tried to demolish a Shiva temple on the banks of the nearby Mandakini, the entire royal retinue—including Aurangzeb—was afflicted by a severe stomach ache. The royal physicians failed to provide relief. Only a handful of soldiers who had visited Balak Das, a local saint, escaped the agony. Finally the emperor approached the saint who immediately cured him and his men. A grateful Aurangzeb spared Chitrakoot his wrath, the story goes, and later built the temple and granted it his patronage.

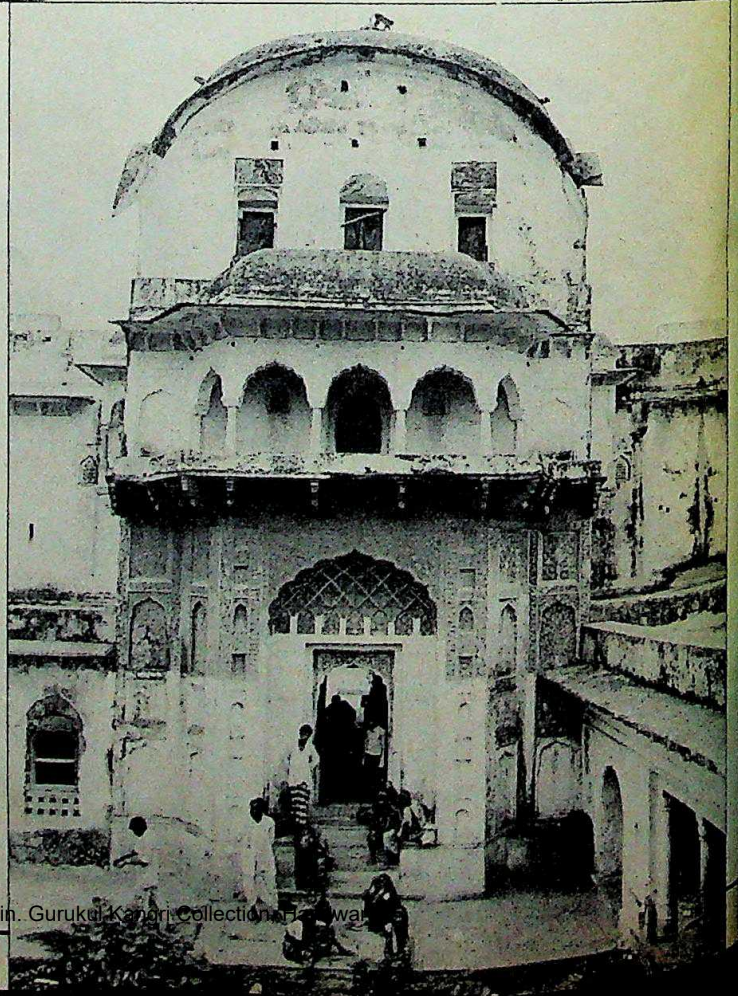
"There is no doubt about it," says Hafeezuddin Khan, the oldest local Muslim. "The temple was built by Alamgir's (Aurangzeb) men. He also gave eight villages for its upkeep." The folklore is so strong that any shred of paper pertaining to the temple is immediately taken to be Aurangzeb's order. So much so, that a court judgement issued in 1889 by a British judge has been taken to be a Mughal document because it is written in an ornate Persian hand. Some copper plaques inscribed in Pali—and issued by rulers of Panna—are also used to supple-

(Clockwise from left): Aurangzeb's seal; temple facade; back of the farmaan and its front

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR







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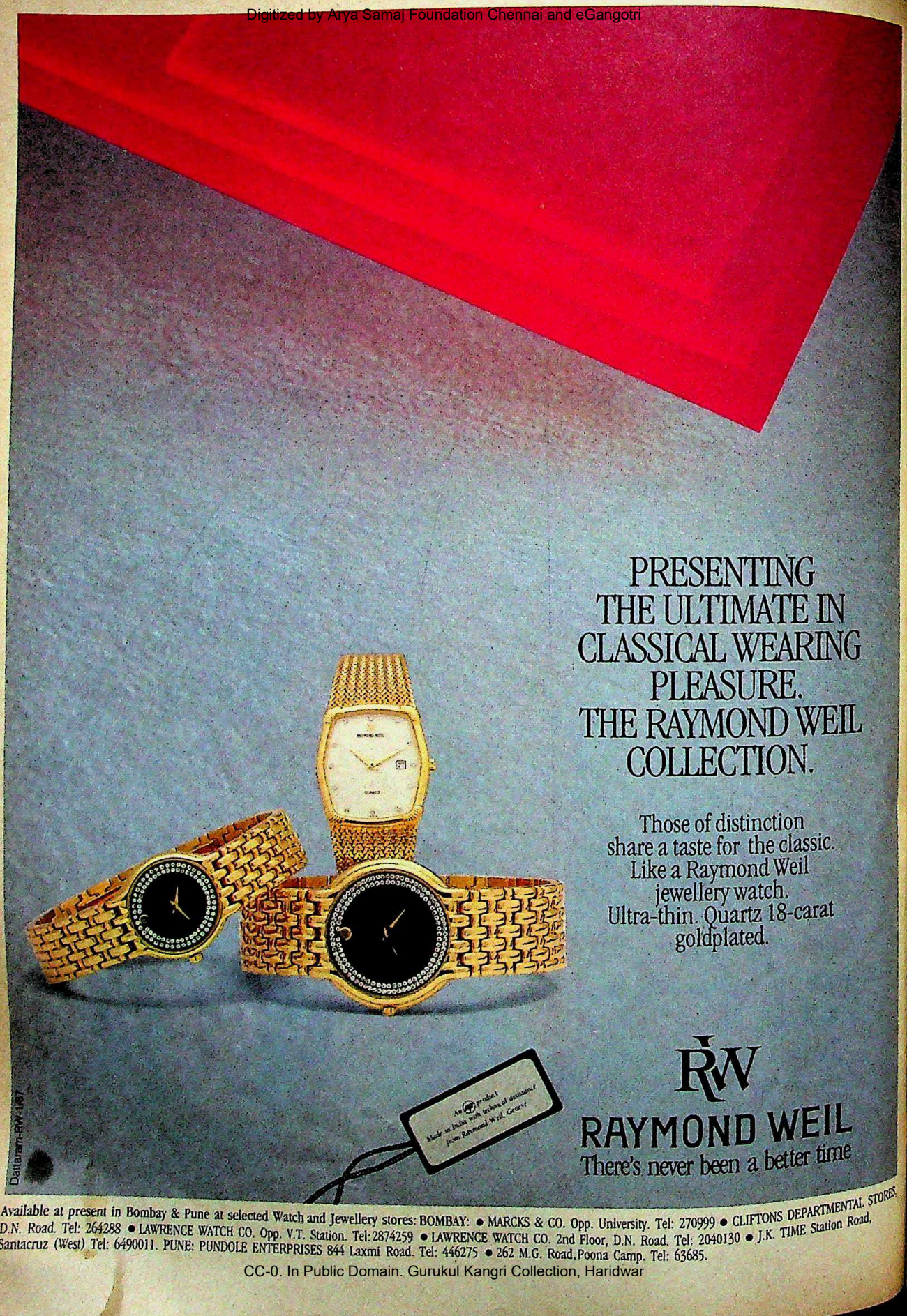

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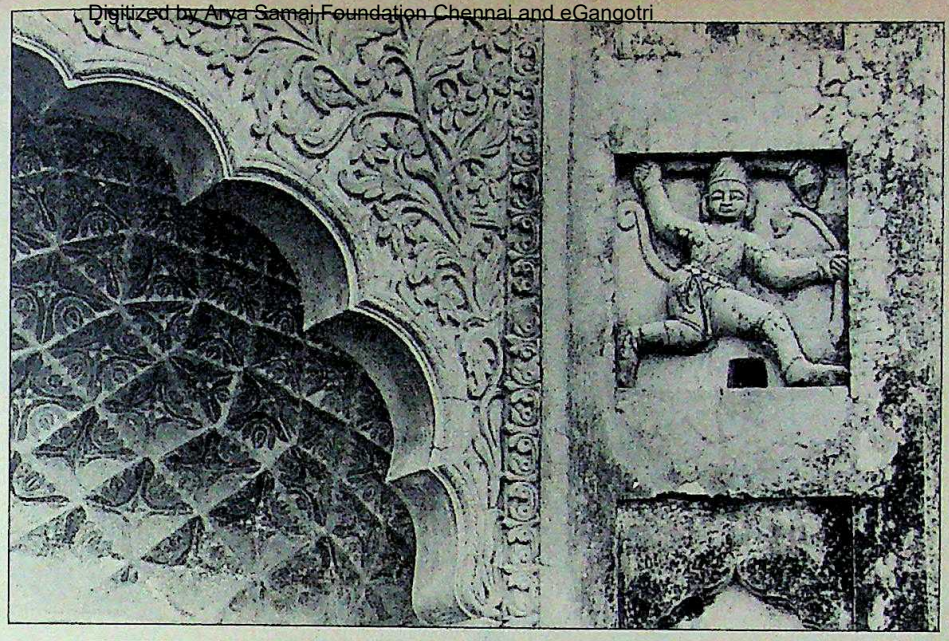

Part of the ornate temple door

ment the Aurangzeb theory.

All these records have been painstakingly preserved by the priests through the ages. The farmaan has been pasted on a thick brown paper to reinforce the original sheaf which had turned brittle and has cracked at the folds. It was translated by a local Muslim 15 years ago, according to Narayan Das. But the Hindi version is as conjectural as the folklore.

However, the document "appears genuine" "despite distortions which have taken place during its restoration", according to Irfaan Habib, chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research. He says that though the single-sheet royal decree has been touched up, introducing some inaccuracies, in its totality it is "a rare document".

After consultations with his colleagues at the Aligarh Muslim University's History Department, Athar Ali and Sheereen Moosvi, Habib translated the document. The royal decree directs officials to demarcate 330 bighas of land to be granted to Balak Das and says that the allotment is permanent and not subject to taxes. It adds that the rights are hereditary and names the eight villages from which the revenue was to go to the mahant. Also, the temple was to get one rupee daily from the market dues of the area for religious purposes. The document, which bears the seal of revenue minister Sayaadat Khan, has been penned by a scribe, Behramand Khan.

The major inaccuracy in the document is the invocation to God. Aurangzeb was the emperor who changed the *Allah-o-Akbar* invocation to *Bismillah-hir-Rehman-nir-Raheem*. The addition is done at a later date as this particular bit is written on a different piece of paper and pasted during the restoration.

The second distortion relates to the dates. The *zimn* (the back of the farmaan), traditionally written after the main text, has a date preceding the date on the main text. Habib brushes aside the two inaccuracies saying that a number of old documents were distorted by their owners who unsuccessfully tried to restore them. A few grammatical mistakes have also crept in for the same reason, he says.

However, the three experts say that the style and language of the royal

Chitrakoot residents express satisfaction about the temple's unusual origins. Perhaps this town holds a lesson for religious fundamentalists everywhere.

notice, the names of the Mughal officers and their seals confirm its authenticity. The order was termed "rare" and "valuable" because such grants, though commonplace in Akbar and Shah Jahan's time, were far and few during Aurangzeb's reign. "The most significant thing is that it was done by a man who is considered a destroyer of temples," adds Habib. Equally noteworthy is the fact that this document was a direct order from Aurangzeb though most of such grants were extended by their subedaars routinely.

BUT it is hard to confirm that the temple was built by Aurangzeb. The architecture of the temple is certainly Mughal. It is clearly reflected in the floral patterns on the entrance, the mosaic of criss-cross decoration under the two gateways and the domes. But such designs were profusely used in temples built during the time of Akbar and Shah Jahan and the practice continued till much later.

And though the Archaeological Survey of India is yet to initiate any action on the subject, the local population is convinced that the temple was built in 1683 or 1686, when Aurangzeb was in the Deccan. But history has no record of Aurangzeb visiting Chitrakoot which makes the folklore doubtful. The Tourism Department of the Uttar Pradesh Government, which boasts about Chitrakoot as a place of religious attraction in its glossy brochures, is also ignorant about the year in which the temple was built.

The only agency displaying interest in the temple is the Waqf Board which recently called Hafeezuddin Khan to Lucknow for information on the temple and its Mughal links. "They are making a list of all the temples which have received grants from Mughal emperors," Khan says, adding that the board wants to take up the issue with the Government. That is a reason for concern for whenever outside elements have meddled in religious matters, bickerings and tension have followed. The controversy raked up last year about the Krishna Janmabhoomi by Hindu fundamentalists is a case in point.

But, away from the intrigues of religio-political wranglings, Chitrakoot shows quiet satisfaction about its prized possession. Dwarka Prasad Saini, who has been visiting the Balaji temple daily for the last 65 years, says: "Go, and tell these Ayodhya people, our Thakurji lives in a temple built by Aurangzeb. No one fights here." Perhaps this modest little town holds a lesson for religious fundamentalists everywhere.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI in Chitrakoot

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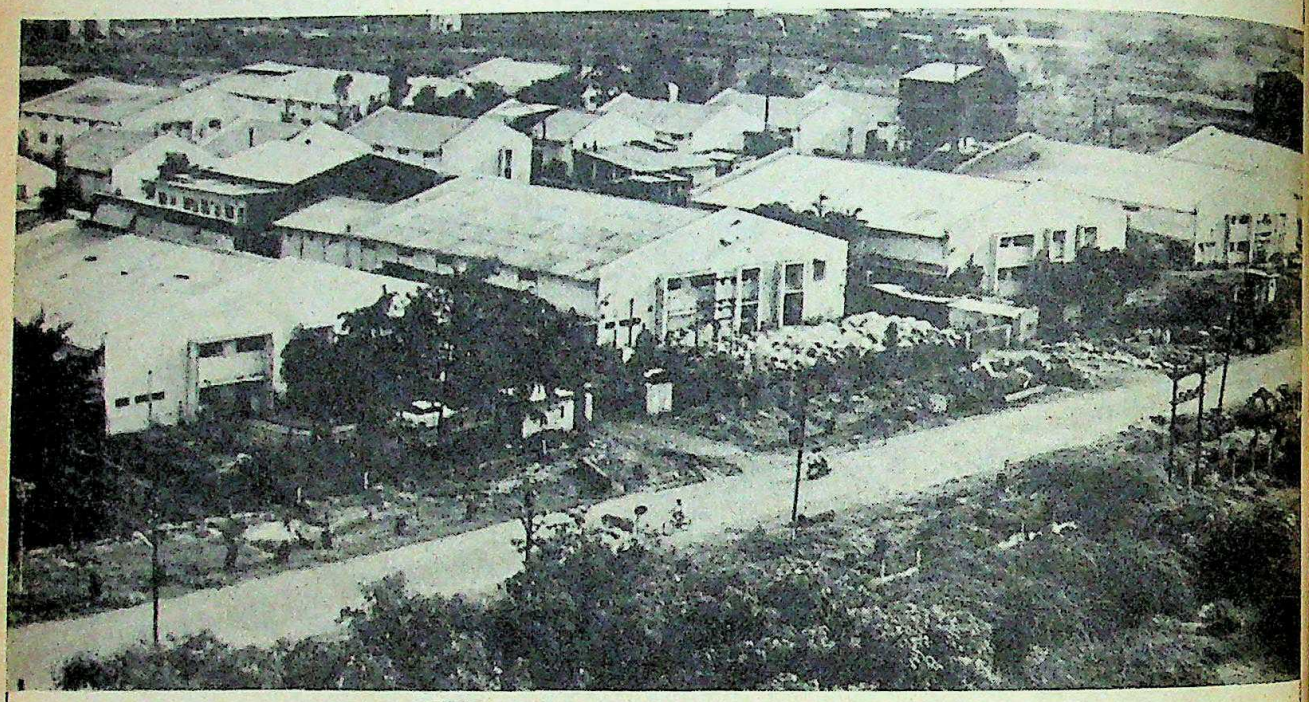

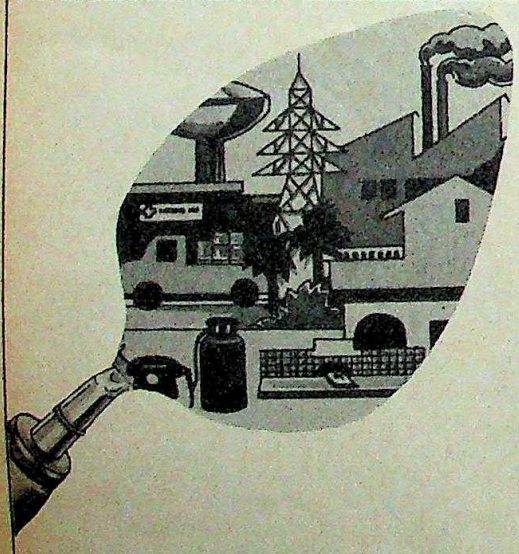

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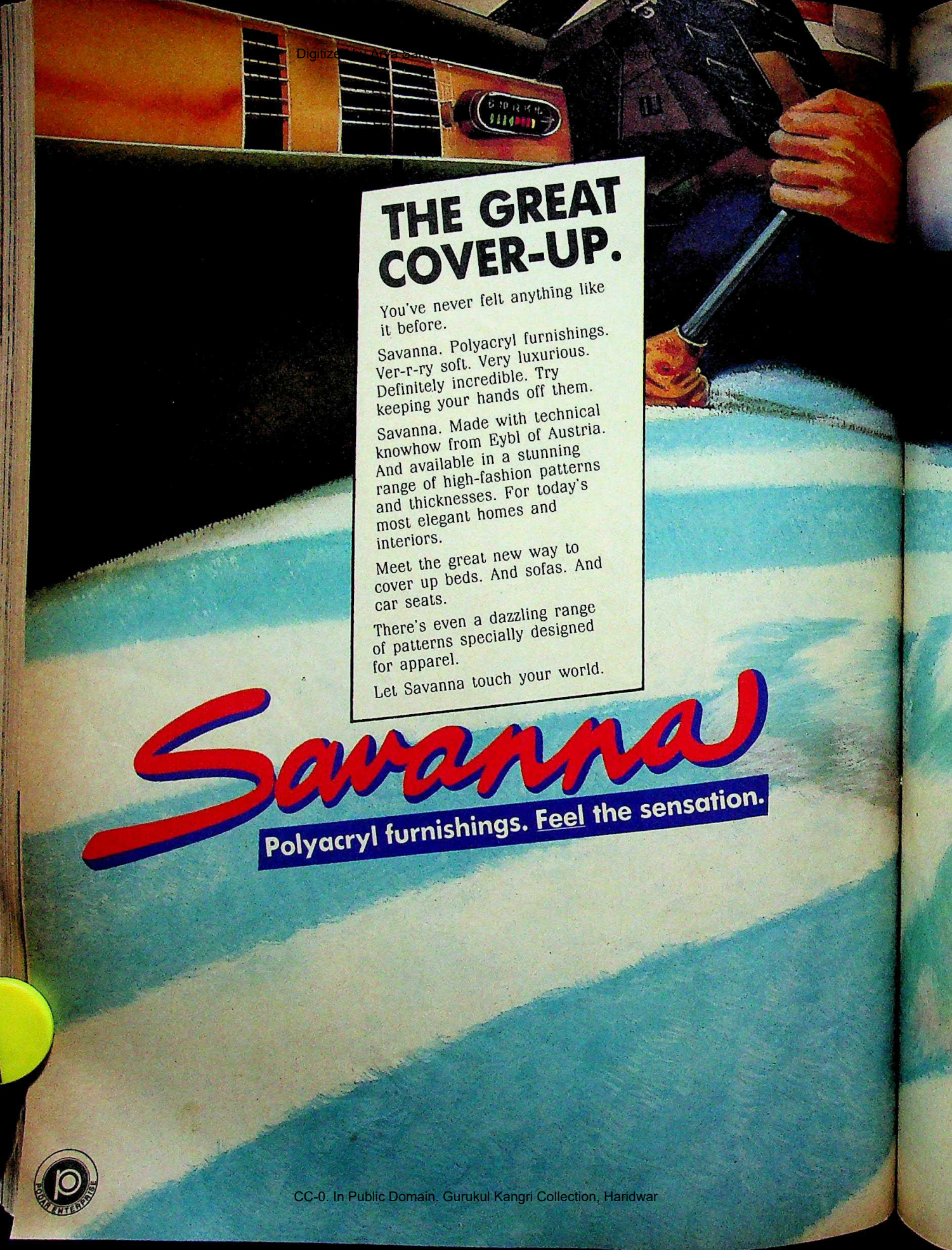

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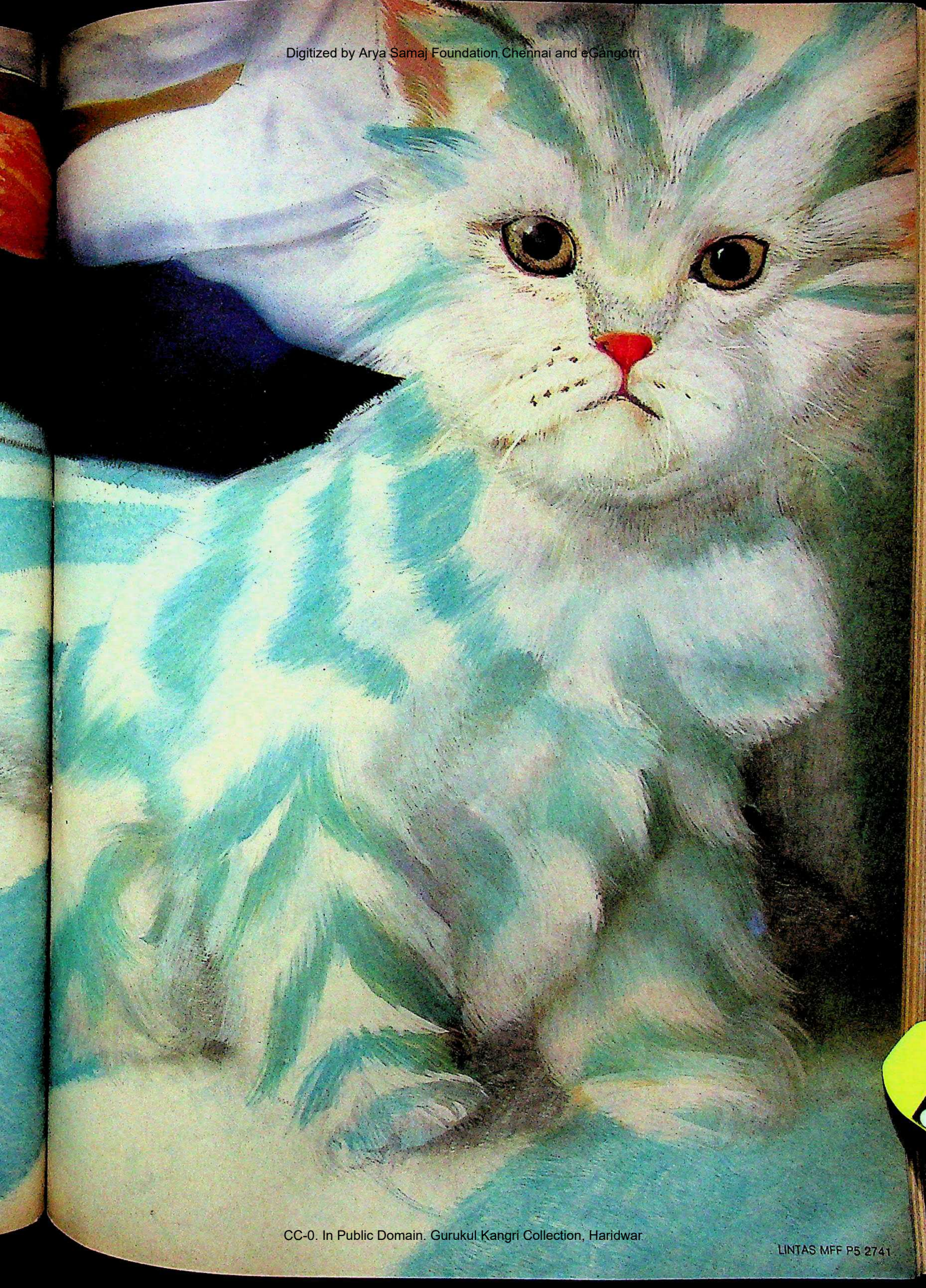

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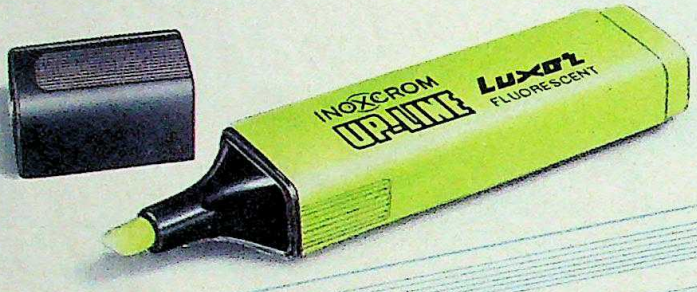

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THE NAVY

A Quantum Jump

The Viraat acquisition enhances coastline protection

THE most striking feature of the Indian Navy's latest warship, the 28,500 tonne aircraft carrier INS Viraat, is not so much its majestic size as its unusually designed aircraft launching ramp, the ski-jump. If the INS Vikrant, India's first aircraft carrier, resembles a floating airfield, the Viraat adds a touch of the exotic to the traditional flat take-off deck.

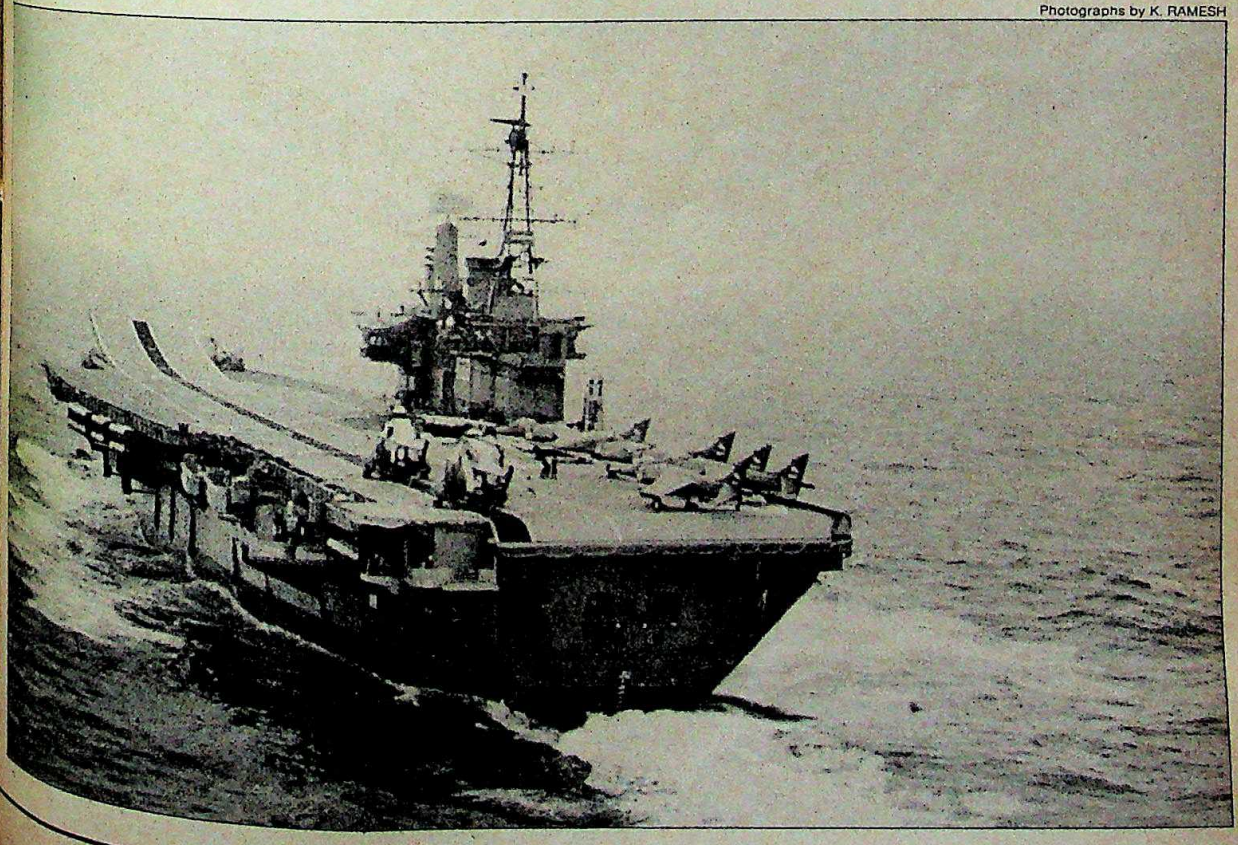
But the difference is not just on the surface. Larger in size, better designed and packing more power, the Viraat last fortnight, took over from the aging Vikrant the main role as the flagship of the Indian Navy's western fleet. "The threat at sea today is three-pronged—from submarines, from ships and from the air," says Admiral Ram H. Tahiliani, chief of the naval staff. "Viraat gives us greater capability on all fronts."

The acquisition of the Viraat has been in response to a long-standing demand of the Indian Navy for at least two aircraft carriers to protect the waters around India's coastline. The discovery of oil offshore increased the necessity of a mobile airfield, but though the plan for a second aircraft carrier was approved in 1964, invariably resources were lacking as the army and air force grabbed a major share of the defence budget. The navy also had to contend with the view that land-based aircraft could ensure control of the sea more economically. The Viraat, a formidable floating airfield capable of exercising control over a radius of 480 km, now confirms acceptance of the view that air defence cannot be integrated cheaply with ships through shore-based aircraft. "Systems studies have shown that an aircraft carrier is still a very cost effective weapon system in relation to shore-based airfields," says Vice-Admiral S. Jain, FOC-in-C Western Naval Command.

As a young naval aviator, Tahiliani was the first Indian to land a plane on the Vikrant after it was commissioned in May 1961. As admiral, he has won the battle for acquiring a second carrier. As the Viraat takes over, the Vikrant will be dry docked for two years, and extensively refitted, including the addition of a ski-jump. The Vikrant's Sea Harrier jets and Sea King helicopters will be transferred to the Viraat, and when the older carrier is operational again, new aircraft on order will be available for it. Nineteen Harriers and 20 Sea Kings have been ordered—the first helicopters will arrive at the end of this year, while the vertical take-off jets armed with Sidewinder air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles will be available from the end of 1988. Eventually, the Viraat will carry 30 aircraft on board—10 more than the Vikrant—and the planes will add a whopping Rs 400 crore to the carrier's total cost.

Viraat means "massive and majestic" but it is its emblem, an eagle holding five arrows symbolising all round weapons capability, which better signifies its operational advance over the Vikrant. The ski-jump, angled at 12 degrees, gives aircraft a height of 200 ft on take-off—far more than the 38 ft in Vikrant—giving the pilot more time to react in an emergency as the plane gets airborne. More importantly, the jets can take off with a higher payload, with more fuel, thereby increasing their range by one and a half times. Since the Harrier jet is

Photographs by K. RAMESH



INS Viraat at sea: a significant all-round weapons capability

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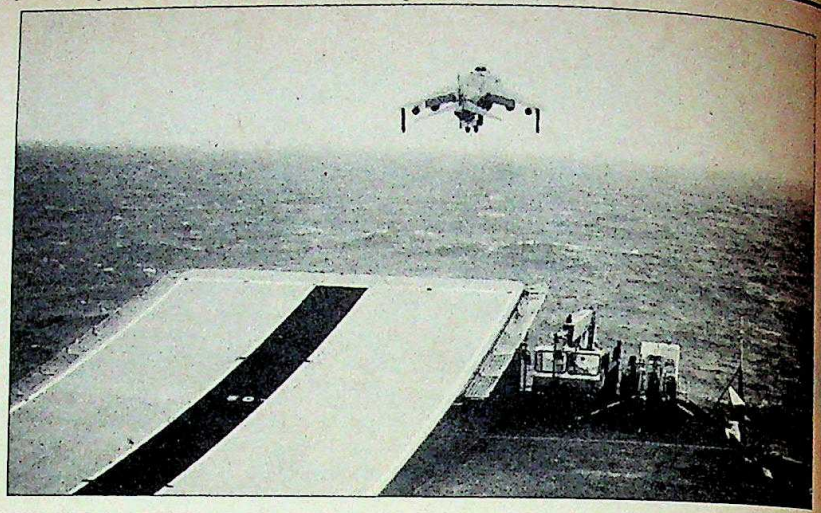
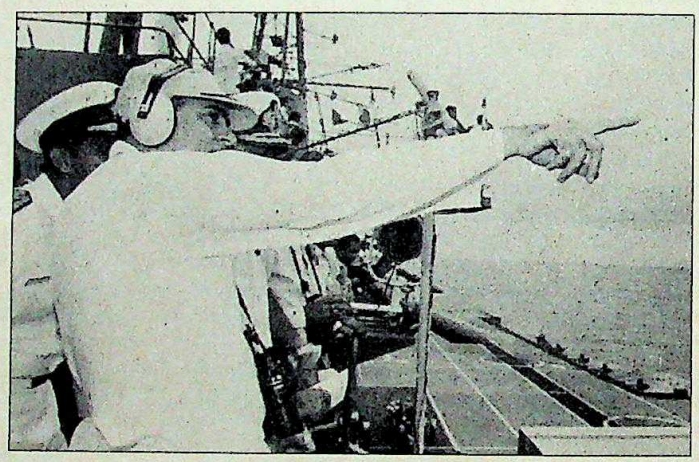
used for reconnaissance, interception and as a fighter, the increase in its range adds to the carrier's effectiveness.

Unlike in the Vikrant, the two lifts used for hauling the planes onto the deck from the giant hangar below do not obstruct aircraft taking off on the Viraat, since the ski-jump allows for a much shorter runway (the jets can take off from as little as 100 ft against the 580 ft in the Vikrant) and planes can be parked on deck even as others are getting airborne. Harriers, of course, are capable of vertical take off, but that burns up more fuel and decreases the payload by 25 per cent. Captain Vinod Pasricha, 45, says: "The Viraat is so designed that planes can take off every 20 seconds, which gives a significant advantage."





Ski-jump (above); and Rajiv inspecting the carrier: advanced design

The massive Sea King helicopters, three of which came along with the ship, also perform several diverse functions—anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surveillance (ASV) using Sea Eagle missiles against enemy ships, and for commando operations along coasts ferrying 24 fully armed men. As the Viraat's motto says; *Jalmev Yasya, Balmev Tasya* (The one who controls the sea is all powerful).

Though the sophisticated datalink was denied to the Indian Navy due to US restrictions, the Viraat has a new version of the computer-aided action information system (CAAIS), the modern DEPS DECK landing guidance system which gives total all weather capability, a remote-controlled unit for the main engine and a boiler room specially protected from nuclear fallout. For its own defence, the carrier has Sea Cat missiles and chaff aluminium foil decoys against cruise missiles. Pakistan, of course, has acquired the Exocet missiles used to deadly effect in the Falklands war, but Tahiliani feels that the effectiveness of the Exocet is exaggerated. "In the Gulf conflict, a study showed that of 104 Cruise missiles used 57 were on target-but mostly on small ships," he says.

The Indian Navy clearly sees the Viraat as a tactical warship exercising total control over the sea during a conflict, and not as a strategic carrier capable of penetrating enemy airspace over land, even though the Vikrant fulfilled this function with great success in the Bangladesh war. So the carrier's acquisition does not make up for the absence of an airborne early warning system, though defence experts feel it is only a matter of time before India goes in for some form of AWACS.

The acquisition of the Viraat was not without controversy. It was commissioned as the HMS Hermes in November 1959 but, after serving as an aircraft carrier in the Royal Navy's global operations, it was converted into a helicopter commando carrier in 1973. In 1982, a year after it was fitted with the 'ski-jump' ramp to allow for optimum use of the Sea Harriers, it gained its hour of glory—as the flagship of the British fleet in the Falklands war. It was then reassigned as a troop carrier, and finally dry-docked when it was offered to India more than two years ago. The Indian Navy jumped at the offer, and amidst criticism that too much was being paid for a ship that had been junked, it was acquired for Rs 130 crore, which included the price for spares, training and extensive refittings.

After year-long repairs in the Plymouth dry docks, the Hermes was commissioned as the INS Viraat on May 12, and arrived off the Bombay coast last fortnight to receive a 17-gun salute from the western fleet in the presence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Defence Minister K.C. Pant. Referring to questions on the wisdom of acquiring a second aircraft carrier, Rajiv emphasised it was necessary as the Vikrant would be dry-docked for a considerable time for refitting and repairs. "The time has come for us to think of designing and building our own aircraft carrier," he added.

That is just what a small group of officers at the naval design organisation have been doing for the last two years, but the project is still at a preliminary stage. But Tahiliani is confident India can build its own carrier. "Hopefully, in 10 years time, we will have our own, indigenously designed aircraft carrier, which will probably be built at the Cochin shipyard," he says. "We have the capability to build one, but we don't have enough designers, so we will need to take limited assistance from abroad."

The 750 ft long Viraat, manned by 1,500 personnel and with a maximum speed of 28 knots, is fully operational. After two weeks in Bombay, it will be exercising off the Goa and Cochin coasts. As the Hermes, it was considered lucky. Now, as Captain Pasricha says: "The British called it the Happy Hermes, and with us it will be the Very Happy Viraat."

—M. RAHMAN

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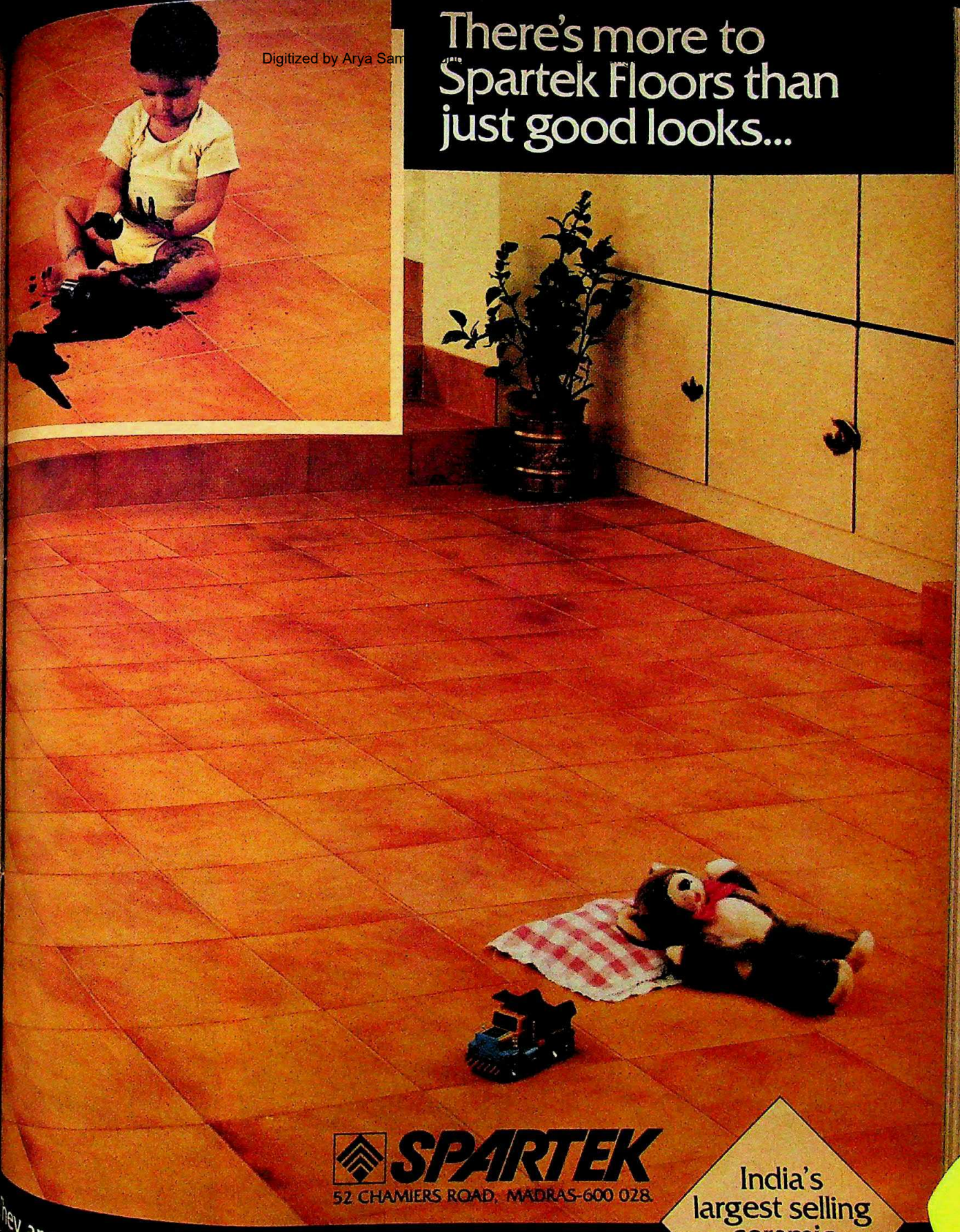

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NEW TRENDS

Political Pot-Boilers

The politician-goonda emerges as the new villain

ART is right on the heels of life. And life has begun to lead cinema down the mean streets of politics. The current celluloid villain is the politician-goonda. The hero turns Ramboesque—the discredited policeman, army officer or ordinary man and woman—and takes the law into his own hands. In the process, one message comes through—the police, bureaucrats and politicians are corrupt, and the law impotent. The only solution is the law of the jungle: eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.

Take a look at:

■ *Pratighaat*: The local goonda, a law unto himself, terrorises the whole town into submission. With his ascension to politics, blessed by a corrupt khadi-clad *neta* who sips gin-laced *nimboo pani*, his reign goes unchallenged. The nexus between the criminal and the politician is complete; the two have in fact, merged. And it is the law which is fettered.

Reality: The political landscape is dotted with criminals, who have won elections from jail.

■ *Awam*: A spy ring is out to "destabilise" India. A retired major-general has sold top-secret files on Super Hunter planes to a "foreign" power, represented by a young French mata hari. A powerful cabinet minister, formerly a freedom fighter, leads the group code-named Friends of India. They have plans to assassinate the *mahamantri* (a thin disguise for the prime minister) and plunge India into confusion. The minister for defence purchases has a Swiss bank account.

Reality: The smoking guns of Bofors. The case of the Larkins brothers which actually inspired director B.R. Chopra. De-stabilisation is, in fact, the refrain in Parliament. And Swiss bank accounts have now entered the vocabulary of children; as have kickbacks.

■ *Satyamev Jayate*: A tough and angry cop, shades of *Dirty Harry*, in his pursuit of brown sugar smugglers, reaches dangerously close to powerful politicians—there are several references to the minister in New Delhi. But he is constantly transferred: from city to tehsil, to traffic to special branch.

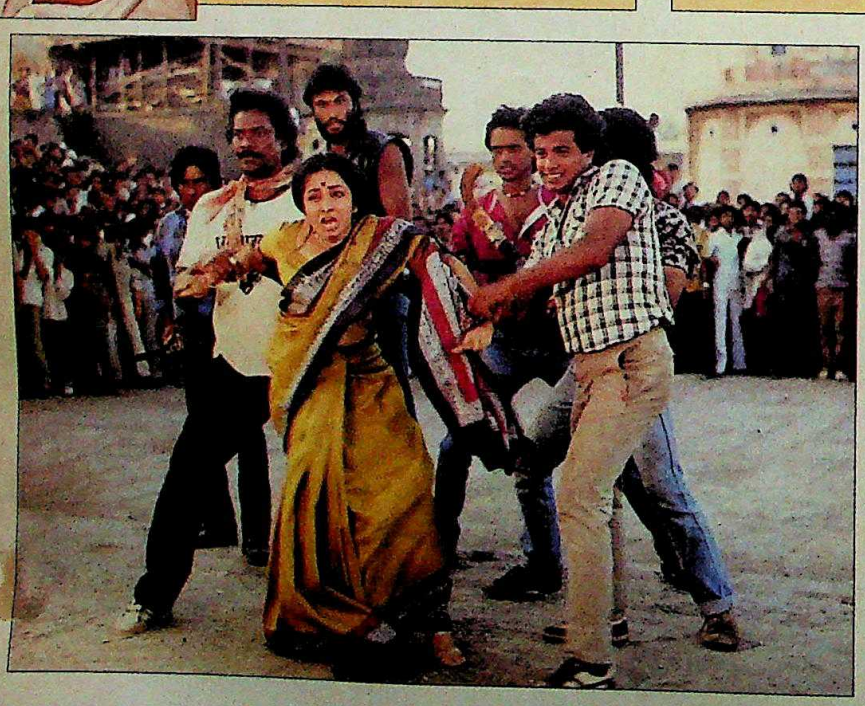
■ *Hiraasat*: The idealistic, honest policeman, also on the trail of the brown sugar men, is framed and sacked from the service. Those *netas* again, and New Delhi loom menacingly in the background. He, however, fights the system from the outside.

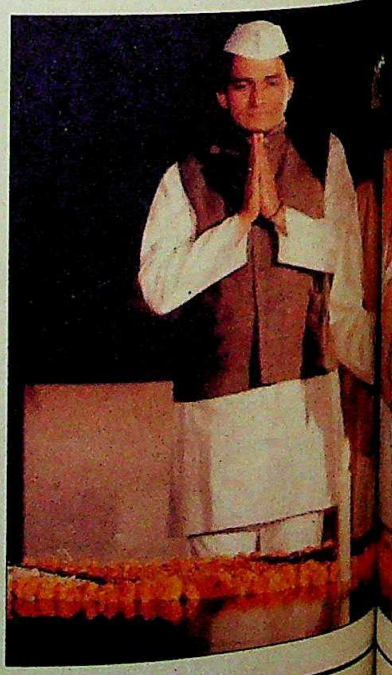
■ *Shahenshah*: The hero is a bumbling, bribable cop during the day. At night, he metamorphoses into the lethal shahenshah and settles scores with criminals. Once again, the policeman goes outside the system—corrupt to the core and corrupt all the way to the top—to fight injustice.

Reality: The routine transfers of upright policemen and bureaucrats who dare to raise the voice of protest. An every

"My incidents are from real life and my villains are true to life. In Indian politics, the line between politicians and goondas is fast disappearing."
N. CHANDRA

"*Awam* is political; ministers are involved. It is about corruption in high places. But it is an entertainment film. Art is not politics."
B.R. CHOPRA, *director*





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SHAHENSHAH

Overtones

IT's a strange night. The light is blue. From this nocturnal mist emerges a tall, lanky, black-swathed figure, an upmarket Zorro. The righter of wrongs. The credits unroll to the score of *Andheri raat me*. Amitabh Bachchan in night gear is Shahenshah. The creature of the night who protects the poor; ravishes the rich and politically crooked.

Shahenshah, Tinnu Anand's Rs 1.75-crore film, to be released later this year, would have been just another of the gargantuan, films with The Star proving yet again that there is nobody to challenge him in the *maidan* of histrionics. Curiosity is further tickled by the fact that the film is Bachchan's come-back vehicle. But the star-crossed, real-life role of the former MP casts unwelcome shadows over his celluloid personage. There are unexpectedly ironic double entendres in the script.

For instance: "There are two kinds of laws in this country: one for the rich and one for the poor."

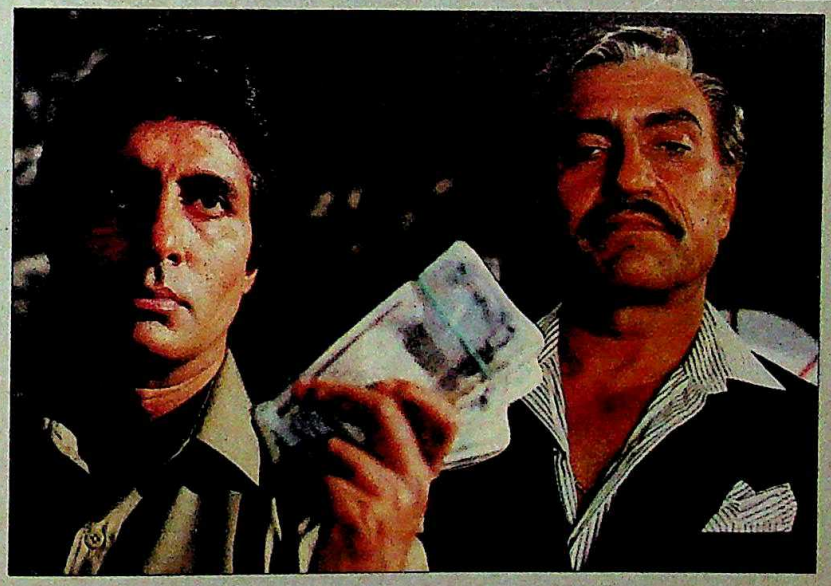
Or: "The politician has turned the law into a whore and sent it to the *kotha* (whore house). And the policeman has helped him send it there." The only real justice is out of court. In the Shahenshah's *adalat*. As he says himself.

Good clap-inspiring dialogue. But from the mouth of one in the dock for his brother's alleged sins, the words may just boomerang. And in the climax, the saviour drags the villain back to the court which has freed him and orders the judge to try him again. For charges of land-grabbing, bribery, corruption. The list sounds familiar.

In the world outside, people like columnist M.V. Kamath and lawyer Ram Jethmalani have called for a boycott of the film. Bachchan's releases which have suddenly inundated halls (*Mr Natwarlal*, *Don*) and the new audio cassette of his dialogues are doing well. And Tinnu Anand is optimistic: "We're living in very political times. But those who see Amitabh's films know that he's well-off. And they accept it. When you switch off the lights in the halls, you switch off your personal connection, and get involved with the character on screen."

—MADHU JAIN

"We're living in very political times. But those who see Amitabh's films know that he's well-off. And they accept it."
TINNU ANAND, *director*



Amitabh in *Shahenshah*: ironic role

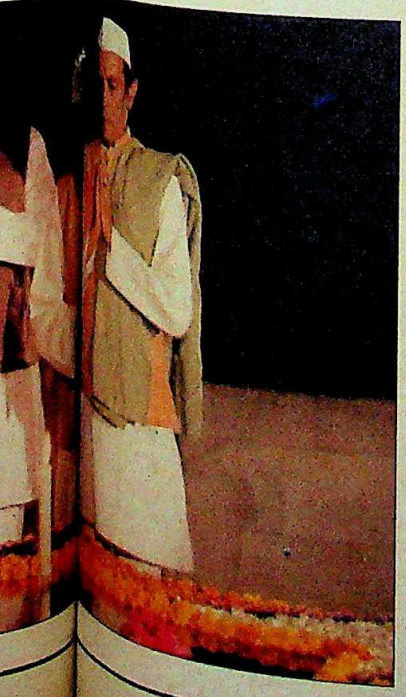
affair in many states, but witnessed on the highest rungs too as with V.P. Singh, former Union minister of finance, who was transferred to defence following his alleged pursuit of the Fairfax affair.

Cinema, then, is losing some of its sly flat. The mirror now held to the times is not always glazed, the glass not all that clear. The winds of cynicism brought the theme of political vendetta to the "other" cinema a few years ago. Govind Nihalani's *Ardh Satya*, about a discredited policeman humiliated into killing the powerful local politician-dada, was the trendsetter. Says director Tinnu Anand, whose *Shahenshah* is partly cast in the same mould: "It started with *Ardh Satya* and became effective with *Pratighaat*. The script-writers took off from here."

Nihalani isn't surprised: "Since *Ardh Satya* was successful, it influenced commercial cinema. The strength of commercial cinema is that it picks up elements, of various cinema which have caught the imagination of the audience. These are rendered larger-than-life. And then these become the new stereotypes."

Vendetta by itself has been the basic formula for a long time. *Sholay* gave that formula a hallowed status. The Salim-Javed script team made their millions with it. And it was from this springboard that Amitabh Bachchan was catapulted to super-stardom in the '70s. For a decade that formula persisted: from *Sholay* to *Shahenshah*, both with Amitabh. The only

Stills from *Pratighaat* (left); and *Awam*: law of the jungle



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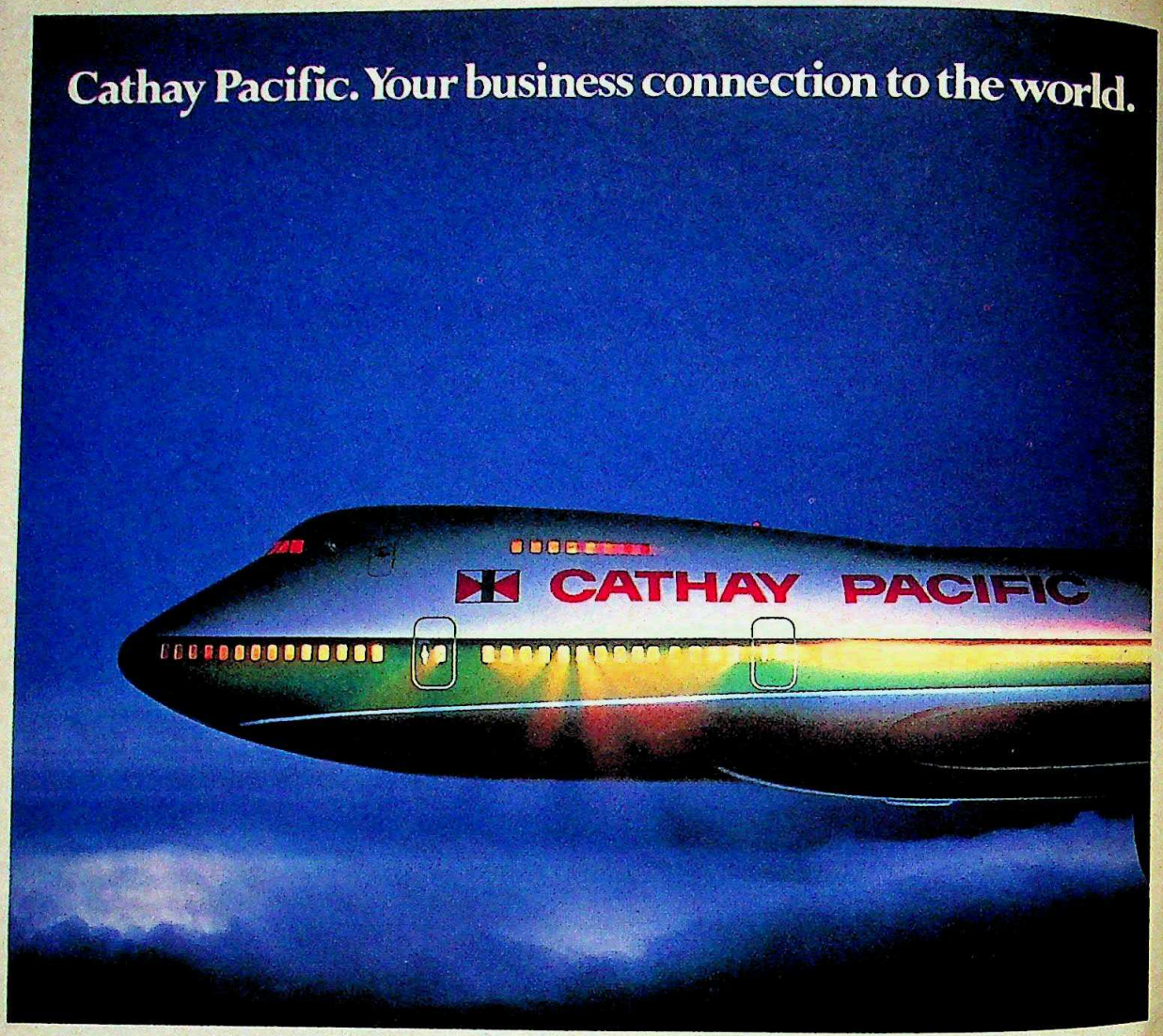

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"Commercial cinema's strength is that it uses aspects of serious cinema and renders them larger-than-life."
GOVIND NIHALANI, *director*

"*Pratighaat* is real unlike those pseudo-radical films. It's a teacher's whack on us, with our pants down."
SURESH JINDAL, *producer*

difference being that the *daku* has now been replaced by the politician-goonda. And that politics is the new *masala* providing the bite to cinema and drawing in the crowds.

The new villain is the natural product of the cinema of the '70s. Says producer Suresh Jindal: "The orphan who is looked after by the local mafia boss and who becomes a smuggler in the countless lost-and-found films starring Amitabh during this decade has today, grown up to become the politician. Chandra in *Pratighaat* has taken off from here. Now the mafia boss *is* the MP."

There was political vendetta in large measure in *Inquilab*: when Amitabh Bachchan shoots the entire cabinet. There also was the ersatz-political film *Aaj Ka MLA* with Rajesh Khanna (strangely enough, life followed art: Bachchan actually became an MP and Khanna is more than testing political waters). But both the films flopped at the box-office. Politics here was only mild seasoning. The strongest winds of change originally came from the South. *Pratighaat* is a re-make of a Telugu film produced by *Enadu*'s Ramoji Rao. *Andha Kanoon*, *Akhri Raasta*, *Inquilab* have

N. CHANDRA

"Politician is like a goonda"

THE little man with the Midas touch. All producers' paths now lead to N. Chandra. Last year, when multi-starrers and block-busters fell like nine pins, he hit the jackpot with his Rs 12 lakh and starless, Ankush. *He did it again this year with* Pratighaat *which—despite the low budget and absence of stars—hit a bigger jackpot: almost Rs 8 crore. The magic ingredients for such phenomenal success: political* masala *and the riveting creation of the politician-goonda persona. The raw stuff of life in other words. Principal Correspondent* MADHU JAIN *spoke to him in Bombay. Excerpts:*

Q. *How do you explain the phenomenal success of your films ?*

A. My incidents are from real life; and my villains are true to life. In Indian politics, the line between politicians and goondas is fast disappearing. The movement has been mutual: the goonda is becoming more like a politician and the politician more like a goonda. In the interiors, there are so many known goondas with murder charges who stand for polls from jails—and win.

Q. *Such as.*

A. Well in Bombay, Thapa from the Shiv Sena who had several murder charges against him was elected. In Ahmedabad, Abdul Latif was elected while in jail. In Bihar, there is Suraj Deo Singh.

Q. *Why do they get elected?*

A. It is to do with power-gathering and the money that comes with it. For power, politicians need goondas; they need them for booth-capturing or terrorising voters. Goondas then begin to realise how it works. Eventually

they become politicians. Take Latif—the Muslims think that he's their messiah and so don't bother about what he does.

Q. *Are political films the answer?*

A. Political Hindi films won't work we were told. But *Pratighaat* broke that rule. Love angles were essential. Well, my films don't have any romantic songs. The images are now breaking. We've found a new villain, the politician-goonda. People no longer have any faith in the law or in the police. So they go to the politician or to the goonda.

Q. *Isn't the hero today becoming more like a villain?*

A. The difference between them is that today's hero does bad things for good causes—the ends justify the means. And the villain does bad things for bad causes.

Q. *What about the rise in violence? Is that a reason for your films' success?*

A. Quantity-wise I have less. And whatever there is, is close to the truth. When the goonda-politician kills the police inspector, the violence looks very real. My fight scenes are ordinary with no gimmicks are and so, are more real. And more threatening.

Q. *There appears to be a strong feminist line in your films. The message that comes across is that only women have guts.*

A. Yes. There's so much hatred in society. Only a woman can extract some humanity from people. Because a woman is warm. In *Pratighaat*, the heroine Laxmi takes on the image of Kali. She becomes a mythical figure in killing the politician-goonda, Kali.

Q. *What kind of films inspire you?*

A. I'm not interested in films that don't reach the masses or treat their problems. I make films from what I've seen. Just look at the papers—there's a Kali in every town.

Q. *How long will this politician-goonda syndrome last?*

A. A few years, until the sincerity goes. This formula has become very popular. It gives the needed drama. The more the odds against the hero the greater the drama. It's never one to one. And the politician-goonda is even more powerful: the police and the law are in his pocket.

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southern first editions. K. Balachander's new Tamil film, *Acham Ellai* has the wife stabbing her corrupt politician husband in the climax scene, after she garlands him at a public meeting.

The importance of *Pratighaat*, which is pulling in rickshawalas and business executives alike, is that it offers the raw slices of unpalatable life without much garnishing other than the loud volumes of violence and heavy dose of symbolism. There are no redeeming frills. Says her foot, Durga-like on the stomach of the slayed demon-politician, she enters the realm of the mythical. The audience is charged at an even deeper level. Or, when Vinod Khanna or Shatrughan Sinha (*Satyamev Jayate* and *Hiraasat*) take the law, literally by its collar, the audience lustily cheers them on.

But more worrying is the fact that the best-selling films are not alone in cashing in on the prevailing mood of total disillusionment. Many regional scythes are only aimed at sex and violence. The dangerous signals from these films get through. Lawlessness is lauded as a virtue. And anarchy portrayed as a natural outcome in a society in which the law is impotent and the institutions corrupt. These films find a welcome response in an increasingly frustrated population. Dr Saryu Doshi, member of the board of censors is worried about this trend: "There is a strong simmering of discontent under the surface. If you are unemployed and see the consumer society, you chop off the hand not only for the diamonds, but because of anger."

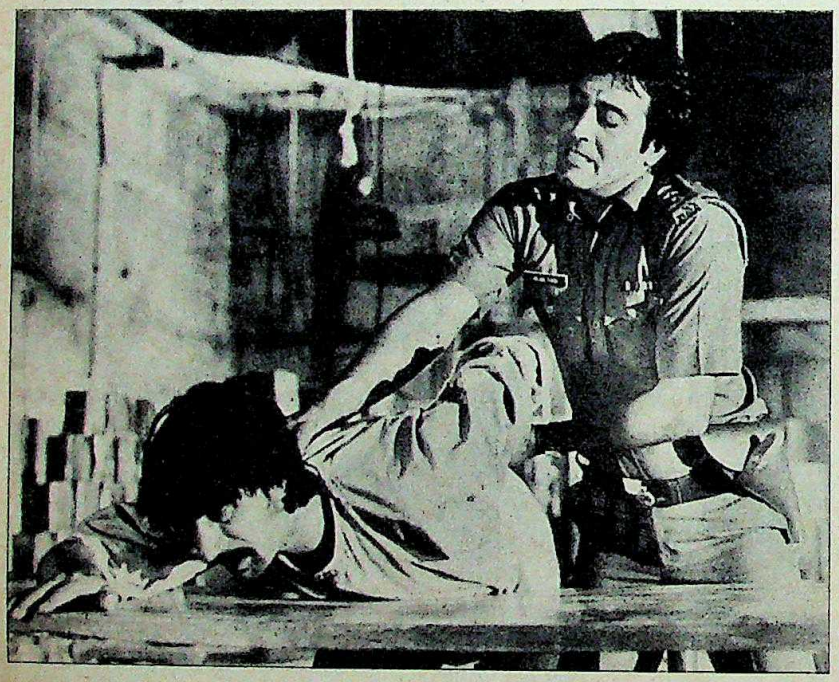
When Vinod Khanna in Raj Sippy's *Satyamev Jayate* or Shatrughan Sinha take the law by its collar, the audience lustily cheers them on.

Strangely enough, the vendetta is also an import. It came in rather innocuously with the video-school of film making in the '70s. Script-writers in air-conditioned Juhu hotels did not need pen and paper; it was more like a compilation of video clips from all the Rambos, Death Wishes and Dirty Harrys. But since the last three or four years, these films have become dangerously relevant. They began to strike deep chords among the people, both up and down the social ladder. And strange alchemies began to happen. Says the ever iconoclastic producer, Amit Khanna: "The theme now is public vigilante. The Arun Shouries are being converted into Rambos. And Rambo is a convenient way of being anti-establishment."

Truth has to be dressed up for the big screen—even though in *Pratighaat* it was *au naturel*. Says movie moghul B.R. Chopra: "*Awam* is political; ministers are involved. It is about corruption in high places. But it is an entertainment film and we have given an emotional slant to it. Art is not politics. The problem with something like Bofors is that if you try to become factual, it becomes a films division sort of documentary. We all know about Bofors. So what else is new?"

Art and life then, are crossing swords more often today. But the cruel irony is that, while 40 years of Independence is being celebrated, cinema has begun to lament what has been done with that Independence. The freedom fighter-turned-traitor (*Awam*), or turned dope smuggler (*Hiraasat*), is becoming a familiar screen character. In this cinema, Independence is being mortgaged, though not necessarily to Swiss banks. And, there is no room for idols. If one were to look at the big screen as a crystal ball, the future would reveal many more perfectly ordinary people like Laxmi in *Pratighaat*, "killing metropolitan councillors and ministers".

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay



Satyamev Jayate: bitter truths

Jindal: "This is much more of a real film than those pseudo-radical films which are like pacifiers in a baby's mouth. *Pratighaat* is a whack by a teacher on us, with our pants down."

If, as Jindal says, popular cinema is "seismographing" the times, the richter scale is indeed showing alarming readings. The rumblings of discontent below could shake the foundations of the system and of society. When Laxmi (played by Sujata Mehta), the rather sweet teacher—bindi, plait, nice sari, the girl-you-can-take-home-to-mother—hacks the poilitician-goonda (played to perfection by Charan Raj), with an axe in *Pratighaat*, the spectators' gut approval is disturbingly tangible. And when she puts films are also encouraging the descent to the streets for justice. The message: the ends justify the means, never mind however illegal, bloody, or cruel. Under the guise of various liberation movements, the heroes take the law into their own hands. Every time they kill the excuse is that the police is ineffective. Robin Hood has dug in his heels. Robbers are all right if they distribute the money to the poor. In this new morality the smuggler or crook is forgiven his crimes and trespasses because of the "social injustice" done to him in his childhood.

The censors are being inundated by films advocating a call to arms. But their

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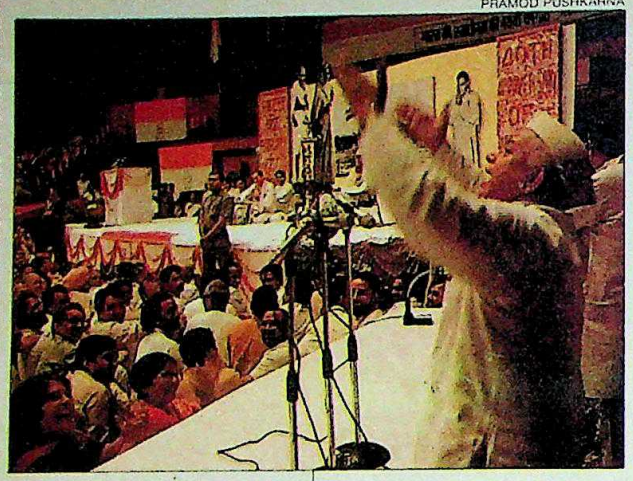


Tiwari: musical passion

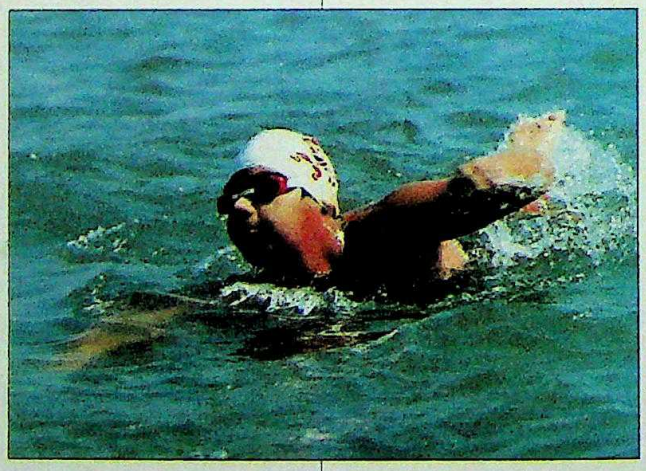
◆ India ought to have been the star of the Independence Day Celebratory Show. But the real discovery: Finance Minister **N.D. Tiwari.** In true K.L. Saighal style he warbled: "*Hame to shauk hai, shauk hai, shauk hai...jail khana*" (we have a passion for, a passion for, a passion for...the jailhouse). Tiwari's *desi* jailhouse rock had the political bigwigs, including the prime minister, clapping and swaying along. Says Tiwari: "During pre-Independence, I was in jail. In these romantic days of my youth, I used to write patriotic songs." Here's hoping his next budget is in the same key.

◆ **Nusli Wadia**, 43, could well be Bombay Dyeing's new model. After his arrest last fortnight on a trivial charge, the textile tycoon has become the new media pin-up. Now, unsolicited portraits have arrived in media offices showing Wadia as a well-heeled family man. So, whose style was it anyway? The wife, the rumour mills churned. Maureen, of course, indignantly denied the fact: "The photographs used earlier were 10 to 15 years old. So the company must've had the new ones sent out." Either way, Bombay's dyeing to change the boss's image.

Wadia's: family portrait

◆ One water baby has returned while the other has gone to more distant shores. **Arti Pradhan**, 16, the youngest Asian to swim the English Channel, is back after her feat, following in the wake of **Anita Sood**, 22, who did the crossing in 8 hours and 15 minutes—the fastest timing by an Asian, male or female.

Pradhan has been swimming since the age of six and has always harboured ambitions to test international waters.



Arti: water baby

"Since there was no way I could have done this on short distance courses, I had set my sights, long ago, on swimming the Channel," she says.

◆ Parsi parodies make her angry. After helplessly watching screen and stage caricatures from the wings, **Vijaya Mehta**, the ebullient high priestess of theatre, intends to correct the picture of all those bumbling *bawajis*. "I have been married to a Parsi for 20 years and I think I understand the nuances of their life-style better than most film makers. The Parsis have not been represented on screen in their true colours." With a cast headed by **Naseeruddin Shah** and the versatile **Shabana Azmi**, she has made *Pestonji*, penned by screen editor, B.K. Karanjia. It is her third cinematic venture and Nasir's second Parsi celluloid incarnation. Quite a rich *dhansak* this.

Shabana and (inset) Mehta: Parsi role

SIGNPOST

■ **Died: Romesh Thapar**, 65, editor of *Seminar*, of a cardiac seizure; **Samar Sen**, 71, editor of *Frontier*, of an arteries ailment; and **G.K. Reddy**, 64, political correspondent of *The Hindu*, of cancer.

Thapar, a crusader for media freedom, was president of the Editor's Guild of India and authored several books on Indian media. Sen, a radical litterateur and journalist of repute, penned powerful prose against the establishment and in favour of the have-nots. Reddy, a respected political scribe was known for his enviable sources and his day-before stories.

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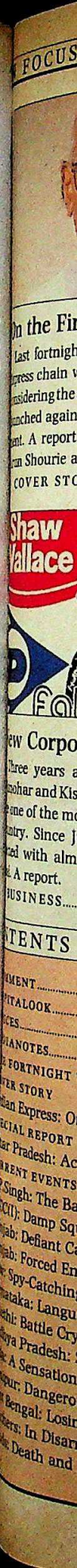

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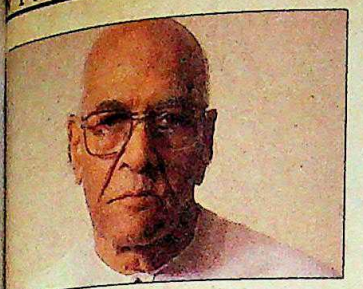

On the Firing Line

Last fortnight's raids against the Indian Express chain were not entirely unexpected considering the all-out offensive the paper has launched against the Rajiv Gandhi Government. A report and interviews with Editor Arun Shourie and proprietor R.N. Goenka.

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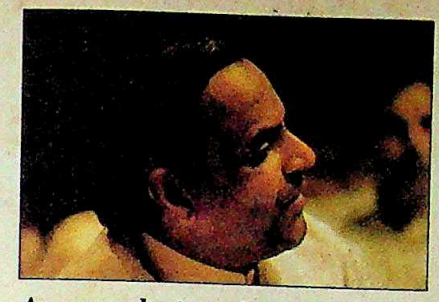

Accumulating Assets

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh has become embroiled in controversial property deals in Gorakhpur and Lucknow, even as probes show that his family has grown from penury to affluence during his 20-year political career. An exclusive report.

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The Bhopal Bonanza

The Bhopal gas tragedy is turning out to be a bonanza for fly-by-night operators, doctors, lawyers, officials, self-styled social workers and petty politicians as the Government and Union Carbide pump in huge amounts of money into the city.

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New Corporate Sheikhs

Three years ago, nobody had heard of Mohar and Kishore Chhabria. Today, they are one of the most important groups in the country. Since June, they have been connected with almost every major corporate deal. A report.

BUSINESS 102

A Family Concern

Four writ petitions filed in the Andhra Pradesh High Court last fortnight, charging Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao with corruption, have once again raked up the controversial dealings of his family. An investigation into the charges.

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Crowding Tinsel Town

The dream machine has started to attract a new breed of stars—children. Suddenly, child stars are swarming cinema and television like locusts, encouraged by their parents whose sole vocation it is to manage their child's film careers. A report.

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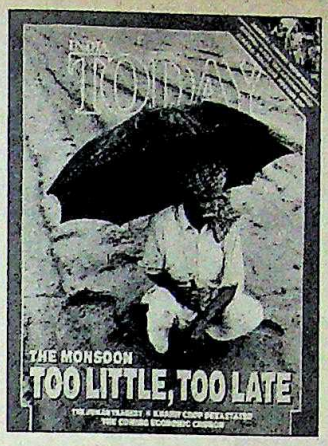

DRY DISASTER

Your cover story ("The Devastating Drought", September 15) is a grim reminder of the country's dependence on monsoons for its agricultural success. In a recent address, Rajiv talked of 'improved irrigation and watershed management'. Yet these are long-term measures and require heavy capital. A viable alternative for some areas, which most of our planners seem to have neglected, is the use of dry farming methods.

Delhi — **S. VAIDYA**

■ The severe drought in many parts of the country can partly be attributed to large-scale deforestation. In Malnad in Karnataka, widespread eucalyptus planting for commercial gain and deforestation has prevented natural ground water collection. This area, which once had four months of unabated rainfall, now has no drinking water.

Bangalore — **RAMANAND SHARMA**

■ The drought situation in the country is indeed grim, but not entirely without hope. If we all pool resources, especially those of us who are better off, we can help mitigate the sufferings of our less fortunate countrymen.

Bombay — **A.M. PAI**

■ Instead of imposing a drought tax which could cause public resentment, it would be more effective if 1 per cent of the monthly salary of every worker is deducted as a voluntary contribution.

London — **AJIT RAMCHANDANI**

■ Fell forests and reap drought. This is the punishment we have to face for the Government's "development" programmes which are not backed by sound thinking. Isn't it time the Government restructured its policies?

Agra — **SANJAY E. SILAS**

■ It is a pity that though the Government wastes crores of rupees every year in an attempt to contain the drought problem, it has not arrived at any long-term solution. It is a measure of the Government's failure that it has not been able to ease the misery of people over the years.

Bombay — **ROBIN PALARAMB**

■ The survey of the drought situation in Gujarat did not fully reflect the actual extent of disaster in the state. It was far worse than what was described, especially in parts of Kutch and Saurashtra.

Baroda — **SUJAL OLA**

VIOLENT FARE

After reading the story on new trends in cinema ("Political Pot-Boilers", September 15), I was tempted to see the movie *Pratighaat*. Witnessing the violence and the brutal murders left me shaken. Even in reality the law-enforcers are impotent in dealing with criminals. Justice can be obtained, if at all, only by one's own efforts.

New Delhi — **A. G. AJWANI**

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

The stringent measures taken by the US Embassy in granting visas ("Visa Wait", September 15) are a boon in disguise. It may well help to check the outflow of people who have utilised the resources of this poor nation to serve another country for monetary gain.

Kota — **RAJENDRA JAIN**

■ Having been refused a student visa to study in India many years ago, it is hard to be sympathetic to the Indian students who are rejected by the US Embassy. At least the applications are processed promptly. In my case, after nine months and several costly trips to the Indian consulate in New York, I was turned away with a terse one-liner.

Delhi — **J. STEWART**

MASTER VOCALIST

Your write-up on Pandit Bhimsen Joshi ("The Master's Voice", September 15) made absorbing reading and the photographs were superb. It is hoped such excellent pieces will continue.

Jaipur — **B. SRIDHAR**

■ Some errors have crept into your article. To begin with, Bhimsen Joshi is not the only living doyen of the Kirana

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Gharana—Pandit Firoz Dastur, Gangubai Hangal and Hirabai Barodekar are others. Sawai Gandharva's surname was Kundgolkar and not Kundolkar. Besides, Vitthal is another name for Lord Krishna and not Shiva. And Bhimsen Joshi's wife's name is Vatsala and not Lakshmi.

Madras — ASHWIN BHANDARKAR

SWEATING IT OUT

Power cuts seem to be the special privilege of Delhi residents ("Power Hungry", September 15). The other metros do not have half as many cuts despite a national power grid which is supposed to equalise load-shedding between different regions. To make things worse, in my colony, DESU has the street lights on in broad daylight while we swelter without electricity at home.

New Delhi — I.J.S. BASSI

APPALLING SCANDAL

With the stench of corruption pervading the Bofors issue ("Unresolved Controversy", September 15), it is imperative that all the opposition members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha resign en bloc. This is the only way that they can express their disgust at the manner in which this scandal has been debated in the Parliament. Since the ruling party members will only want to protect their position, at least their opponents should take a moral stand on the issue.

New Delhi — C.A. REDDI

ACE MANIPULATOR

Your article shows that Bir Bahadur Singh will take desperate measures to get out of the political soup he is in ("Shock and Resignation", September 15). Hiking perks and salaries of MLAs at a time when the state is suffering from severe drought is an unthinkable luxury. The chief minister's only priority is to display winning cards in the face of the Centre's losing deck.

New Delhi — SHARAD RAJ

A NEW DESCRIPTION

In the story on video ads ("New Pitch", September 15) I have been referred to as the head of Mudra Communications. The company is, however, headed by A.G. Krishnamurthy who is its chairman and managing director. I am the vice-president.

Bombay — SAM BALSARA

RAISING A LAUGH

The Last Word column ("Deluge of Letters", September 15) is one of the best pieces of humour that I have come across in a long time now. The letter from 'Lost' Chadha to Rajiv Gandhi was particularly priceless!

Ajmer — DIPAK DEVA

REVEALING POLL

The amount of information collected and presented in the opinion poll ("Battered Victor", August 31) is remarkable. The analysis was accurate and showed some significant results. I was pleasantly surprised to find Lal Bahadur Shastri rated as the best prime minister of India. He deserves this.

Karnal — R.M. GUPTA

EXONERATED

Your report "Kicking up a Row" (August 31) was on the whole a balanced piece, but I must take strong exception to the statement that I have "had a previous record of being charged with forgery" in connection with the Chester Bowles case.

When you mentioned the charge, you should in all fairness have also mentioned that the documents were published by *Current*, another weekly, and not by *Blitz*. You should have stated that I was acquitted by the trial as well as the appeal courts.

Morarji Desai, then chief minister, decided to arrest both Dosu Karaka, editor of *Current*, and myself on charges of organising a forgery and planting it. I was the first to repudiate the Chester Bowles letter as "forgery most foul", challenge the chief minister's vendetta as motivated and offer myself for the trial that followed. I was acquitted and totally exonerated by the chief presidency magistrate of Bombay and finally by Mr Justice M.C.Chagla of the Bombay High Court, to which the Government went in appeal.

Bombay — R.K. KARANJIA
Editor-in-Chief, Blitz

HILARIOUS DRAMA

"The National Stage" (August 31) was a superb article. The fantastic cartoons coupled with minute observations of the Parliament's proceedings in true burlesque style made really splendid reading.

Chandigarh — TAJINDER KAUR

SHIELDING THE GUILTY

The article on the Delhi riots ("A Reluctant Inquiry", August 31) reveals the futility of government inquiry committees. It is widely known that it was the Congress(I) and its lumpen elements who were behind the genocide. Such a thing would not have happened in Mrs Gandhi's reign.

New Delhi — ABHAY ARJUN SAPRU

NEW IS NICER

Although old is said to be gold ("Driving into Trouble", August 31), the new generation cars are superior in design, quality and fuel efficiency to the earlier cars. Scope has, however, to be left for teething troubles. And users have to be geared for a more sensitive driving style and maintenance schedule.

Pana — H.M. WALIA

SHAMEFUL SITUATION

The nexus between politicians, administrators and drug manufacturers ("The Merchants of Death", August 31) has to be broken without delay if the common man is to be saved.

Coimbatore — J.V.V. MURTHY

ARROGANCE UNLIMITED

"Above the Law" (August 31) clearly brings out how brazen and insolent our police force has become. It is surprising that senior police officials are shielding the guilty instead of taking corrective action against them. A dangerous precedent indeed for the police elsewhere in the country.

Calcutta — ANJANA SINHA

NO RECOGNITION

It is a pity that Vishwanathan Anand, the first Asian to be crowned junior world chess champion, was accorded such a shoddy welcome ("Star of the Squares", August 31). The Sports Ministry should give him the recognition that is his due.

Allahabad — GAURANG TIWARI

BACK TROUBLE

Congratulations for throwing light on the problem of backaches in a language understandable to a layman ("A Spreading Malady", August 31). The dos and don'ts will be really beneficial.

Ranchi — BISWAJIT DAS

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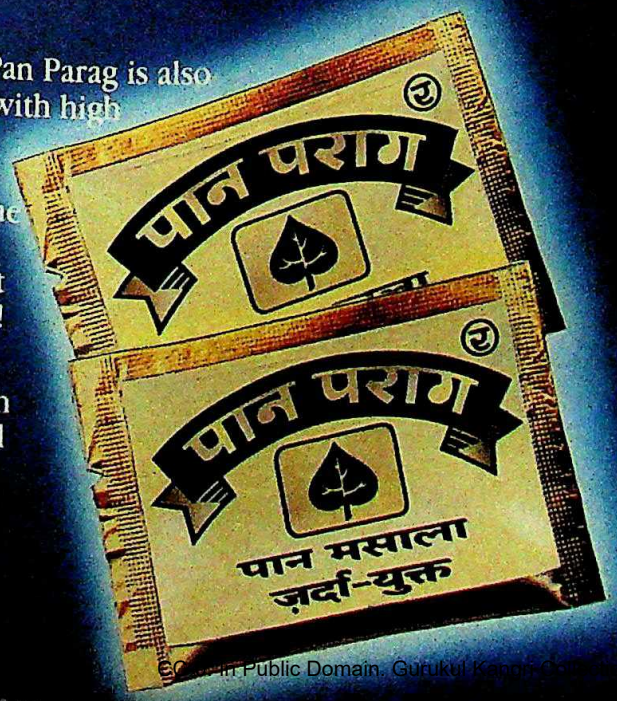

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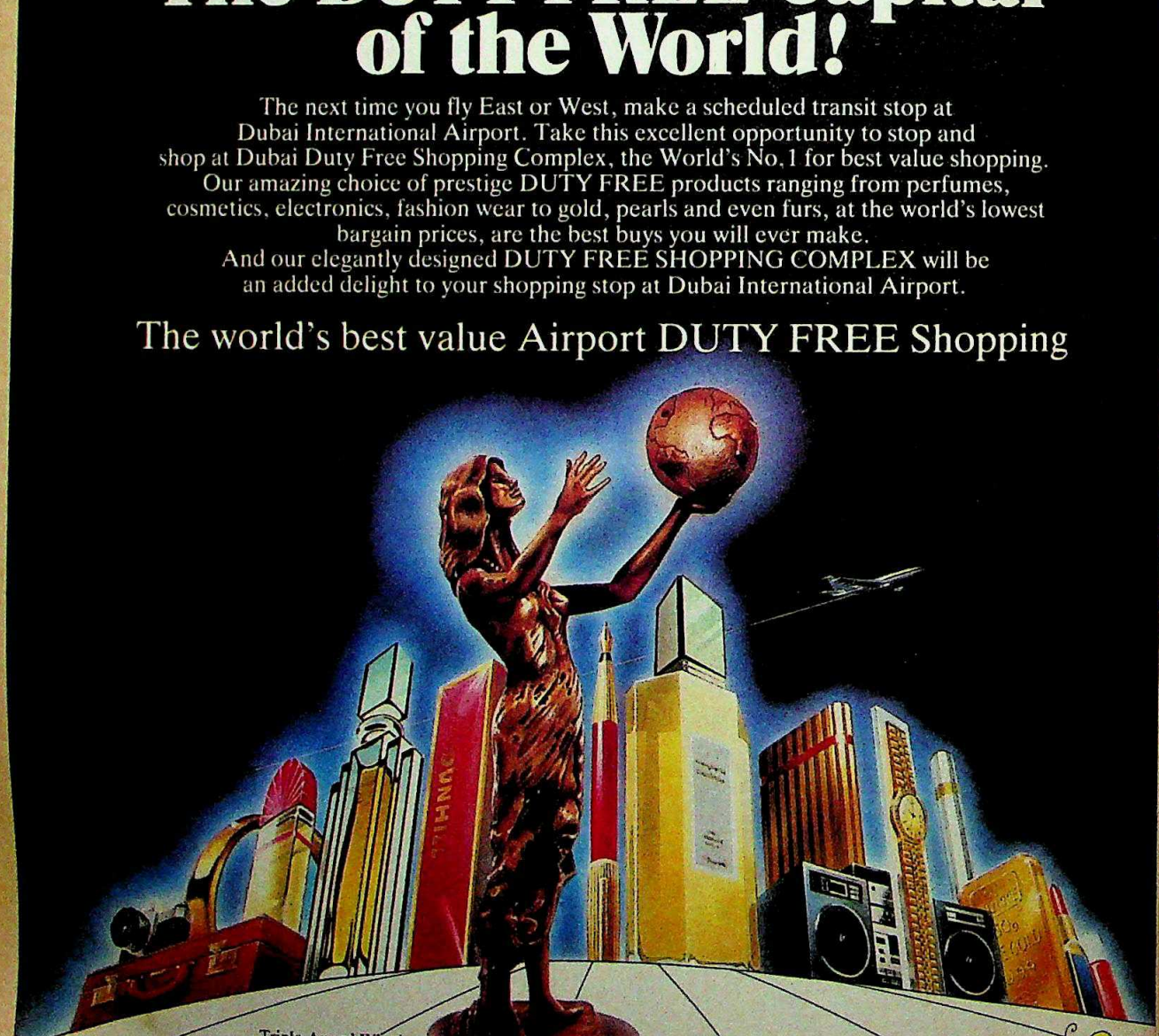

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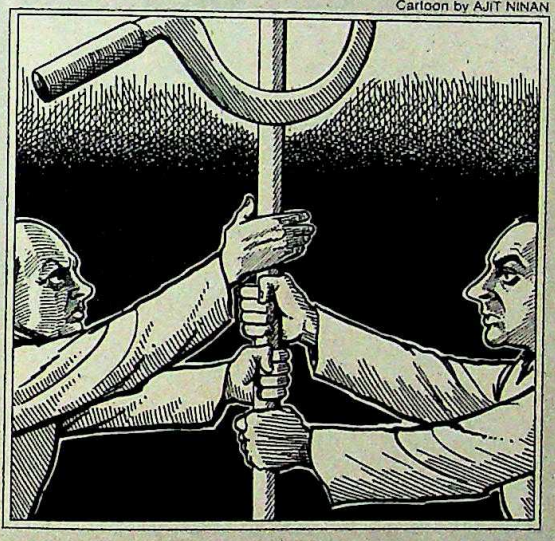
Lefter Than Thou

THERE can be few things more absurd in Indian politics than the sight of Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh competing for the leftist label. Rajiv was the burgeoning middle class's dream prime minister: slashing taxes, abolishing the estate duty altogether, talking of (and trying to) privatise public sector companies, trimming (or trying to trim) government down to size, virtually demolishing the industrial licensing paraphernalia, boosting the consumer goods fancied by the upper crust, liberalising trade policies and robbing the monopoly law of its teeth. All this with an abandon that none of his predecessors had dared (or cared) to show.

And V.P. Singh implemented Rajiv's tax policies so effectively that he should go down in modern Indian history as the most rightist finance minister of them all. Both, it must be remembered, were criticised at a 1985 session of the All India Congress(I) Committee, when there was vociferous criticism from party delegates because the economic resolution did not once mention the word 'socialism'. Indeed, if there was ever a period when leftism took a back seat in Indian politics, it was when the Rajiv-Singh duo was riding high in '85 and most of '86.

Yet last fortnight, Rajiv was telling the revived Congress Socialist Forum (revived, let it be noted, with prime ministerial blessings) that: "There has never been any question in my mind...that our foremost goal is to build a democratic, socialist society." And V.P. Singh did one better, hastily summoning a press conference to declare that the left parties were his "natural allies" and that he was going to "build bridges" with them. At another press conference, Singh confessed to having seen the light of leftism some time ago, and mentioned as evidence his increasing of import duties on capital goods and the announcing of a (still born) scheme for giving workers 5 per cent of new share issues.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Both men are resorting to ridiculous posturing. Mrs Gandhi confessed some years ago that she swung the Congress leftward after its 1969 split because "it went down well", implying that there was no real conviction involved in the radical stance that she eventually gave up in 1974. Both Rajiv and Singh clearly believe that leftism will go down equally well today too, and their records make it crystal clear that there is no more conviction involved now than in Mrs Gandhi's case. At a time when both politicians are fighting somewhat desperately for the support of the voting public, some amount of posturing is only to be expected and should be dismissed as such. After all, it is part of hoary wisdom that nothing other than a left of centre stand can gain broad acceptance in the Indian political milieu. But modulated posturing and populism must stop short of outright hypocrisy, lest the country be presented with capitalist bulls in the guise of socialist bears.

Somewhere down the line, there must be conviction and credibility in politics. And if there was anything to the extended honeymoon that the Indian public had with the Rajiv administration in 1985, the reason was that Rajiv said what he felt which was what large numbers of voters felt. And there was promise of change. The public sector was sucking the Government and the economy dry, and giving precious little in return. Government had got too big and bloated. Industrial licensing served little purpose other than to delay action, chain entrepreneurship and build a protected, high-cost economy. Taxes were so high that the incentive for evasion was higher still. And so on, down a long list of issues that needed to be addressed head-on. There was an agenda of reform here that Rajiv paid heed to.

Today's posturing, in contrast, marks a resort to ostensibly safer, fall-back positions, but it remains posturing and lacks conviction. The effort seems as bogus as the hired crowds that, till a few weeks ago, were brought to the prime minister's residence for lectures on destabilisation which were dutifully telecast on Doordarshan. The prime minister may hope, in the process, to change his initial image of being the rich man's friend, but he can hardly hope to fire fresh imagination by following a beaten path to what might well be an economic cul-de-sac. V.P. Singh is even more confused, seeking Jayaprakash Narayan's mantle (as the reformist politician outside the system) while flirting with Marxists.

This is not to argue that unbridled capitalism must replace the mixed economy. Indeed, in a country where 40 per cent of the population still lives below the poverty line, policies have to be specially tailored to tackle the problem of poverty. But surely, any politician who claims to have an understanding of economic issues must recognise that what passes for socialism is often nothing more than state capitalism, and an inefficient variant at that. It is equally obvious that the socialist laws which Mrs Gandhi wrote into the book in the early '70s were simply not delivering the results that were intended and were causing economic harm. What the economy needs is a correction of some of these excesses, faster growth without a skewing of income patterns, greater productivity, more efficient use of scarce capital, and reduced obeisance to what must be a comforting socialist conscience. It takes political courage for a prime minister or politician to accept this, and if neither Rajiv Gandhi nor V.P. Singh can do so when he is on test, it shows them both up as men of poor mettle, politicians without real conviction.

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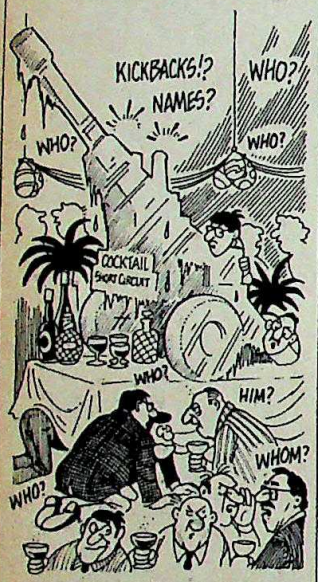
Chinese Whisper

● The nation's capital, in the light of the recent defence scandals, has become a gossip columnist's paradise. And the rumour mill runs faster than the speed of sound. Last fortnight word spread, apparently from a remark made by a bored reporter in the newsroom of a daily, that an international news agency had



flashed the names of all those involved in the Bofors' payoffs. In seconds, the story had travelled New Delhi's cocktail circuit. No ifs and buts. People rattled off the names with confident assurance.

That night, Maharashtra MP Suresh Kalmadi threw a party which was attended by prominent journalists, government officials and politicians. Here too people announced the denouement had begun. A prominent name on the list was Murli Deora, MP from Bombay, who had a midnight knock on his door at his New Delhi home by several high-spirited newsmen seeking his comments on the disclosures. Politicians began calling him from all over the country, keeping the hapless Bombay Congress(I) chief awake till the early morning hours. Of course, there was not a shred of truth to this story, which only goes to show: there is no better place than Delhi to convert rumour into 'fact'.

Home Coming

● Ever since R. Venkataraman, the mild-mannered philosopher-statesman became President of the country, he has hardly stepped out of Rashtrapati Bhawan, leave alone New Delhi. But this is not because he doesn't want to. In fact, the new President is reportedly keen to tour the country but he wants, for obvious sentimental reasons, to start with his home state, Tamil Nadu, as a spring-board.

He, however, finds himself hampered temporarily. Or at least until Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran feels better. MGR has insisted, and Venkataraman has agreed, that the President should not visit the state in the absence of the chief minister. And MGR—true to his style—wants to lay out the red carpet for the native son who made it to Rashtrapati Bhawan.

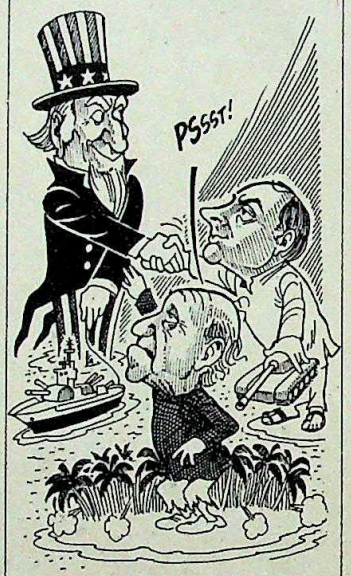
As things stand, this is out

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

of the question as the ailing MGR is in the United States for treatment and may not be back for the next several weeks. Venkataraman, it seems, will simply have to wait patiently for the chief minister's return.

Double Take

● Diplomatic circles in New Delhi are finally beginning to shed some light on why Sri Lankan President Junius Richard Jayewardene did a sudden switcheroo. Abandoning his previously obdurate stand, he agreed to the peace accord with the Tamil militants and to India standing as guarantor.



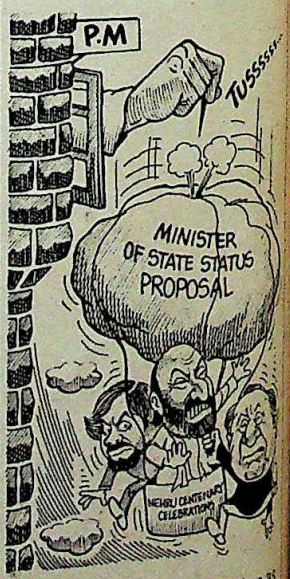
Till just before the accord was signed, Jayewardene was resisting the peace offensive launched by the Indian side. Having generally been pro-American in his outlook, the Sri Lankan President made several last-minute overtures to the US for diplomatic help. But the American message to him was loud and clear: the US and its allies could, or would, do little to help. Jayewardene had no choice but to seek help from closer quarters.

It is interesting to note that after the accord was signed in Colombo—and even before any ratification by the Sri Lankan Parliament—the US was the first country to offer congratulations to India. And there is possibly a quid pro quo in all this.

In return for the American gesture in Sri Lanka, the Indian Government is likely to be less strident about the American naval presence in the Indian Ocean as the months roll by.

Seeking Solace

● The implementation group of the committee to celebrate Nehru's centenary and India's 40th year of Independence had originally come up with several weird ideas for grandiose tamashas all over the country which were quietly shot down in favour of a more sober and sophisticated approach. But several non-governmental members of the group were irked by the rejection of their fanciful schemes—one being the lighting of a torch by a solar-powered mirror by the prime minister to signal India's entry into the 21st century. So they tried to make up in status what they had lost in influence. They drafted a proposal to the Prime Minister's Secretariat seeking to confer on themselves the rank of ministers of state. The Prime Minister's Secretariat promptly rejected the suggestion as ridiculous and sent out word that if they



found it difficult to function as committee members they could, quite simply, resign. So far, there have been no resignations. This story too has a moral to it: if you don't give them their mile, they'll gladly clutch on to their inch.

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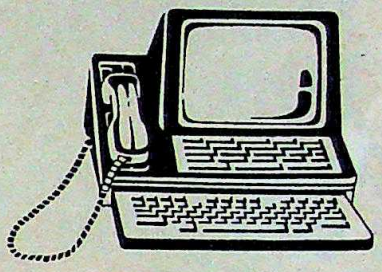

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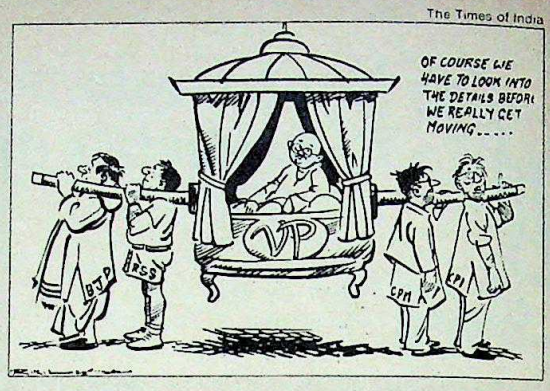

• *We are not suppressing the truth. We are not hiding anything. We are neither shirking nor running away. We are going into the greatest detail.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI, on the Bofors issue, at the Congress Socialist Forum meeting

• *Our duty is to bring these rulers to heel, to make them accountable to the people. And by our word, we will.*

■ Editorial in the *Indian Express*, after the September 1 raids

• *What* The Hindustan Times *should contain is decided by the paper's editor and not by me.*

■ K.K. BIRLA, in a letter to *The Sunday Observer*

• *The best thing that Rajiv can do now is to step down.*

■ VIJAYALAKSHMI PANDIT in *The Times of India Sunday Review*

• *Being in public life is as good politics as being in office.*

■ V.P. SINGH in *Frontline*

• *It is not quite clear whether V.P. Singh wishes to work within the Congress or wishes to take the clean part and join with other clean people outside. I've not been able to fathom this.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI in *Sunday*

• *Even if a* bandarwala *stands anywhere, he too is able to draw a lot of crowds. However, that crowd is here this moment and gone the next. So will be the fate of these madaaris (the dissidents).*

■ K.K. TEWARI in *Delhi Recorder*

• *Bir Bahadur Singh is only the symptom of the disease; we are fighting the disease, not the symptom.*

■ ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN, in *Sunday Mail*

• *Communalism is like* AIDS. *As there is physical* AIDS *in America, there is political* AIDS *in India.*

■ CHANDRA SWAMY in *Surya India*

• *They (the people) were expecting him (V.P. Singh) to outline his new programmes and policies. Instead, he talked of A for Amitabh, B for Bofors and C for Chadha.*

■ KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI, quoted in *The Times of India*

• *I've heard that Mandi House isn't clean, that influence goes on. But I can't really take action on hearsay.*

■ AJIT KUMAR PANJA in *Filmfare*

• *The number of times the radio and television commentators, the newspapers and magazines are going to mouth 'Reliance' is going to be phenomenal.*

■ ANIL AMBANI in *Sportsworld*

• *It was the biggest mistake I ever committed to open the factory. Gun making is not a sage's job.*

■ DHIRENDRA BRAHMACHARI, quoted in *The Telegraph*

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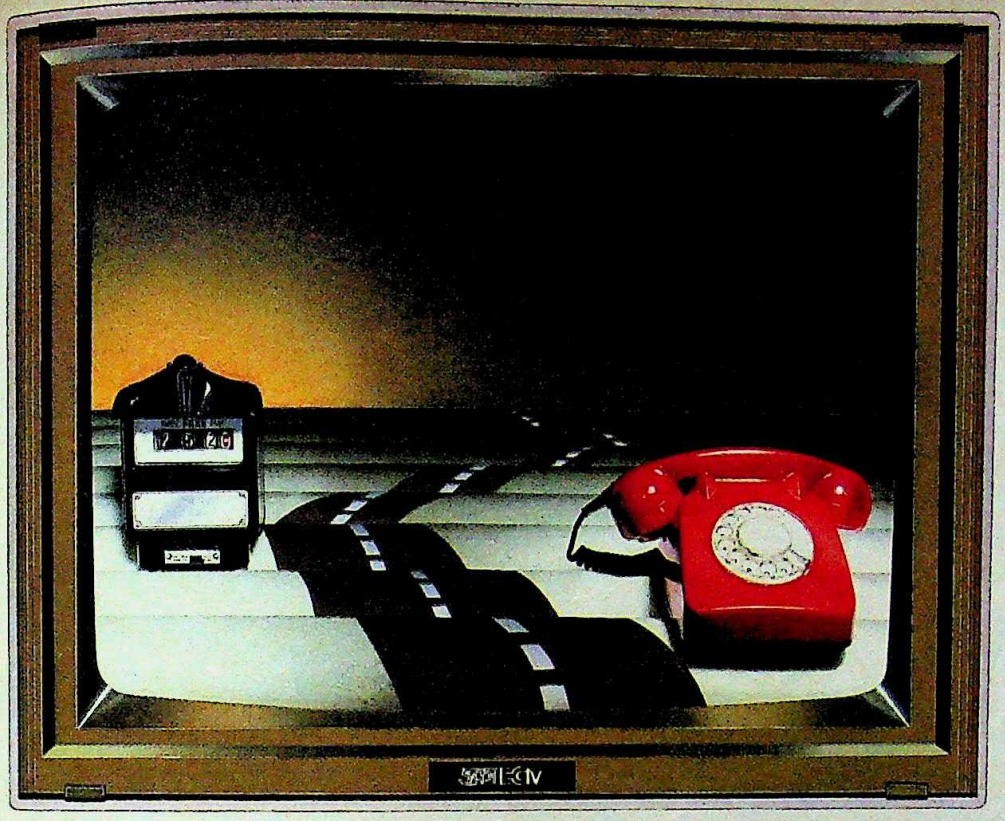

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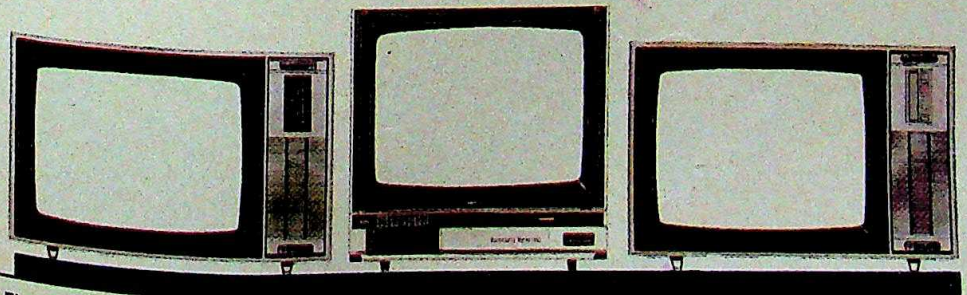

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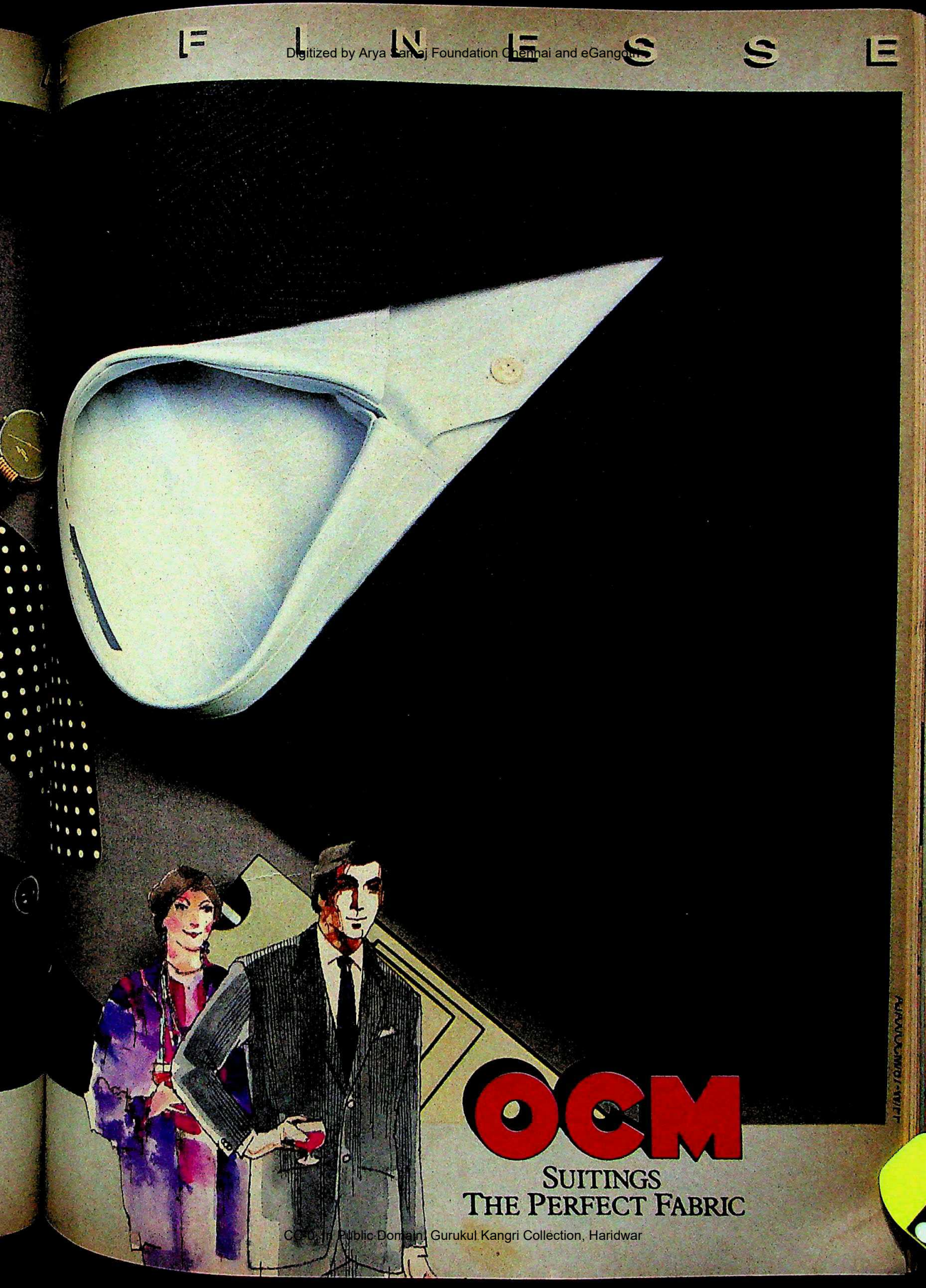

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Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

WATERY WISH

There used to be a time when the rains came as a matter of course. Now, the gods only oblige when mortals wheedle for days on end either by prayer or song and dance. But the people of drought-hit Patharra village in Bilaspur resorted to an ingenuous scheme to entice Devenar, the rain god, to shower his watery blessings on them.

Villagers rallied together and arranged a marriage of two frogs. The fathers of the bride and groom—appointed by the village—approached the temple priest who worked out the mahurat for the solemn occasion. Invitations were issued and every one sent gifts in cash to the prospective couple. The frogs were dressed up. And soon-after, the wedding procession wound its way to the temple—the bride and groom escorted by their surrogate parents.

Amidst much chanting, the frogs were wed. If, after this, the rains still keep away, then the gods must be crazy.

TERROR ERROR

For the past few years, newspapers have been full of terrorists and hit lists. So when Mahender Singh Anand, a resident of south Delhi, found a letter between the pages of his morning paper, his imagination ran riot. The letter informed Anand that if he valued his and his family's life, he should support the Punjab terrorists. Plain enough, but what made Anand's hair stand on end was the signatory's name: 'Bhindranwale Tiger Force'.

In panic, Anand informed the police. And then, an hour later, a muffled voice on the phone ordered the head of the house to bring Rs 50,000 to an assigned place in one of the city's parks.

The police packed off a terrified Anand with a bag to the park, promising to keep him covered. The ruse paid off. But the hardcore terrorist turned out to be a paper tiger—a local small time burglar trying to make it big.

STINGING RAID

This is the era of the raid raj. Labouring under this delusion, policemen at the Sri-krishna police station in Patna seized some bags of sugar that a crafty shopkeeper had put away—with black-marketeering designs, they said. They put the contraband in the lock-up and went about their duties minding the city's underworld.

But an unexpected downpour altered the status quo. Piled high under a leaking roof, the sugar became a sodden mess. And the police station was soon enveloped in a pungent, cloying fragrance.

Work might still have gone on but for the arrival of a swarm of bees—attracted, no doubt, by the prospect of a flowery profusion. Unfortunately, some winged intruders turned their attention to the humans present. All hell broke lose and the police deserted the post. Peace was restored only when the soggy sugar bags were disposed of.

MAIL TRAIL

Perseverance pays. But sometimes, as R.V. Nagole of Dharwar discovered last fortnight, the fruits of victory are not so sweet. Six months ago, Nagole's postman asked him to cough up Re 1 as the book post addressed to him had insufficient postage. The good man paid up, but soon realised that he had been charged extra for nothing. He despatched a letter to the post master demanding a refund. The response: a pregnant silence.

A week later, a longer letter was sent to the senior superintendent of post offices who responded quickly. The matter—three letters later—was amicably resolved. The money was to be collected from the head post office.

But this was easier said than done. The battle finally ended in late August when an inspector handed over Re 1 to the patient crusader. A happy ending, except that Nagole found he had spent Rs 50 to get back his Re 1.

CUPID CALLED

Marriages, they say, are made in heaven. This one was no exception to the rule, except that it needed a little earthly help to tie the knot. Kiran Bai was a small town girl, who allowed herself to be lured into Muzaffarnagar's flesh trade. And once in, there was no way out for the girl was beautiful. Things would have got tougher for Kiran Bai, except that cupid crept into the house she lived in.

A rich and handsome, but old, businessman hearing about the lissom lass called on her only to find himself captivated. The man came every day and slowly Kiran Bai too succumbed to his charms. Then, without warning, the police swooped down on the house and took into custody the inmates—Kiran Bai included.

The lover stepped in and rescued his damsel in distress. Tickled to be matchmaking, the police released the girl into his protective custody.

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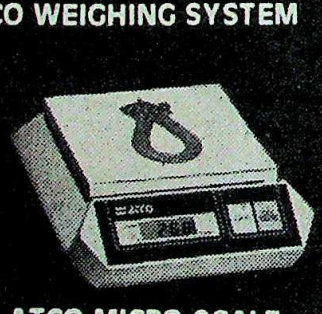

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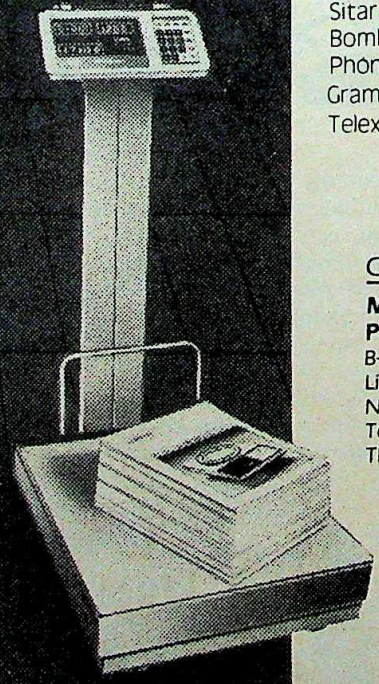

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Paradoxes Prevail

PRASHANT PANJIAR

The Express raids indicate that the defenders were going on the offensive.

THE Raiders of the Lost Bark aptly headlined the fortnight that was, though the immoral of the story was sadly sinister. A government in paralysis suddenly went into a paroxysm of pressure against the press—without quite being able to sell its side of the story. The massive country-wide raids against the *Indian Express* empire wore worrying overtones, signalling, as it decidedly did, a stentorian warning to the Government's ever-expanding circle of critics. The excessive, and armed force employed in the crackdown indicated that democracy may not be in danger, but it is increasingly in deceit. Nobody quite believed Rajiv Gandhi's statement that he was in Rajasthan and therefore knew nothing.

Sadly, a deceptive diet has now become staple. The longest teachers' strike in history ends in a settlement but the strike still goes on. The Opposition pledges to unite but the fissures only widen. A major reshuffle looms ahead but the related reorganisation of the ruling party is no exercise in utility. The crowds swell behind the challenger while the challenge itself loses momentum. The lull still awaits the storm.

In trying to be all things to all parties, V.P. Singh is in danger of losing them all.

Nothing symbolises the current paradox of Indian politics more than V.P. Singh. In his attempt to be all things to all parties, he is in danger of losing them all. The incongruity of a man of his economic antecedents embracing the leftist parties as his "natural allies" is not lost on his sympathisers. Little wonder that critics like Kamalapathi Tripathi can safely charge him with knowing only the ABC of politics—Amitabh, Bofors and Chadha.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The decision by the high priests could have dangerous consequences.

The paradoxes prevail. Amitabh Bachchan obtains a certificate from armament manufacturers instead of film censors, and threatens to make his comeback a dual role. And Rajiv returned to his political roots in Amethi to ensure his constituency is still intact—or perhaps to recharge drained batteries. Yet, in essence, the fortnight was a significant one even if its contours were obscured. As the *Express* raids and Amitabh's actions indicated, the defenders are readying to go on the offensive and the battle could be bloodier still.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

India pledges aid to Sri Lanka but peace has still to return.

As in Punjab, where the battle against the terrorists has now entered a critical phase. The success of the security forces in capturing or eliminating key terrorists like Jinda has been dangerously diluted by the decision of the four high priests to back the extremists. Whether out of fear or favour, it is a decision that could have far-reaching consequences.

In Jaffna, another community was in turmoil as the rival Tamil militant groups continued to attack each other and even the Indian army, throwing the Indo-Sri Lankan accord into grievous danger. Despite India's pledge of Rs 50 crore to help rebuild the island's ravaged economy, there is obviously a long road to be traversed before peace finds a permanent home.

Things were hotting up on the economic battlefront as well, as the combined effect of government policies and the devastating drought started to push up prices to unprecedented levels. And, on the corporate mean streets, the ubiquitous Chhabria brothers were on the prowl, hungrily devouring one company after another. The raid raj is back with us.

—DILIP BOBB

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INDIAN EXPRESS ON THE

The Indian Express, the most powerful cutting edge of opposition to the Rajiv Gandhi Government, stands accused of evading customs duties and violating FERA regulations.

AT 9 a.m. on a sunny morning early last fortnight, *Indian Express*' feisty owner Ramnath Goenka, his maverick editor Arun Shourie and fire-brand adviser and financial consultant S. Gurumurthy were sipping tea at the Express guest-house at 130 Sunder Nagar, when a nervous timekeeper at the newspaper's office called to say that more than 30 officials had arrived to conduct a search of the premises. The call hardly surprised the crusading troika of the Indian press, engaged for the past seven months in an unprecedented, no-holds-barred editorial battle against what they labelled the corrupt Rajiv Gandhi Government.

For several months, the management and editors of India's largest newspaper chain—35 newspapers and magazines with a combined sale of 16 lakhs, including the 11 English editions with a circulation of about 7 lakhs—had been expecting some form of drastic retaliatory action from the Government. Shourie had even telexed detailed instructions to all his reporters on how to conduct themselves in the eventuality of a raid: inform all newspaper agencies, photograph the raiders, flood the offices of the prime minister's aides G.K. Arora and Sharada Prasad, as well as the directors of Enforcement and CBI with phone-calls, to solicit their comments for a front-page story.

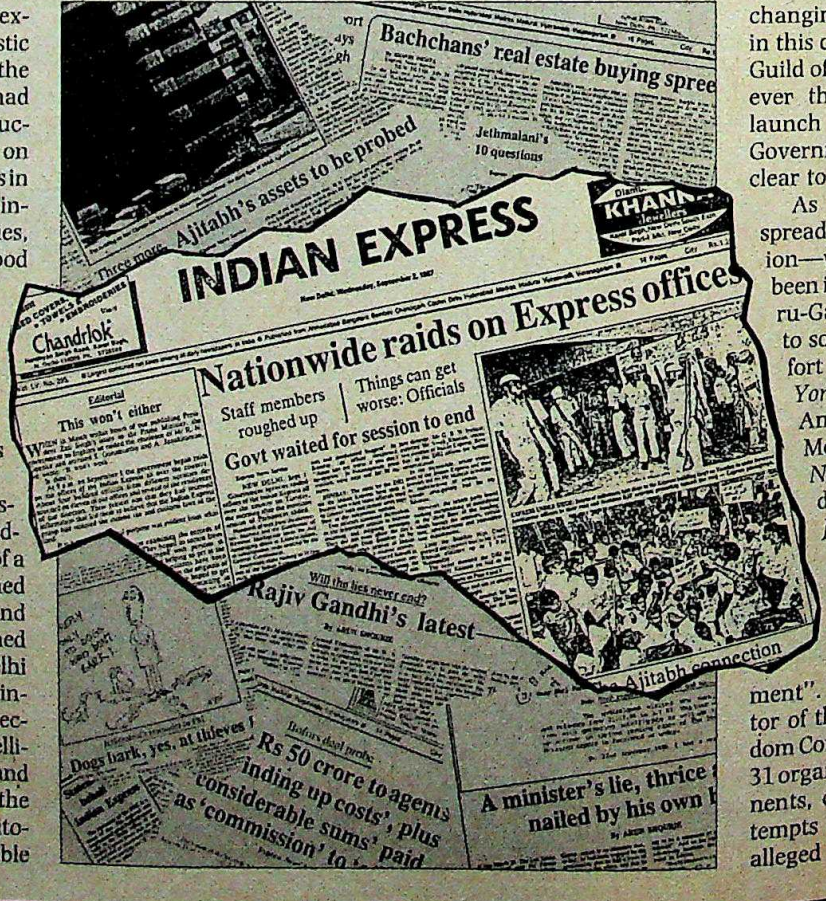
The scene at the newspaper's New Delhi headquarters was hardly that of a raid. It was a veritable armed siege, replete with guns and uniforms. Two CRPF armed companies, scores of Delhi policemen and plain-clothesmen from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), customs, and revenue service invaded the building, including the editorial offices. The ostensible purpose: to find proof in support of a government case which has been under investigation for a year, that the Express had evaded customs duties and violated foreign exchange regulations in the purchase of machinery *(see box)*.

But the scope and dimension of the raid—the presence of armed police inside a newspaper office and the involvement of some 600 intelligence men who swooped down simultaneously on 12 centres of the Express group across the country—signalled that Rajiv Gandhi's empire had struck back and would go on the offensive, irrespective of the criticism it attracted.

The raid's timing indicated high-level planning. Conducted the day after Parliament adjourned, it prevented opposition onslaughts in the House. Doordarshan carried items on its national news network, some four minutes long, detailing charges against the Express, without giving it an opportunity to defend itself.

Echoing Shourie's initial reaction, that the raid was "an act of desperation against a paper that has contributed to changing the tone of debate in this country", the Editors' Guild of India noted: "Whatever the reasons given to launch the raids, the Government's motive is too clear to hoodwink anyone."

As reports of the raid spread, international opinion—which has always been important to the Nehru-Gandhi family—began to sour. "Intimidation Effort Seen," read the *New York Times* headline. And, "Attacking the Messenger," was how *Newsweek* magazine described the raid. The *Japan Times* called it a raid on the "most merciless pursuer of allegations of corruption in Rajiv Gandhi's Government". The executive director of the World Press Freedom Committee representing 31 organisations in five continents, cabled Rajiv that attempts to stifle coverage of alleged government corru-



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FIRING LINE

tion "is to censor what citizens of a country can know, and fly in the face of every international provision supporting press freedom". The Paris-based Federation of Newspaper Publishers said it was "shocked" by the action.

Expressmen are convinced that the raid was conducted not only as part of Rajiv's "get tough" policy intended as an offensive against his critics, but also as part of a pre-emptive strategy to ferret out what the paper was planning to publish next. The search of the classified ads section and teleprinter rooms, Shourie surmises, was an attempt to track down the paper's sources who had been communicating through coded messages in the classified pages. An August 29 classified ad message that read: "Dear Sangma, many thanks for the second parcel—Shetty," was a coded message from the paper to a source.

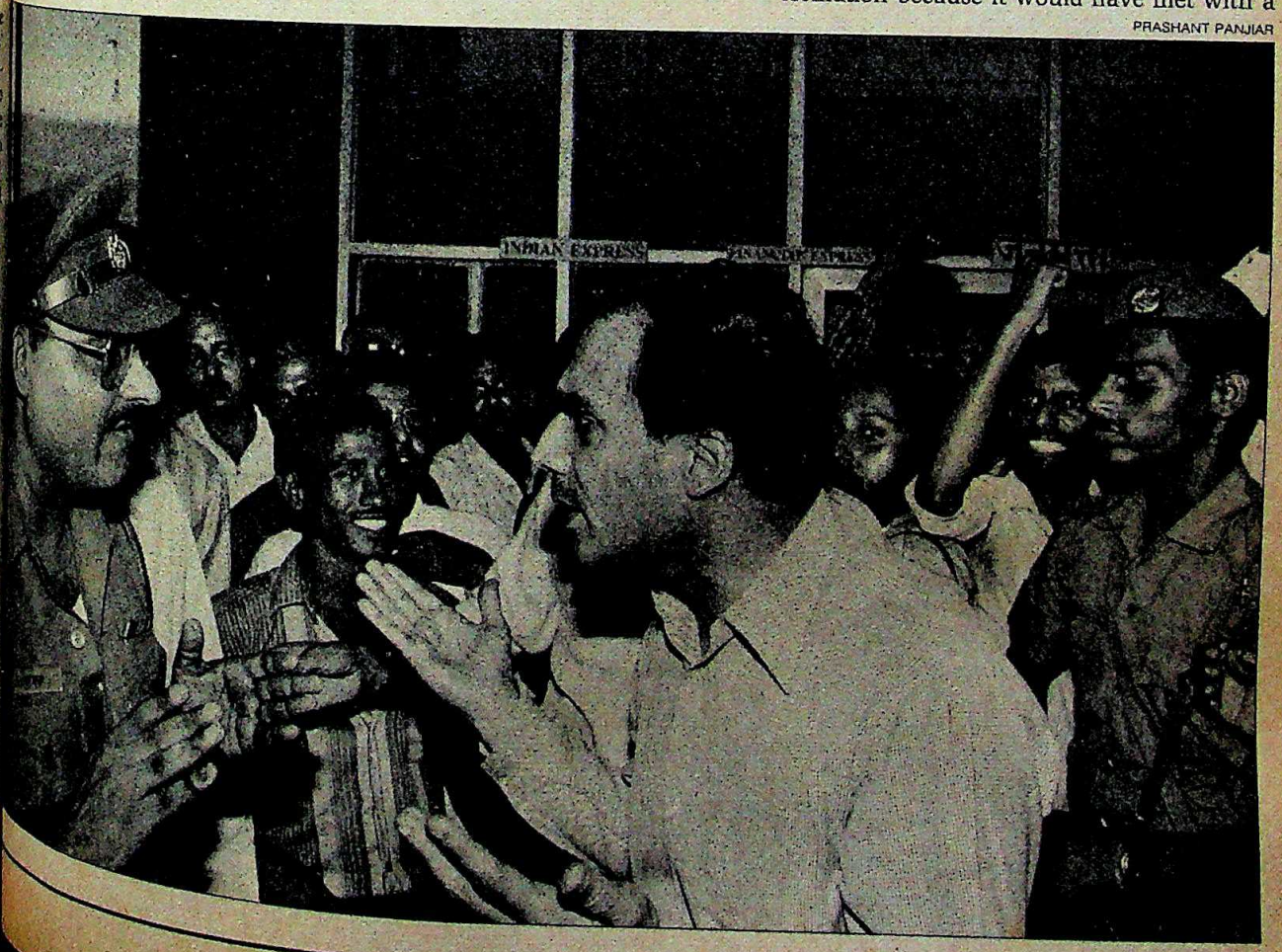
In addition, at the end of August, Shourie, in typical gadfly form, had been needling the Enforcement Directorate. Under the Government's regulation of giving rewards to informants who successfully identify foreign exchange violations, Shourie had asked to be remunerated for revealing Ajitabh Bachchan's purchase of a flat worth Rs 80 lakh in foreign currency. When Enforcement Director Anil Kumar turned him down, Shourie wrote to him, stating: "I am now in a position to furnish definite leads and information which will cover the gamut of illegal foreign exchange activities of Amitabh Bachchan and his associates (and)... point out the companies which have been used for secreting foreign exchange away.... I am also in the position of helping your directorate to identify a specific bank, as well as the specific officer within the bank in Switzerland who have the information which will nail the FERA violations of Mr Ajitabh Bachchan."

Armed police inside the newspaper office and the involvement of 600 officials who swooped down simultaneously on 12 centres, signalled that Rajiv's empire had struck back.

Shourie says he did not publish this information because it would have met with a

Shourie protesting the raid: armed siege

PRASHANT PANJIAR



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RAMNATH GOENKA

"They cannot silence me"

AT 84, press baron Ramnath Goenka is a little slow. Not because he wants to slow down but because a transient stroke some months ago slightly affected his memory. He sometimes stops mid-sentence and gropes for thought and words. And he no longer goes for his three-mile walks. Apart from that nothing's changed. He's in the middle of another fight. And he loves it. His eyes burn with pugilistic delight. He breaks into fits of ear-splitting anger when faced with what he considers a lie. And he has a raucous belly-laugh when he hits home a point. A week after the raid on his paper, he spoke to Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *and Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA:

Q. *In the film* Rajiv's India *you stated: "If I die tomorrow I will go a happy man because the country is in safe hands." What has changed?*

A. I was definitely of the opinion that Rajiv would do a fine job. He was young, enthusiastic and had the people's support. After being sympathetic to him I felt disappointed, but not before giving him ample time. I saw a clear gap between his declarations and decisions. He declared his government was not for sale. Yet, in practice, it was not so. My first hand experience of this dichotomy was in regard to Reliance. When we wrote some 20 articles in the Express about the way Reliance Industries had manipulated the Government, the Rajiv Government did nothing about it at all.

Q. *But were the articles fair?*

A. Yes. We alleged fraud, smuggling and other economic offences of hundreds of crores. Despite our challenge to the Government to disprove us, we were never contradicted. Nobody told us why the persons we complained about were not dealt with. There was no investigation of the offender; instead the punishment was to those who exposed the offenders.

Q. *Are you saying that you and the Express were harassed?*

A. Yes, the Express was harassed in a variety of ways starting with the raids and the arrest of Gurumurthy, our adviser. In fact, the CBI investigated several parts of our exposes and concluded that offences had been committed by Reliance but nothing happened.

Q. *Is Reliance the only reason why you changed your mind on Rajiv?*

A. I'm merely citing Reliance as one important example. The promises the young man made have all been falsified. Reliance is but one illustration.

Q. *Did Rajiv promise you anything?*

A. I had a couple of meetings with Rajiv about 18 months ago in which he told me that necessary action would be taken against economic offenders. He mentioned Reliance and said no investigation would be held back.

Q. *Did you get caught in a squeeze between two industrial houses—Bombay Dyeing and Reliance—and Nusli Wadia used your friendship to launch a campaign against his rival?*

A. This is absolute and utter nonsense. If we publish 20 articles which are uncontradicted, it is easy for people to talk such foolishness. Why don't they reply to the articles we have published? What about the truth of the allegations? Let us discuss the truth of what we have published rather than indulge in conspiracy theories. It is easy to say it is all intercorporate war. Is smuggling of Rs 120 crore plant a subject matter of intercorporate war? Or is forging letter of credit for Rs 100 crore or drawing the loans of Rs 100 crore one? When import duty on yarn should be more less may be an intercorporate affair not crimes of this order.

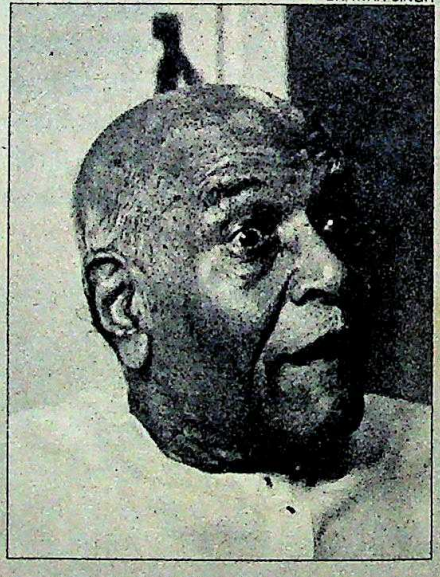
Q. *But are you not close to Wadia*

A. Dhirubhai Ambani was as close me—even closer—as Nusli. He was erous. He always responded to me when asked for donations to charities. I did know Wadia until 1975. In fact, Amb was my friend and I saw more of him 1985 than I did Wadia. But Ambani doing things to try and circumvent entire government system.

Q. *Did you feel sad at having launch a campaign against a friend?*

A. There was a reason for what hap pened. In October 1985, *The Econom Times* published a story about a CBI in-

BHAWAN SINGH



"Rajiv declared his government was not for sale. But when we wrote 20 articles in the Express about Reliance, the Government did nothing. Instead, we were harassed."

"It is utter nonsense to say that the *Indian Express* got caught in an intercorporate war. Is smuggling of a Rs 120 crore plant a matter of intercorporate war?"

quiry into the opening of backdated le ters of credit by Reliance worth Rs 1 crore. Ambani sent a letter of rebuttal PTI—the news agency I was chairm of—stating that the news item was engineered by a DMT-producing textile com pany unable to produce quality DMT in dire financial straits. The obvious ref ence was to Bombay Dyeing. When ran the item, Nani Palkhivala—also the PTI board—called it to my attent and asked my advice on what should done as another company's name been dragged in without evidence. had to write an apology. PTI had n before apologised to anybody. I also k out that there had been pressure on PTI desk to run the Ambani rebuttal went to Dhirubhai and said, 'You pulling down a public institution—

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should have some values.' He gave me a that I would rather not go into with but that is where I felt that his approach highly prejudicial to the country. In fact was the starting point of my investigation into Reliance's affairs.

Q. People say you use the shield of freedom of the press to prevent the Government from inquiring into your own paper's financial improprieties.

A. I challenge them, anybody, to prove against me. If I have committed financial fraud then let them put me in jail. That's where is to it. But they cannot silence me.

Q. Will these latest raids deter you?

A. Those poor government people do their duty, I do mine. I know that 11 parties have imported the same machinery. I'm no exception. But I'm being persecuted. They say I evaded Rs 30 lakh in duty. I laugh at it.

Q. Do you think Rajiv poses a greater threat to press freedom than his mother?

A. His mother, except during the Emergency, behaved none too badly with the press. She did not tell me a lie. She may have evaded or ducked a question but didn't lie. You never know what this boy is about to do at any given moment.

Q. One criticism against the Express is that it gets too involved politically with governments or opposition leaders and behaves as an adviser, and that governments in power that do not like the Express then treat it as a political opponent rather than a newspaper doing its regular business.

A. I have never got close to anybody. I will not barter the independence of the press with anybody. I did not do it for Morarji even though I was close to him. In fact, my paper was born as a Congress paper but I never took a party line.

Q. What about V.P. Singh?

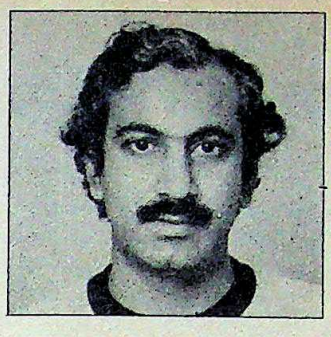
A. I've not met him for the last year-and-a-half. At that time, I told him we were publishing evidence about Reliance but no one seemed to be taking notice. He asked me for a note on the subject which I gave him. There was no action. But I still respect him as, to the extent he could, he did fight corruption.

Q. But in your case, why just Reliance?

A. You need time, resources, trained people for such investigations. But even then, we have investigated so many other cases. Reliance was a different kind of landmark. It marked our first real thrust against corporate corruption which no other paper was doing.

Q. You seem to have cooled off on Bofors.

A. Slow and steady. We are still collecting evidence from all over. *Kutcha cartoos* [illegible] *chahiye* (No point in firing [illegible] squibs).



"There is a difference between investigation journalism and allegation journalism. Either you treat a man as innocent until proved guilty or as guilty until proved innocent."

M.J. AKBAR
editor, Telegraph

"The Express' kind of journalism is sensationalism and very close to movie magazines. If I ask you there's been a murder last night, please explain why you did not commit it, is that an expose?"

KAMAL NATH
member of Parliament

denial. Instead, he decided on a strategy of baiting the Government with it, "in order to force them to show their hand. They'll lie, they'll try to do their worst as they tried with this raid, and then is the time to expose them."

Rajiv Gandhi, on a tour of Rajasthan, said he did not have any knowledge of the raid. But most observers of the political scene were united in the view that a raid of such dimensions could not possibly have been conducted without the express approval of the prime minister.

Information pieced together by INDIA TODAY indicates that Rajiv had approved action against the Express several months ago, when he held the finance portfolio. Initially, allegations about the paper's financial transgressions, some in the form of a dossier being circulated by Reliance Industries, had been passed on to Finance Minister V.P. Singh in January. He routinely passed it on to the then revenue secretary Vinod Pande. But the matter lay on the backburner until Singh was shifted to defence and Rajiv became finance minister. The Revenue Department and the ministry then ordered a secret investigation into the Express' affairs. The probe was aimed at discovering the exact location and the use of photocomposing machines imported by Traders Private Limited, a Baroda-based Goenka concern. DRI officials say they found that the machines were not installed at Pune where they were supposed to be but at Hyderabad and Bangalore, in violation of the Indian Customs Act.

Armed with what they considered to be incriminating evidence against the Express, DRI prepared a dossier for action which was approved by the revenue secretary in March 1987. According to Finance Ministry sources, the action plan was sent to the Prime Minister's Secretariat. In July, DRI sleuths including Director Kumar visited Hyderabad, Bangalore, Madras, Bombay and Baroda and spoke to at least 50 ex-Express staffers and trade union leaders who had earlier submitted a memoranda against the Express. Since the allegations related to evasion of income tax and customs duty, and FERA violations, an inter-agency team including CBI, Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax Department and the DRI, was formed to handle the job. The final meeting in end August in North Block was attended by Kumar, CBI Director Mohan Katre, Enforcement Director Anil Kumar and S.K Roy, member (investigation) Central Board of Direct Taxes, at which they decided to raid the Express—after the Parliament session ended.

The DRI chief said: "We have gone strictly by the nature of crime committed by the Express group. We could not ignore the economic offence only because someone is in the newspaper business. For us he is one of those against whom we had evidence. We are going to issue a charge sheet to them within the next two weeks which will speak for itself."

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ARUN SHOURIE

"You cannot afford to let go"

BENEATH his mild-mannered exterior, lies a belly for fire. His speech is soft but it is laden with barely controlled outrage. Against the system. Against political leaders who lose their hearing. Yet, Arun Shourie is a man of immense faith. In Buddha. And in the creative mind of Mahatma Gandhi who dared to march to the sound of a distant drummer. With the second coming of Shourie to the Indian Express, *most people had expected the obvious fireworks. But not so soon. But then, Shourie is not a man who is known for his patience. He shared some of his thoughts about his ongoing battle with the Rajiv Gandhi Government with Features Editor* INDERJIT BADHWAR.

Q. *Most of your critics say your heart is in the right place, but you only pursue personalities, and that doesn't change the system.*

A. When I criticised Mrs Gandhi, people said the same thing, why only criticise Mrs Gandhi? When I pursued Antulay, they said why only Antulay? But they forget the other issues that we have tackled—prison reforms, bonded labour, the plight of undertrials. No one seems to remember that, as a result, 40,000 undertrials were released. When I focus on an individual it is not because the individual is the only issue but because he may be the most visible symbol of the things that are wrong.

Q. *For example?*

A. When I wrote about Speaker Balram Jakhar the issue was one of speaking the truth to the people, of letting democracy function, about corruption.

Q. *But your style seems to antagonise many educated upper middle class people.*

A. I know the cocktail circuit chitchat. They say: "Oh, you may be right on some of the things that Rajiv has done, but enough is enough now. Why don't you chaps let go of the poor fellow?" My response to this is, we must be like crocodiles. Change is not brought about by Scotch-sipping dilettantes. Once you've got the leg in your mouth, you just can't afford to let it go. I'm not here just to entertain the readers. This is a serious business. If we are serious about reform, then we have to liberate ourselves from the whims of our audiences. The trouble with the cocktail circuit chatter is that it is a question of *baat hi ka kaam hai, kaam ki baat nahin* (all talk and no work).

Q. *You've always maintained you're not a journalist. So why did you join the* Indian Express *at this time?*

A. I was then with *The Times of India. Woh Akhbar Nahin, Sarkar hai* (It's not a paper, it's the Government). And I didn't want to work for the Government. The point I'm making is that my work is the work of every conscientious citizen—to improve the state of society. When last I was with the Express, I did the same work. I continued it after my dismissal, and I'm doing the same thing now. My job is to acquaint the people with the character of their government. And the job of a good newspaper is to ensure accountability and to force a regime to unmask itself. One single essay or an entertaining piece doesn't change things. You can't afford to let go.

Q. *But sometimes your pieces are involved and complicated.*

A. I have an academic background. How can I dismiss an issue in a small number of words just because people may not read the piece. That is up to them. But what is unfair is to criticise me and quote me out of context. When I wrote an essay on the Muslim Women's Bill I read the Quran, the Hadi, the parables of the prophet so I could not be faulted for superficiality.

Q. *Is your ire against Rajiv Gandhi a personal thing?*

A. I had dealt with Rajiv one-on-one from time to time. What ultimately I saw was the deceitful nature of the man, particularly over the Muslim Women's Bill. He'd asked me for advice and for some papers on the issue. But I found that he was not serious. He thinks of everything in terms of a public relations exercise.

Q. *What about his advisers?*

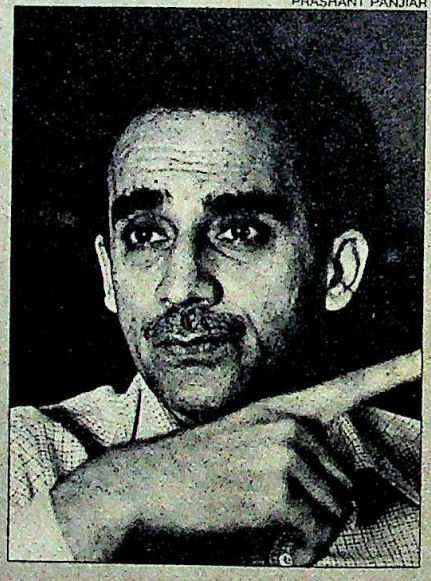
A. I was with him one day with P.V. Narasimha Rao and Law Minister Bhardwaj. Bhardwaj did not even know the articles of the Constitution leave alone Muslim Personal Law. And Narasimha Rao was just telling lies and Rajiv didn't know any better. For instance, he was telling Rajiv that the Government had never interfered in personal law. This was ridiculous. In 1984 the Waqf Act was amended by the Centre. Then there was the Marriages Act of 1956.

Q. *Did you point these things out?*

A. I told him so on his face and I gave him a paper on the subject. Then he told me that no other Muslim country has interfered with personal law. And I

"The cocktail circuit says: why don't you chaps let the poor fellow (Rajiv) go? Change is not brought about by Scotch-sipping dilettantes. Like a crocodile, you cannot let go."

PRASHANT PANJIAR



"Our circulation has gone up. Rajiv is our best circulation manager. Our quandary is whether to pay him a salary, a commission, or winding up charges like Win Chadha."

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roved to him that this has taken place in other countries. Then he asked me, can I as a Hindu prime minister, do this? I mean, he's a superficial man pretending to be slick. He's a political dandy.

Q. How are you going to show or prove all this through the press?

A. You have to keep putting pressure on the regime. What can you or I write to prove whether he believes in press freedom or not? But his own actions, such as the raid on the Express, will show this.

Q. How has it affected you so far?

A. As I've said, they can arrest us if they wish. And we will refuse to take bail. They've tried all their disinformation tricks, planting of documents, forging letters, extorting statements, accusing us of passing official secrets out of the country, calling dissenters CIA agents. But the public does not believe them. In fact our circulation has only gone up. Rajiv Gandhi is our best circulation manager. Our only quandary is whether to pay him a salary, a commission, or winding up charges like Win Chadha.

Q. You see the humour in all this but you are talking about very serious matters.

A. Yes, but one of the most striking features about the Indian state is its total inefficiency. And that is the only saving grace of freedom from an all powerful executive that can fix any institution, even the courts. But it is not so easy to fix the minds of the people.

Q. Do you consider the raid on the Express an assault on press freedom in general?

A. When will it be an attack on the Press? When 1,800 papers are raided? There is no doubt that is an attempt to blunt the cutting edge. A ruler never moves against everybody. During the Emergency Mrs Gandhi attacked only the Indian Express. During and after Operation Bluestar 20 government cases were filed against the Express and not the Tribune. Because the Express was running blank spaces for editorials. There was no need to go after a paper complying with the official will.

Q. Do you see any bright side at all?

A. Of course. People have come to value democratic rights. Things like freedom of association and movement—that were once distant concepts—are deeply ingrained now. People are possessive about these rights, and their right to throw out inept and corrupt rulers in whom they once reposed their hopes, whether it be the Janata government or Rajiv Gandhi.

"No prime minister has confirmed the worst suspicions about his probity as has Mr Rajiv Gandhi. He came to office on the promise of cleansing public life. One person doing so was V.P. Singh...the President must act."

Editorial on V.P. Singh's resignation
Indian Express, April 13

"There is a simple answer to high-handedness. Our duty is to inform our readers. We will continue to do so. Our duty is to bring the rulers to heel, to make them accountable....By our word, we will."

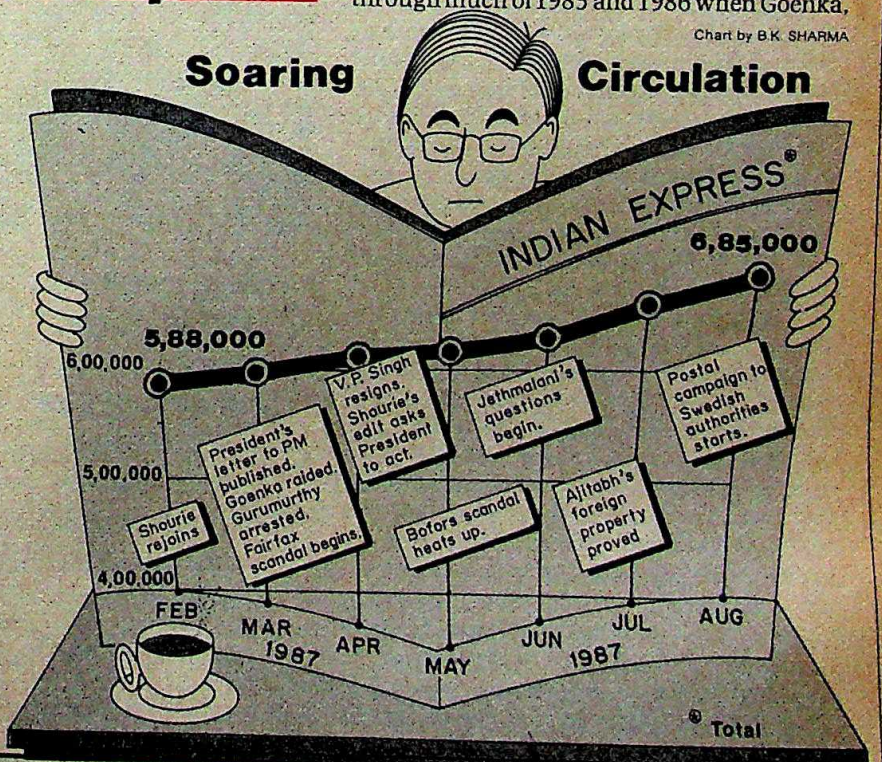
Editorial after the raid
Indian Express, September 2

While the charges remain to be proved, some of them (like the alleged duty evasion of Rs 33 lakh on printing machines) seem to be old affairs already under dispute. But Goenka, responding to charges of payments abroad for a colour scanner, stepped into trouble when he declared that he had got a Robert Briner in Switzerland to fork out $ 200,000 as advance payment. Although Goenka added that this was done to save foreign exchange, this is probably a violation of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act. Curiously, Briner was mentioned in the forged Fairfax letter as having paid Fairfax.

If Goenka's admission on Briner suggested that he had been living in a glass house and throwing stones, the press magnate said "If I have done anything wrong, let them put me in jail." And glass house or not, Goenka believes he has the right to point his finger at a corrupt government. Shourie maintains that newspaper managements should subject themselves to audit by public men in order to make their position invulnerable. And there was little doubt that the scope of the charges hardly warranted the scale and manner of the nationwide raid, bigger than that mounted on L.M. Thapar for offences totalling Rs 14 crore: 600 men for the Express, against 46 for Thapar.

The Express had not just become a prickly burr inside Rajiv Gandhi's bullet-proof jacket. It had become a challenger, a taunter that parried and thrusted, and dared the prime minister to do his worst. The irrepressible paper, known for its refusal to buckle under to Mrs Gandhi during the Emergency, which had taken on judges, ministers, corrupt policemen—targets which none in the Indian press had dared challenge before—had come to life. It had been sleepy through much of 1985 and 1986 when Goenka,

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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who had said, "If I die today, I will go a happy man, because the country is in safe hands," was honeymooning with Rajiv. The Express was simply not the Express. And the paper started losing circulation. As former editor Kuldip Nayar says: "This paper loses circulation whenever it becomes pro-government." During the past year—until February—the paper's Delhi edition dropped from 116,000 to 98,000. It had reverted to its position of being the second or even third to other newspapers that have captured the market in various regions.

The Express is, in most editions, a badly-written, poorly produced paper. The only difference is that its adrenalin has started pumping again. And this difference is largely attributable to the return of Shourie, and the fact that Goenka is on the warpath. The three men leading the charge—Goenka, Shourie, Gurumurthy—are a lethal combination. Goenka is a battle-scarred warhorse whose mental response to political events is immediately reflected in the paper. He is a rich man with a poor man's attitude, simple, niggardly in expenditure, capable of great generosity one minute and the opposite the very next. "He's a Brahmin and Kshatriya combined in one," says a friend, "an intellectual and a fighter, but what he really is, no one can detect". At times his behaviour is that of an innocent child but within that child there is also a *rakshas* and a ruffian. And above all, he loves his Express which he has nurtured, guarded and protected with the ferocity of a tigress protecting a cub, and will still rise at 4 a.m. to read the first edition hot off the press. And he is a ruthless enemy.

Shourie is a tenacious missionary, a gadfly, a reformer who listens to his own inner voice and who will not turn back from a course he believes is right. And he would be a misfit in any other newspaper but the Express. Gurumurthy, one of Goenka's closest confidants and advisers, is from a humble village background in Madras, a chartered accountant and an RSS activist who organised underground opposition to the Emergency. He is also an intrepid strategist capable of taking any risk on behalf of his beliefs. All three have vowed that if they are arrested they will go to jail and not ask for bail.

Goenka's disenchantment with Rajiv Gandhi began early last year after the Express began to publish a series of articles alleging financial fraud by Reliance Industries and the Government's refusal to take firm action. Says Gurumurthy, the author of the articles: "This was the first time that the Indian press had investigated a large commercial house and nothing was done." Instead, the CBI, last December, raided Gurumurthy's premises in Bombay. "Ramnathji became convinced that Rajiv's Government was full of hypocrisy," says Gurumurthy. Goenka, it became obvious, wanted a Shourie—a pen warmed up in hell—for the task that lay ahead. As a Goenka friend put it: "Suman Dubey was a gentleman editor. He was a nice guy Sunil Gavaskar but Goenka really wanted a Kapil Dev." And Shourie hit the ground running in February. His first big scoop, in March, was the publication of President Zail Singh's critical letter to Rajiv Gandhi. Barely hours after the letter was published on March 11, Gurumurthy's residence as well as that of Goenka were raided on the basis of what turned out to be forged letters purporting to show that they were involved in making illegal payments to the Fairfax detective agency and in passing on official secrets to the US. The Express's editorial responses once again began raising the familiar criticism that the paper was indulging in witchhunts, obliterating the line between journalism and politics and running campaigns rather than news stories.

Articles alleging fraud by Ambani's Reliance started the hostilities with the Government. The Express investigation was based partly on Reliance-circulated dossiers.

Many people felt that the *Indian Express*, in aiding and abetting Ram Jethmalani's prosecutorial diatribes, was straying from standards of fairness.

When the speaker cut off debate in Parliament over the President-prime minister dispute following the publication of the Zail Singh letter, Shourie wrote: "The President has in effect called the prime minister of India a liar... charged him with having lied in Parliament." When the Congress(I) first enunciated its "destabilisation" theory, Shourie promptly called it "incompetence compounded by paranoia". When V.P. Singh resigned, a front page editorial called on the President to act—obviously to dismiss the prime minister. Suman Dubey, who did not agree with either the tone or content of that edit, submitted his resignation to Goenka the same day.

And as the Bofors scandal mounted, the Express repeatedly exposed in minute detail the contradictions between government statements, particularly those made by the prime minister, and the facts. When Rajiv Gandhi made a statement saying that the Swedish Government's Audit Bureau "has vindicated what we said", Shourie, in an article headlined "Will the lies never end," asked: "To what should one attribute this? To the man's gall? To the man's deceit? Or to the fact that he just does not comprehend what he's saying?"

The publication of the document on the front page of the Express showing the purchase of an apartment in Switzerland in the name of Ajitabh Bachchan, under the title "Specific Enough, Prime Minister?" and the continuous assault on Rajiv through the questions posed by Ram Jethmalani came as merciless hammer-blows to an already beleaguered government. In publishing Jethmalani's views, the Express did more than simply report questions raised independently by a lawyer. Indeed, it acted in concert with him and had even given him an office in its headquarters. Many therefore, including Express sympathisers, felt the paper had begun to stray from standards of fairness.

Youth Congress leader Anand Sharma notes that rather than upholding press freedom "the Express has brought disgrace to the free press. It has become a mouthpiece for the

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The Charges

EVEN before the raids at the *Indian Express* establishments had been completed on the evening of September 1, B.V. Kumar, the chief of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), issued the first of a series of statements providing details on how, when and where the newspaper group had broken various economic laws. Despite all the official tom-tomming, the actual charges amount to very little, running into lakhs of rupees rather than crores.

Yet, if the Government can make the charges stick, the Express could be in very serious trouble. The prescribed penalties for the alleged offences include the paying up of five times the amount of the foreign exchange violation, the confiscation of the machinery involved, and the subsequent blacklisting of the company so that it cannot import anything in the future. If the charges stick and the penalties are enforced, the Express will not be able to either import newsprint or to use the several printing presses that are involved.

For good measure, the company's functionaries could be arrested, but most have already taken anticipatory bail. Despite all this, the fact also is that few companies, that have been charged with similar violations in the past, have been penalised to the full extent empowered by the law.

The major allegation against the Express is that duty had been evaded on the import of 14 small printing presses in May 1984. Duty concessions available for machines that print at least 30,000 copies an hour had been availed of, but the presses were not turning out more than 20,000 copies.

Express Executive Director Vivek Khaitan answered that this was no secret and that "at least 10 other newspapers have imported the same and have identical problems". Not only that, he said the Customs Department had gone over the matter with them before, and had not only dropped the demand for additional duty "some time in 1984" but had even refunded Rs 1.56 lakh of the original Rs 13 lakh that was paid. The company has, in fact, been upset about the substandard performance of the machines and has withheld payment of the final 10 per cent—$56,000 (Rs 7.28 lakh).

The DRI says that the machines were supposed to have been installed in Baroda, Rajkot and Ahmedabad but instead they have ended up with the Hyderabad and Bangalore centres of the paper, after being sold by one to another of the group's many companies. This sale apparently violates the conditions of import under an Open General Licence.

Further, the directorate alleges the under-invoicing of imports to the order of Rs 33 lakh. "I presume this is with reference to the Hong Hua machinery import," says Khaitan. He explained that the Express bills were lower than those of the other newspapers because they had not ordered certain ancillaries along with the machines—thereby saving about $300,000 (Rs 39 lakh) in foreign exchange.

Two days after the raids, the focus turned to the import of a scanner, which separates the four basic colours of a photograph for colour printing. After prolonged questioning, DRI officers had obtained statements from Renu Sharma, Goenka's former secretary, and R.P. Mittal, an agent of the German supplier, implicating the Express management in illegal foreign exchange payments for the scanner. Both Sharma and Mittal recanted afterwards, saying they had been tortured and forced to sign the allegations.

Nonetheless, the scanner in Delhi as well as the presses in Bangalore were seized—though the newspaper continues to use them. And the DRI was not ready to drop this juicy charge involving, as it did, Swiss banks, young female couriers and transcontinental link-ups. The key was a certain Dr Briner, who they claim paid a large sum in Deutsche Marks towards the scanner purchase. Octogenarian Express Chairman R.N. Goenka took this allegation seriously enough to answer it himself. He explained that he had requested Briner, an old friend, to help out when the Government's tardiness in sanctioning the foreign exchange had put the contract for the scanner purchase in jeopardy. Briner had agreed to pay $200,000 (Rs 26 lakh), that was to be returned when the letter of credit came through.

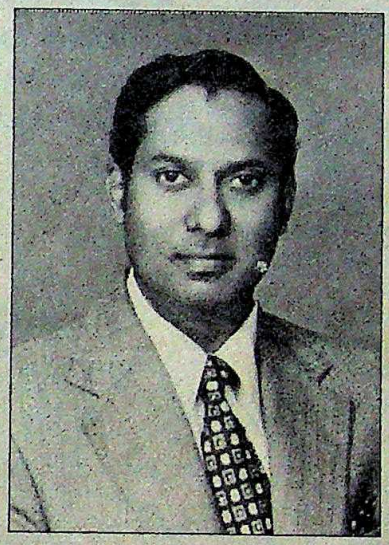
The DRI also found fault with the fact that computerised data processing machines imported for certain centres of the Express group were, like the presses, installed at other cities. The company was also accused of owing Rs 2.75 crore in tax arrears. Khaitan answered that here again the searchers had not turned up anything new. Five of the group's companies had been disputing the tax amount due since 1980. Similarly, he disclosed, there was also nothing new in the allegation that the organisation had not paid wealth tax due on the imposing Express Towers in Bombay and other buildings.

Calling the first DRI statement "a tissue of lies", Khaitan challenged the Government to "prosecute us". He added that the charges levelled along with the "fabricated evidence were contained in a memorandum circulated at the instance of a powerful business house whose misdeeds were exposed by the *Indian Express* in the recent past. What the Government has done is merely to rely on and improve upon this fabrication." Everything, it seemed, came back to the *Express*' original bugbear, Reliance Industries.

—DAVID DEVADAS

"We have gone by the nature of the crime committed. We cannot ignore economic offences because someone is in the newspaper business."

B.V. KUMAR
director, DRI



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Opposition." Adds Kamal Nath, Madhya Pradesh MP: "The Express kind of journalism is sensationalism and very close to movie magazines. If I ask you there's been a murder last night, please explain why you did not commit it, is that an expose?"

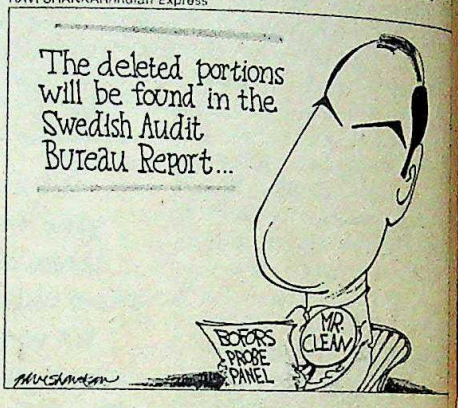
And *Telegraph* Editor M.J. Akbar told INDIA TODAY: "There has to be a difference made between investigation journalism and allegation journalism. There are two ways of going about things—either you treat a man as innocent until proved guilty or as guilty until proved innocent. The other day, I heard Jethmalani said in Patna that the prime minister may not be personally guilty. Then what's all this about? All these vicious cartoons—particularly the one on his running away to Italy. It's in thoroughly bad taste."

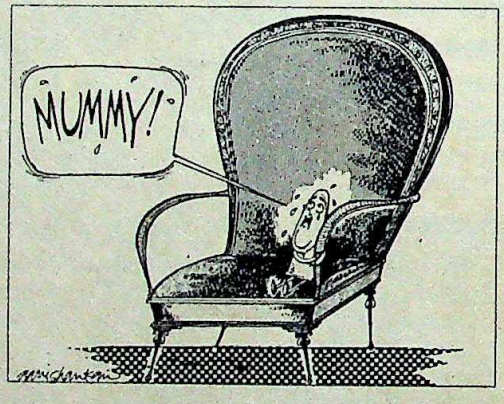
But during the period of the Jethmalani questions (June-July) the paper registered its sharpest increase in circulation: 30,000 nation-wide. Says Circulation Manager Shavak Srivastava, 28: "The Express is now the number two paper in the Delhi area, after *The Hindustan Times*, having taken over the spot from *The Times of India*. Comparing my Delhi-Chandigarh with their Delhi-Jaipur-Lucknow-Patna, the Express sells almost 2 lakhs in the north while the *Times* is not higher than 185,000."

What most critics of the Express seem to forget is that crusading journalism, siding with the dissenters, is part of the Express culture and that no matter how many temporary truces Goenka may make with governments, once he gets a bug up his sleeve there's no reining him in.

The Express' adrenalin is pumping again. This is largely attributable to Shourie's return and Goenka going on the warpath. The three leading the charge—Goenka, Shourie and Gurumurthy—are a lethal combination.

RAVI SHANKAR/Indian Express





It was this sense of mission which inspired Goenka to start the Express in 1932 "to fight for freedom and not to make money, big dividends or big profits," says former editor George Verghese. Many of the correspondents and editors who still work there, old and new, believe sincerely that because of the Express, large segments of Indian society have developed a vested interest in the freedom of the press. Special Correspondent A. Surya Prakash sees the paper he has given 16 years to as a national institution. "It's the ultimate thing—if the Express succumbs, then there's nothing," he says.

The freedom, successive editors have allowed, stems, it would seem, from the freedom Goenka has vouchsafed them. Verghese says that whenever they had differences—"as any intelligent people must"—they tried to persuade each other, and if they couldn't, they agreed to disagree. But even if Goenka differed violently, he would leave saying something like: "I believe this thing you're doing will have a disastrous result. I've told you, but now you're the editor, it's your decision." Adds Kuldip Nayar: "I knew that he didn't like some of my writing, but he never stopped me....The man has certain faults but by and large he has served the press well."

Most people who may not agree with the Express's freewheeling and unconventional style of journalism are nonetheless agreed that the Express has become a symbol—a veritable bastion—of press freedom in India. Even *The Times of India* Editor Girilal Jain who does not consider the raid on the Express an assault on press freedom "because Rajiv's record on this has been good", and does not approve of some the Express's campaigns, says nonetheless that he will defend the Express's right to practise its own brand of journalism. But the stark reality is that if a government is successful in stifling the voice of the Express, it will have silenced a major critic and dissenter and thereby create a chilling effect on the rest of the press. It will also have silenced those voiceless millions who find their voice through the columns of the Express, for the battle today is not just between the Government and the Express but between a significant section of public opinion and the Government.

Most people who may not agree with the Express' freewheeling and unconventional style of journalism are nonetheless agreed that the Express has become a symbol—a veritable bastion—of press freedom in India.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR, PRABHU CHAWLA and DAVID DEVADAS with bureau reports

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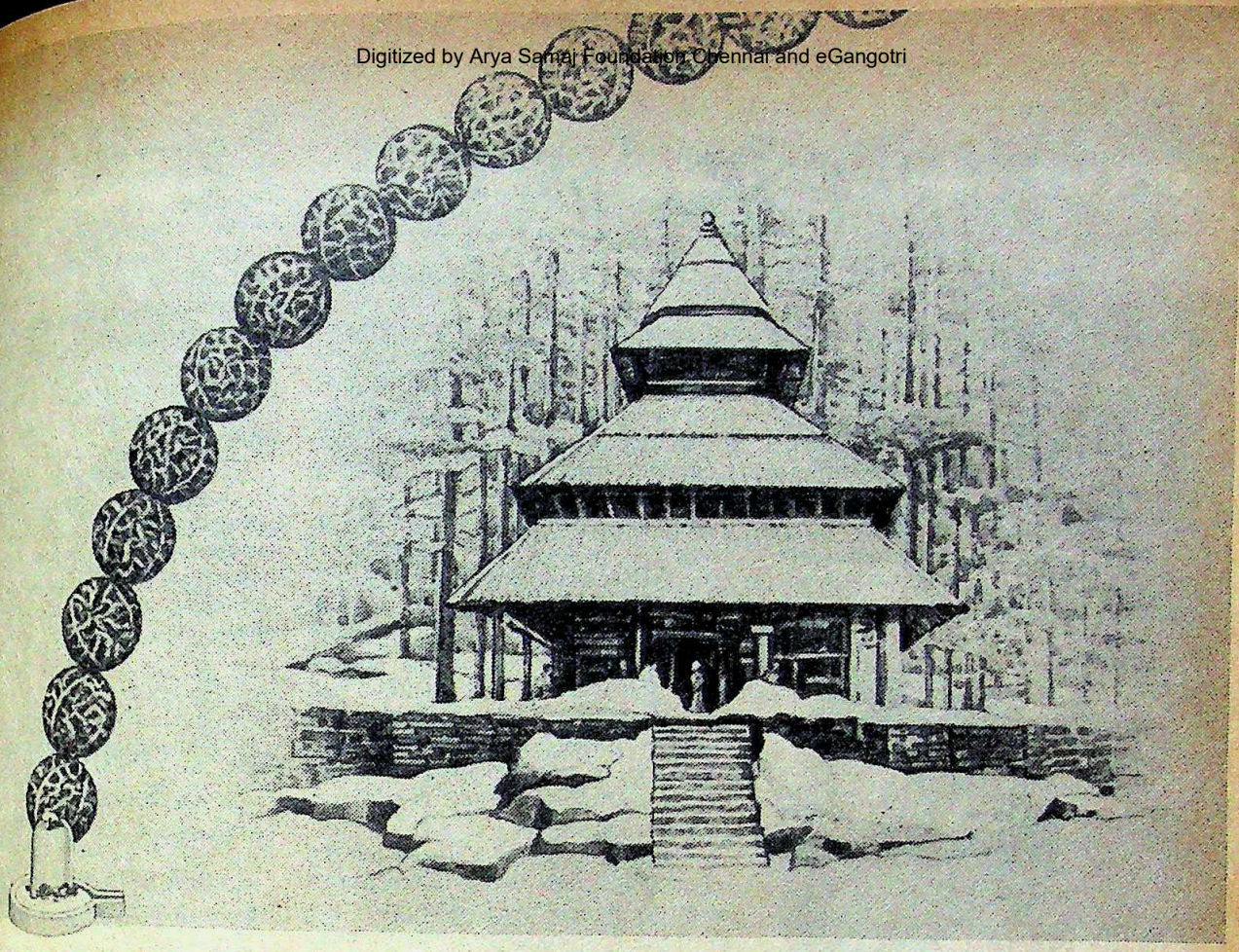
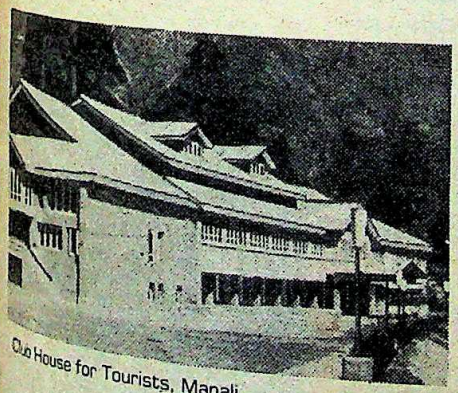


"Faith is the force of life"

– LEO TOLSTOY



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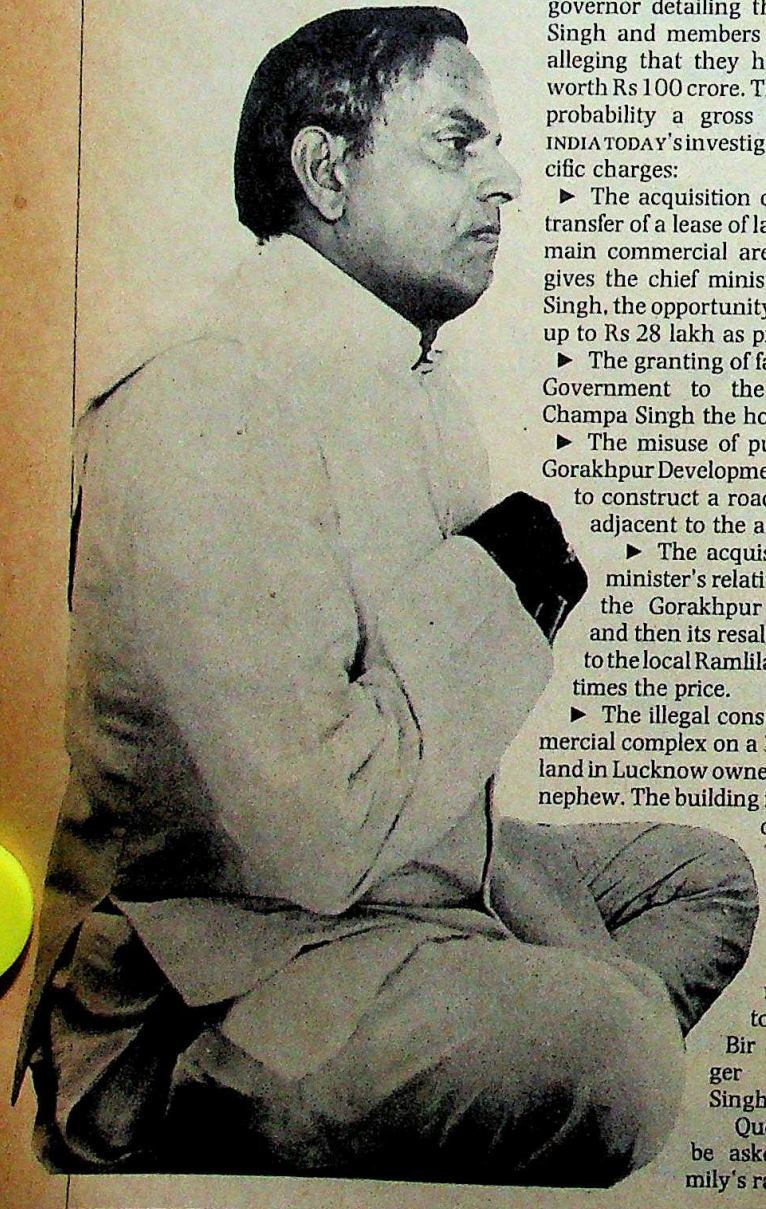
UTTAR PRADESH

Accumulating Assets

The first family's land transactions create suspicion

LATER this month, Bir Bahadur Singh will complete two years as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh—setting some kind of a record in the state's recent political history. This year also marks his completion of two decades as a member of the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, to which he was first elected in 1967.

The years since then have been prosperous ones for Singh and his family, which has graduated from a mud hut and a poverty-stricken existence on 1.48 acres of land in Harnahi village, near Gorakhpur, to more than 55 acres of land, a palatial 12-room house in the village, some flourishing businesses—and controversial property deals in Gorakhpur and Lucknow.



Last fortnight, the chief minister's real estate transactions were gradually becoming the focus of attention and promised to balloon into a major scandal. Janata Party MLAs wrote to the state governor detailing the charges against Singh and members of his family, and alleging that they had amassed assets worth Rs 100 crore. That figure was in all probability a gross exaggeration, but INDIA TODAY's investigations revealed specific charges:

- The acquisition of a house and the transfer of a lease of land in Gorakhpur's main commercial area, at a price that gives the chief minister's wife Champa Singh, the opportunity to make anything up to Rs 28 lakh as profit.
- The granting of favours by the state Government to the man who sold Champa Singh the house.
- The misuse of public funds by the Gorakhpur Development Authority (GDA) to construct a road and build a park adjacent to the acquired property.
- The acquisition by the chief minister's relatives, of two acres of the Gorakhpur Ramlila ground, and then its resale six months later, to the local Ramlila committee at four times the price.
- The illegal construction of a commercial complex on a 350 sq yard plot of land in Lucknow owned by Bir Bahadur's nephew. The building is being built without permission from the local authority, and the work is apparently being undertaken by a Gorakhpur contractor associated with Bir Bahadur's younger brother, Gulab Singh.

Questions could also be asked about the family's rapid acquisition of wealth. Gulab Singh, for instance, now runs two brick kilns on 15 acres of land, owns two cars and 30 heads of cattle apart from that ultimate status symbol in a village, an elephant. Bir Bahadur's son, a student in Doon School, has put down Rs 10,000 to book a Maruti car. Other relatives near Gorakhpur have, in recent years, acquired 36 acres of agricultural land. The list goes on. But even if all this were above board (as Bir Bahadur Singh insists it is), the other cases will take some explaining.

The most noteworthy deal concerns the property in Gorakhpur's Golghar market area. Till 1975, when he became a deputy minister, Bir Bahadur used to live in a servant's quarter near Nepal Road in Gorakhpur. And the Golghar house was owned by a well-known taluqdar, Bri

Chief Minister Bir Bahadur and his family are at the centre of a growing scandal revolving around the wealth they have amassed from real estate deals.

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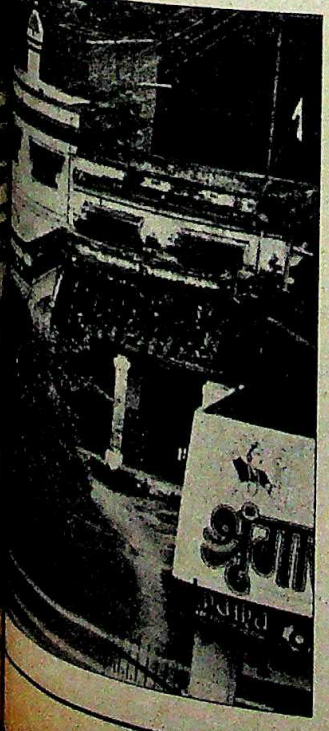
...Sahai. The house (available to the ...t administration under the state's ...t control law) was allotted to Bir ...adur in 1975 for a monthly rent of ...

Eight years later, when Bir Bahadur ...irrigation minister, his wife signed an ...ement for buying the house (which ...a covered area of 2,000 sq ft) and for ...transfer of the long-term lease on the ...of a 3,638 sq yard plot in the heart of ...rakhpur's main shopping area. The ...e of Rs 48,000 was later revised to ...0,000, but even this was low, given ...e size of the building and the location of ...land. The two would have been priced ...mmercially at Rs 50 lakh.

Bir Bahadur told INDIA TODAY (*see interview*) that his wife only owned the ...e, and she had no rights over the ...d, which is nazul (long-term govern...ment leasehold) property. He added that ...e would have to pay the Government at ...market price of the land if he wanted to ...nstruct anything on it.

He is right, of course. Nevertheless, ...re is little doubt that Champa Singh ...w has the opportunity to make a neat ...ancial killing on the land, should she so ...ose. The 'market rate' that Bir Baha...dur talks about is not that prevailing in the ...en market for land, but one fixed by the ...vernment. According to D.K. Kotia, ...e-chairman of the GDA, this varies ...tween Rs 40 and Rs 75 per sq ft. The ...en market price is more than twice as

Gorakhpur house: favoured site



BIR BAHADUR SINGH

"I have done no favours"

CHIEF Minister Bir Bahadur Singh has been a controversial politician, against whom corruption charges in the past have not been proved. But now there are specific allegations against him and his family. Interviewed by Senior Correspondent DILIP AWASTHI *for two hours, he tried to explain his position. Excerpts:*

Q. *The main allegation against you is getting nazul land transferred in your wife's name and buying the house built on it for a song.*

A. The transaction will yield no gain to me. I had to buy the house as I was living in it since 1975. The owner was also more interested in selling it than claiming a meagre monthly rent of Rs 56. I did not buy the land, which still belongs to the Government.

> "I have told my brother and other relatives that I will not spare them if I find that they are misusing their position in my name."
>
> BIR BAHADUR SINGH
> *chief minister, Uttar Pradesh*

Q. *Buying a house built on 32,745.45 sq ft in Golghar market for Rs 80,000 is not a bad bargain.*

A. I can only buy it if I pay the Government the market rate.

Q. *The charge is that the owner quoted a low price as he was otherwise compensated by the Government.*

A. I have done no favours for him.

Q. *A one-acre plot of land has been exempted from the land ceiling.*

A. I've not ordered this.

Q. *The fact remains that you have paid Rs 80,000 for a house and land which could fetch Rs 50 lakh.*

A. I haven't bought the land. I bought the house, and the land's lease has been transferred in my wife's name.

Q. *There are several charges of corruption and misuse of power by your younger brother Gulab Singh.*

A. We have no connection with each other. His entry to my house in Lucknow is banned and he never calls on me when I'm in Gorakhpur.

Q. *But he lives in the Golghar house that you bought and looks after the property in your village Harnahi.*

A. He is my brother after all, but I have told him and all my relations I will not spare them if I find them misusing their position in my name. I have told the officials the same thing.

Q. *Your family had only 1.48 acres in your home village in 1967. Since you entered politics, you and your brother have holdings of more than 55 acres—18 acres in Harnahi.*

A. This is not true. My father was a big businessman.

Q. *But residents of your village say that it was a hand-to-mouth existence for your family 20 years ago.*

A. There was a bad patch.

Q. *Your Harnahi house is palatial now. Your brother owns two brick kilns, and has acquired a lot of assets.*

A. It is not difficult to get into any business these days when so many loans are available. He earns something like Rs 80,000 a year from the brick kilns and sells 200 litres of milk to the Gorakhpur dairy, which fetches Rs 1,000 per day. But I have nothing to do with him, his property or the Harnahi house. I have had no links with my village for more than 25 years.

Q. *But you often visit the village.*

A. Never for more than 15 minutes.

Q. *Gulab Singh has made several land deals in Gorakhpur. How?*

A. I'm not aware of these deals. As I told you, Gulab Singh and I don't have a personal relationship any more.

Q. *Are you aware that your school-going son has booked a Maruti car in his own name?*

A. I don't know of any such booking. He is just a kid.

Q. *There seems to be efforts by your family to amass property.*

A. I can assure you that if at all my relatives have done so—and I am not aware that they have—I have not been a party to it.

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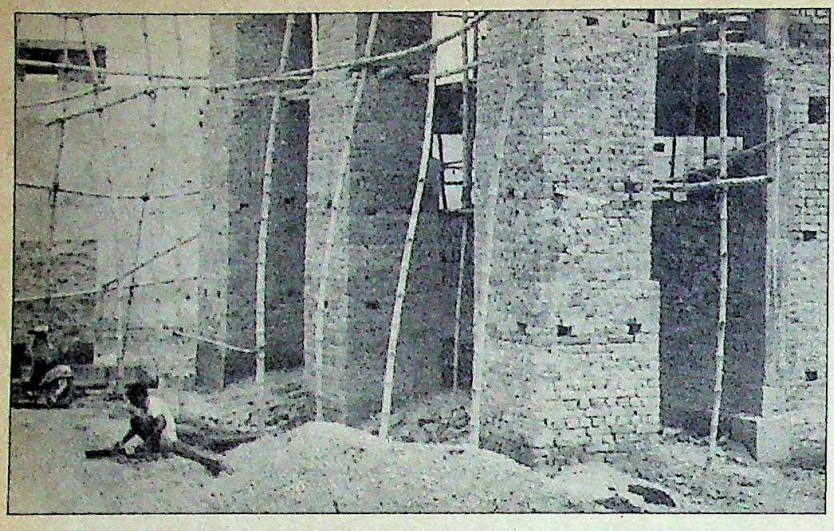

The chief minister's younger brother Gulab Singh is involved in controversial property deals in Lucknow and Gorakhpur.

high: a nearby plot of land auctioned in early 1986 fetched Rs 163 per sq ft. Champa Singh can pay the maximum officially-fixed rate and, after getting the land use pattern changed, get at least twice as much. The net take could be as high as Rs 28.8 lakh.

That is only a part of the story. Even as the deal between Sahai and Champa Singh was on, the state Government took a vital decision that seemed to favour Sahai, who also owned a one-acre plot of land in a commercial area in front of the Government Jubilee College. This plot had come under the urban land ceiling law of the early 1970s, but the authorities exempted the land from the ceiling law, and Sahai is now free to do what he pleases with it. At even Rs 150 per sq ft, he can sell the land for as much as Rs 65 lakh.

In order to construct a road from a point adjacent to that with Champa Singh's house leading on to a main road, the GDA acquired land from Sahai for Rs 3 lakh. Kotia strongly refutes the argument that the road was built because the chief minister's house was nearby. But local officials are at a loss to explain the locating of a Rs 16-lakh beautification project and children's park, complete with snack booths, at the rear of Bir

Lucknow house; and Gulab Singh: dubious deal

Bahadur's house in the town since this is not a residential area. There are only three houses around—one is with Bir Bahadur and the other two are with Sahai.

When Champa Singh bought the house, half of it had been occupied by MLA Ram Krishna Dwivedi for 15 years. Dwivedi was provided another rent control house in July this year (within seven months of the house being formally acquired by Champa Singh). But the alternative house had been occupied by the local sub-divisional magistrate (SDM), so he was transferred and a police posse sent to evict his family on the very day of the transfer. The SDM's wife lodged an FIR with the local police station, and coincidentally the SDM soon got a prized post at Faizabad. The net result is that Champa Singh has got the vacant possession of her house.

A lesser known land case relates to the traditional Ramlila ground in Gorakhpur's Birdghat locality. In January last year, Gulab Singh was instrumental in helping some of his relatives (Teja Devi, Vidyawati Devi, Deepraji Devi and Ram Sakhi Devi) buy a two-acre plot which formed part of the Ramlila ground. All the four women are married to various uncles and cousins of Bir Bahadur. The land was sold to them by another relative of the chief minister, who had earlier managed to buy the land from the district administration by paying the Government's 'market rate', despite the fact that this was the town's Ramlila ground.

When the local Ramlila committee protested at the women buying the land, Bir Bahadur told the district magistrate to sort out the problem. But nothing was done and finally the committee had to buy back the land seven months later, for Rs 1.56 lakh—more than four times the earlier land price of Rs 36,000. While both the purchase and subsequent sale of the land were perfectly legal transactions, the dramatic increase in the price of the land in just seven months suggested that either the initial purchase price of the land had been understated or its subsequent selling price vastly inflated. Gauri Dayal Bachcha, general secretary of the Nagarik Samiti, said that Gulab Singh was the main negotiator in the whole deal.

Meanwhile, in Lucknow, Gulab Singh's 16-year-old son was made the owner of a 355 sq yard plot of land in the swank Maruti Puram locality, bought in 1982 for Rs 25,000. Initially a three-room house was built on it, but now a shopping complex is being constructed on it, although the town planners have not yet cleared the plans. Under the law, the building should be pulled down.

Oddly enough, the name-plate hanging from the half-built structure is that of Dhruv Chand Gupta, who announces his identity as the secretary of the Congress traders' cell. Gupta is, in fact, a Gorakhpur contractor who is close to Gulab Singh.

Many of Bir Bahadur Singh's explanations in the interview are unconvincing. He claimed, for instance, that he had not visited his village in 25 years, then admitted a minute later that he had been there a month ago. He also claimed at first that he had nothing to do with Gulab Singh, who was not allowed into his house. Then he gave his brother's contact telephone number at Gorakhpur as the one at his wife's house in the Golghar market. Gulab Singh did not make himself available for comment despite being tracked to both Gorakhpur and Harnahi village. The family's rapid rise from penury to affluence may well be explainable. But some of the deals that have now come to light will certainly not stand close scrutiny.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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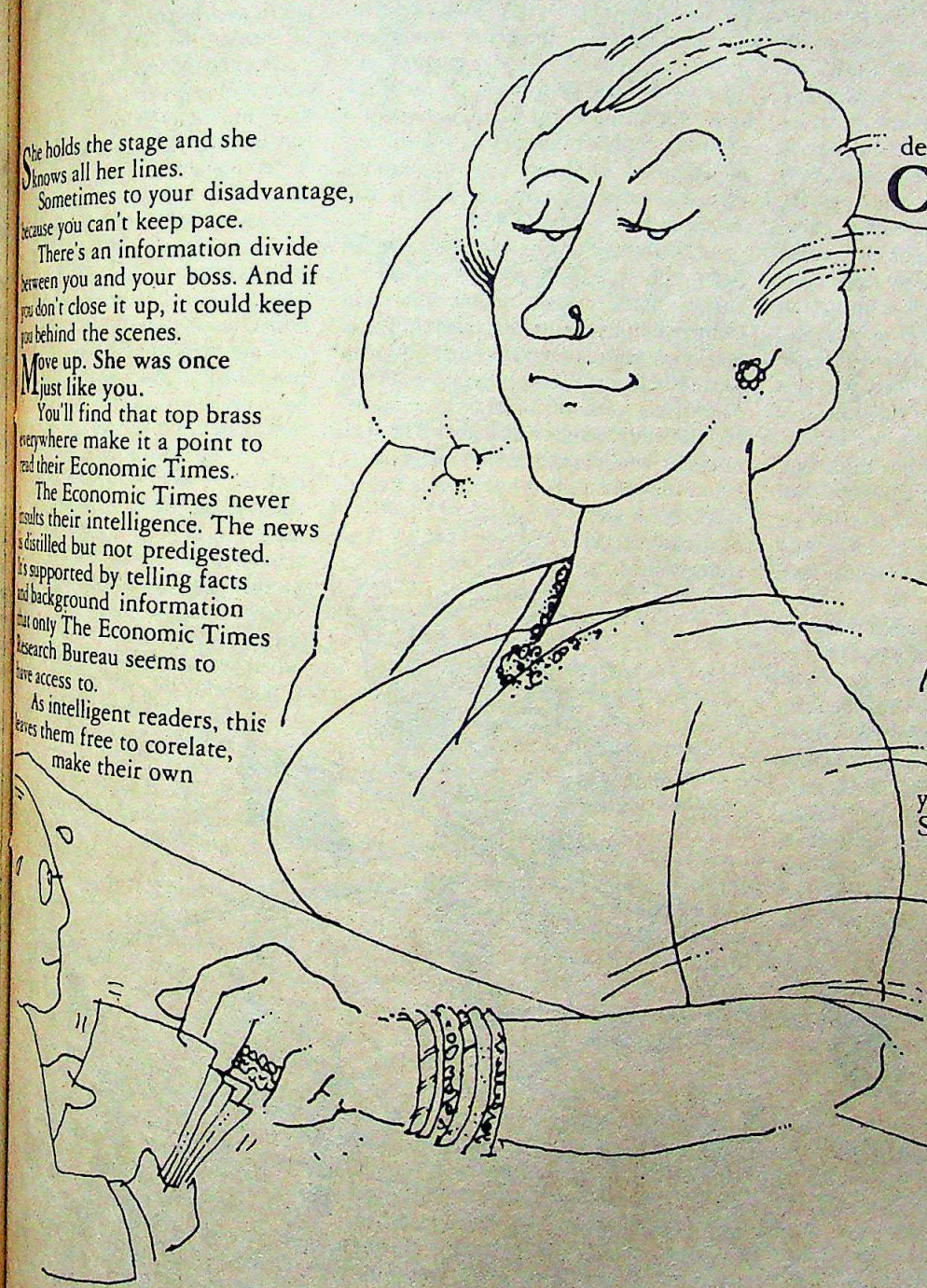
PRIMA DONNA



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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

MAKES YOUR BOSS THINK AHEAD OF YOU

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V.P. SINGH

The Balancing Act

The pressure mounts on him to choose his allies

Is he a rightist or a leftist? Is he in power politics or not? Will he float a new party or take over the Congress(I)? Will he support the US or the USSR? Is he with the urban middle class or with the farmers? All good questions. But few real answers.

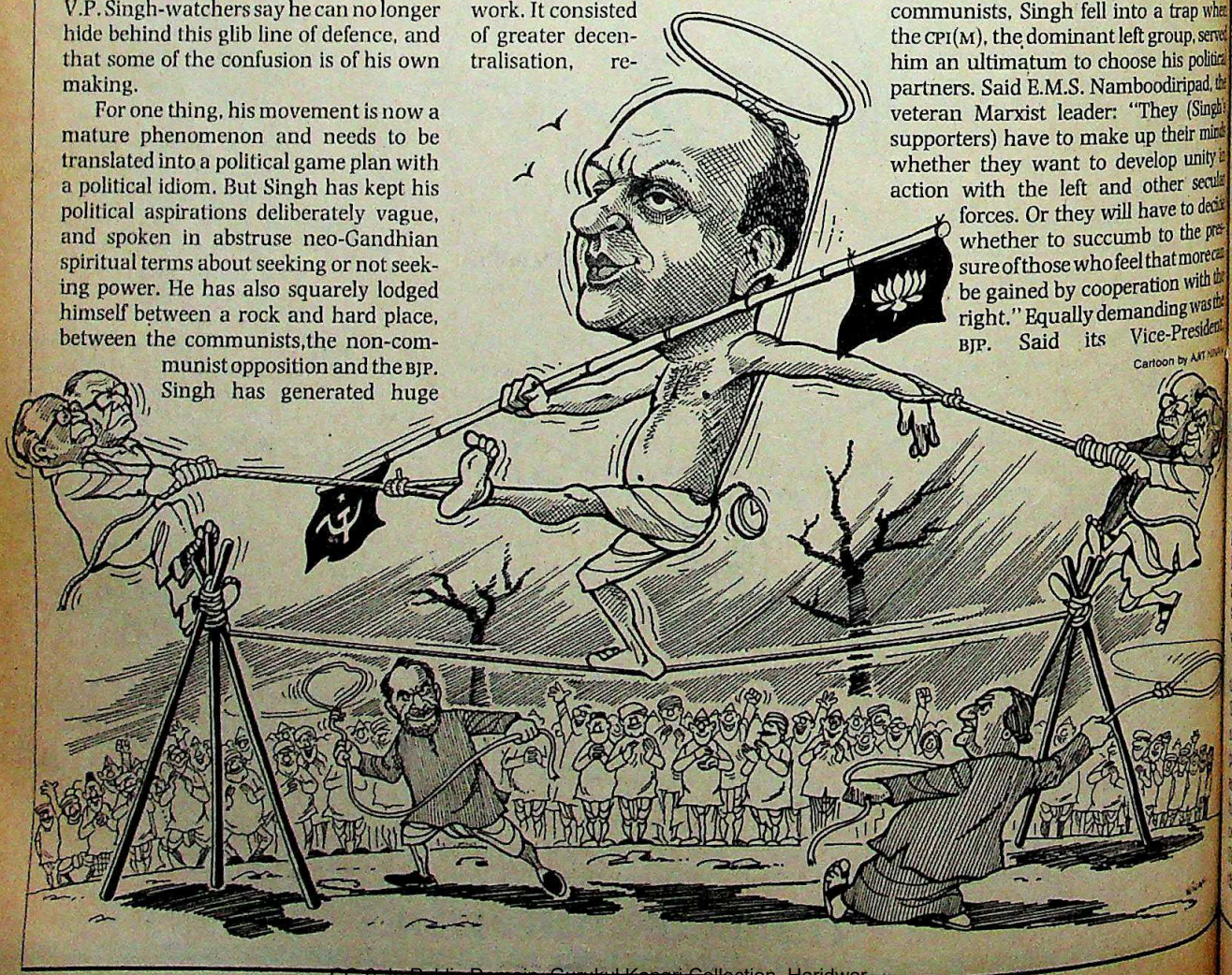
Even some of the most ardent sympathisers of former defence minister V.P. Singh are beginning to ask, will the real V.P. Singh please stand up? The curious dilemma in which Singh now finds himself is that the more he shows himself to the public, and the more enthusiastic are the crowds that greet him, the less people know about him. Singh answers this charge by saying that the rural masses with whom he communicates understand his message clearly. Only the urban armchair intellectuals are confused. But V.P. Singh-watchers say he can no longer hide behind this glib line of defence, and that some of the confusion is of his own making.

For one thing, his movement is now a mature phenomenon and needs to be translated into a political game plan with a political idiom. But Singh has kept his political aspirations deliberately vague, and spoken in abstruse neo-Gandhian spiritual terms about seeking or not seeking power. He has also squarely lodged himself between a rock and hard place, between the communists, the non-communist opposition and the BJP. Singh has generated huge crowds in most places that he has been to. But crowds don't magically transform into cadres which are the essence of any form of political opposition. He is stuck now, with something he vaguely calls a "forum". And because of this vacuum, he depends on both the BJP and the communists for cadre support. And both will demand their pound of flesh.

Alternatively, if he leans on Sharad Joshi and the Shetkari Sangathan for support and insists, as he has done, that farmers don't owe anybody anything, he will be seen as simply outdoing Devi Lal in a crude bid for rural support and negating everything he stood for as finance minister. Basically, Singh was a liberal finance minister, and even after his resignation, he enunciated a liberal economic framework. It consisted of greater decentralisation, removal of unnecessary licences and permits, and opening up of the economy for greater competition. But only recently, in an apparent bid for left support, he called the leftist parties his "natural allies". Besides, Singh has made no systematic scrutiny of what kind of politicians—be they ineffective, corrupt, power-driven—who may be jumping opportunistically on his side.

During the last few months, he has addressed over a crore people, from farmers to university students and advocates. But he had refrained from making any direct commitment on any issue and only asked them to revolt against the corrupt political system and leadership.

He has already shared public platforms with political foes like the BJP, and the CPI(M), regional leaders like Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, peasant and trade union leaders like Sharad Joshi and Datta Samant. This appeared to be a calculated attempt to broaden his mass base but it seemed that he had not thought out the long-range political implications. In fact, in his dealing with the communists, Singh fell into a trap when the CPI(M), the dominant left group, served him an ultimatum to choose his political partners. Said E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the veteran Marxist leader: "They (Singh's supporters) have to make up their minds whether they want to develop unity in action with the left and other secular forces. Or they will have to decide whether to succumb to the pressure of those who feel that more can be gained by cooperation with the right." Equally demanding was the BJP. Said its Vice-President



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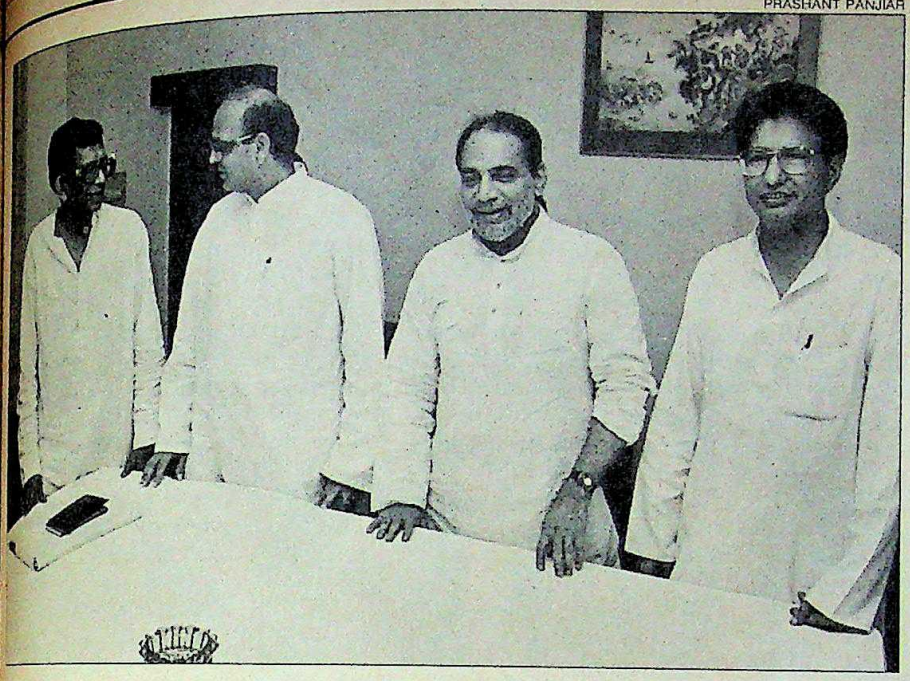
PRASHANT PANJIAR



(From left) Rajni Kothari, Singh, Hegde and Ajit Singh: confused signals

> By keeping his political aspirations deliberately vague, Singh finds himself lodged between the communists and the BJP.

Sikander Bakht: "So far, he is fence sitter. He must come out against Congress(I) policies instead of attacking the prime minister alone."

Taking a cue from their central leadership, junior office bearers of both the parties have started questioning Singh on his conduct and utterances. In a hard-hitting statement, B.T. Ranadive, a prominent CPI(M) leader, lashed out at Singh for accepting the title of Raj Rishi from a Brahmin-dominated social organisation in Varanasi. But Singh had his own political compulsions. He wanted to erase the widely believed impression that he was only a Thakur leader.

But ultimately, it is the fight between the BJP and the CPI(M), that has crystallised Singh's dilemma. In fact, the BJP leadership, first to recognise the ground swell of popularity for Singh, instructed its middle and lower level functionaries to organise his public campaign. The leftists, on the other hand, were a little slow in gauging Singh's crowd-pulling potential. While the BJP was busy drawing detailed schedules for Singh's visit to most of the northern states—and even to Hyderabad—the CPI(M), the Janata Party and the Lok Dal leaders established contact and invited him to share a platform with them. Singh grabbed the chance because he too was looking for leftist support: he did not want to be dubbed a communalist or a rightist. Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammed Khan organised Singh's meetings with not only Jyoti Basu and Namboodiripad, but also dinner meetings with leftist mediamen.

THE Janata Party too has been divided over the question of supporting Singh. Party chief Chandra Shekhar openly criticised the former defence minister for his vagueness. And last fortnight Singh stated that he would accept Chandra Shekhar as his leader.

Originally, Singh's entire game plan was based on an anti-Rajiv wicket. He and his supporters were convinced that gradually Congressmen would have to look for an alternative leader. He therefore refrained from attacking the Congress(I) and its policies and even vowed to follow the Nehru economic and political model. But he had to change his strategy midstream when he found that the anti-Rajiv campaign would not take him very far. And then came his famous package of reforms: delinking money from politics, labour participation in management, job reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, remunerative prices for the farmers and action against economic offenders. But he avoided taking any stand on foreign policy, the public sector and his open commitment to replace Rajiv with a person who has not been in the Congress for a long period. When he appeared to dither, followers like V.C. Shukla began to force the issue. Shukla, in his statement declared that his group would not take BJP support—a commitment which Singh has not made so far.

There seems to be a division in Singh's camp on the question of accepting BJP support. While all of them agree that the group should project the image of progressives and secularists, some of them like Khan and Nehru aren't hostile to the idea of linking up with the BJP for agitational politics in North India. In these areas, the leftist have no organisation worth the name. Moreover, they also feel that in those states where the leftists are powerful, they will neither be willing to part with any seats nor be ready to share power. Moreover, if Singh chooses to align openly with them in left-dominated states, he will put off dissident Congressmen. For example, A.B. Ghani Khan Choudhury has made it very clear that he will not join the Singh bandwagon if he shares a platform with the Marxists in West Bengal. In Kerala too dissident Congressmen shy away for similar reasons.

However, Singh's major problem seems to be an absence of any organisation. He has ruled out the formation of a new party because he still believes that Congressmen—the truly natural allies—will ultimately swell his ranks. But bowing to pressure, he has agreed to the creation of an issue-based political group. Here, too, he is caught in the dilemma of taking either the left or the right with him. Last week, he held meetings with the Karnataka Chief Minister, Ramakrishna Hegde, as well as communist leaders to sort out the basic problems of opposition unity based on current issues like corruption and electoral reforms. But as he begins his nation-wide Dharmayudha against the Rajiv Gandhi Government, he will have to decide on who his allies will be. Since he has announced that he will die a Congressman, he may find himself uncomfortable with the communists, whose avowed objective is to do away with Congress culture. He has to choose between a spotless white, saffron, and red. He can't wear all three.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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AICC(I)

Damp Squib

A routine reshuffle occurs

FOR months now, the Congress(I), under heavy political attack, has been laying great store by the imminent reshuffle in the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I), hoping that sweeping changes in the party organisation would somehow turn the tide. But when the reshuffle finally came last fortnight, it brought little cheer.

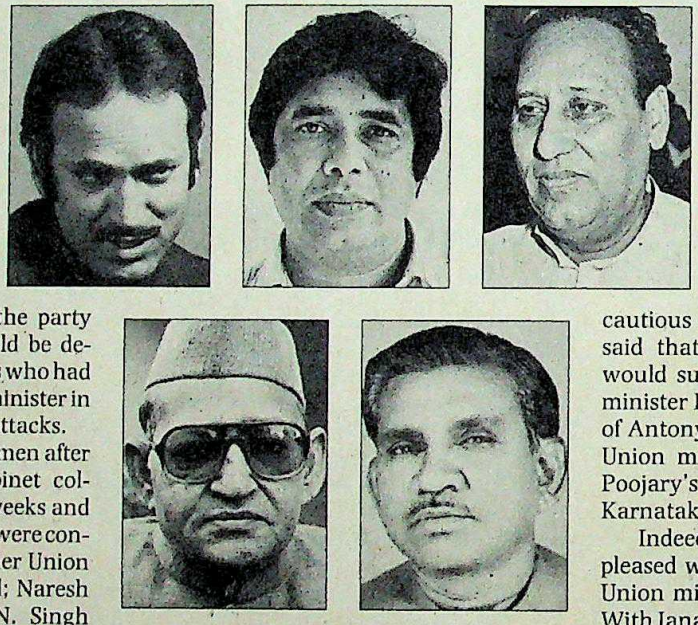
Party President Rajiv Gandhi announced the appointment of five AICC(I) general secretaries, two PCC(I) presidents and three new office-bearers for the Uttar Pradesh party unit. The changes—the fourth in less than 30 months—neither heralded a purge of deadwood nor the induction of people capable of revitalising the party monolith. At best they could be described as a reward to leaders who had stoutly defended the prime minister in the face of recent political attacks.

Rajiv made his choice of men after consultations with his cabinet colleagues that lasted several weeks and during which 40 candidates were considered. The new faces: former Union minister Ghulam Nabi Azad; Naresh Chand Chaturvedi and K.N. Singh (both MPs from Uttar Pradesh); Ram Ratan Ram, an MP from Bihar, and Oscar Fernandes, president of the Karnataka party unit. They replaced Nawal Kishore Sharma, Bhagwat Jha Azad, A.K. Antony and Najma Heptullah. In addition, Antony was despatched to Kerala to head the state unit while Union Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojary was asked to take over Oscar Fernandes' responsibilities in the state of Karnataka.

The reshuffle came in the wake of the party's failure to assert itself, particularly in the northern belt, where public hostility towards it has been increasing. This, is despite the fact that only last year heavyweights had been introduced into the AICC(I).

What annoyed Rajiv most was the failure of the AICC(I) office-bearers to implement the Congress(I) Working Committee's resolution to organise public meetings to counter the propaganda about corruption in high places. When the opposition attack led by V.P. Singh came, the party organisation simply collapsed like a sand wall. Repeated warnings failed to shake the AICC(I) and finally leaders close to Rajiv began criticising it.

The first indication of change was Ghulam Nabi Azad's offer to resign from his post as minister of state for civil supplies on September 5. In a hard-hitting letter to Rajiv, he demanded a purge in the organisation and offered his services for party work. The letter, inexplicably released to the press, said: "The reaction of the Congress organisation has been far from satisfactory...and one can observe a sense of diffidence on the part of the party functionaries in general."



(Clockwise from top left) Azad, Fernandes, K.N. Singh, Chaturvedi, Ratan Ram: new party team

It would seem that Rajiv shared these sentiments. The only AICC(I) office-bearers who were left untouched were General Secretary G.K. Moopanar and Treasurer Sita Ram Kesari. While Moopanar has performed his function with dignity and confidence, Sita Ram Kesari has been occupying his post for the last eight years.

But whether the newcomers can perform at a level at which their predecessors failed to is another question altogether. Azad can be trusted to be aggressive in his dealings with the Opposition. However, the rest of them are barely known beyond their backyards. For example, the only factor that qualifies both K.N. Singh and Chaturvedi for their posts is that they are V.P. Singh's arch-rivals. While K.N. Singh, a Thakur who represents Ghaziabad, is an active member of the newly-created Congress Socialist Forum, Chaturvedi—a Brahmin from Kanpur who is a trade union leader—is a protege of the former working president Kamalapati Tripathi. The choice of the two MPs will, though, surely strike a caste balance in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Indeed, it was the caste consideration that led to the inclusion of Ram Ratan Ram, a Harijan from Bihar, as general secretary. Ever since Ram Dhan—now with V.P. Singh—quit the AICC(I), there has been no general secretary to represent the Harijan community at all.

The response within the Congress(I) has been at best lukewarm. Even Tripathi, ever willing to rise to Rajiv's defence, was cautious in his comments when he said that he hoped the new team would succeed. Former Kerala chief minister K. Karunakaran was critical of Antony's new brief, as was former Union minister Jaffer Sharief about Poojary's posting to the state of Karnataka.

Indeed, many leaders were displeased with the trend of appointing Union ministers as PCC(I) presidents. With Janardhan Poojary, the number has now gone up to four. Disappointment was evident on another count as well. The party reshuffle failed to touch the issue of more than half a dozen PCC(I)s—including the UPCC(I)—which have continued to function without presidents for a long time.

Rajiv loyalists insist though that the reshuffle will revitalise the party. They say, moreover, that it will serve as a signal to office-bearers in state units who have failed to perfom. Rajiv was apparently also influenced by his belief that the major crisis has blown over and that he no longer needs to award members of the old guard whose loyalty is in doubt. Says Moopanar: "We have a good mix of both the old and the young. All those who are hard working and committed will continue to be rewarded." Fine words, and they should suffice until the party president decides to go in for another of his regular reshuffles.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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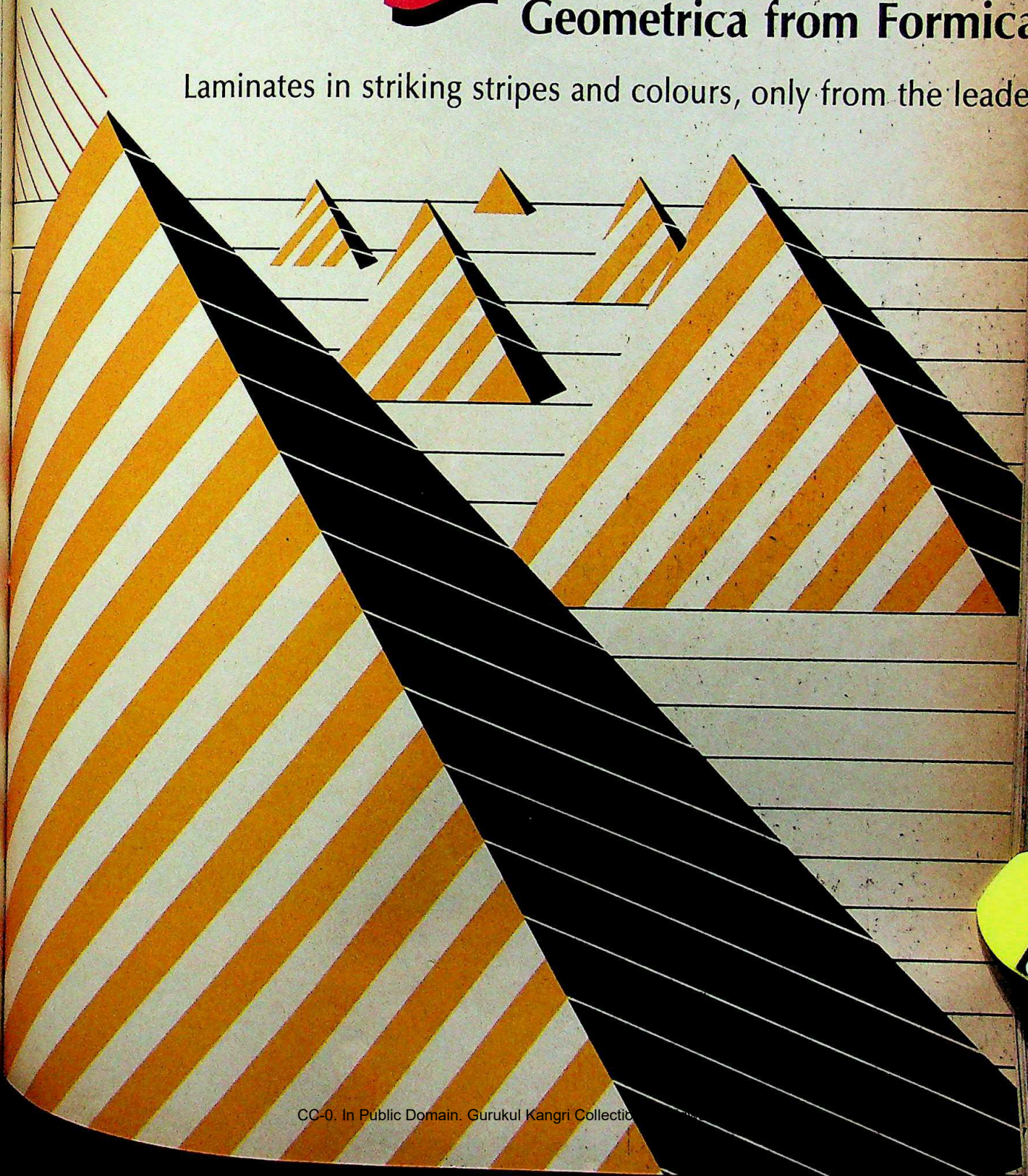

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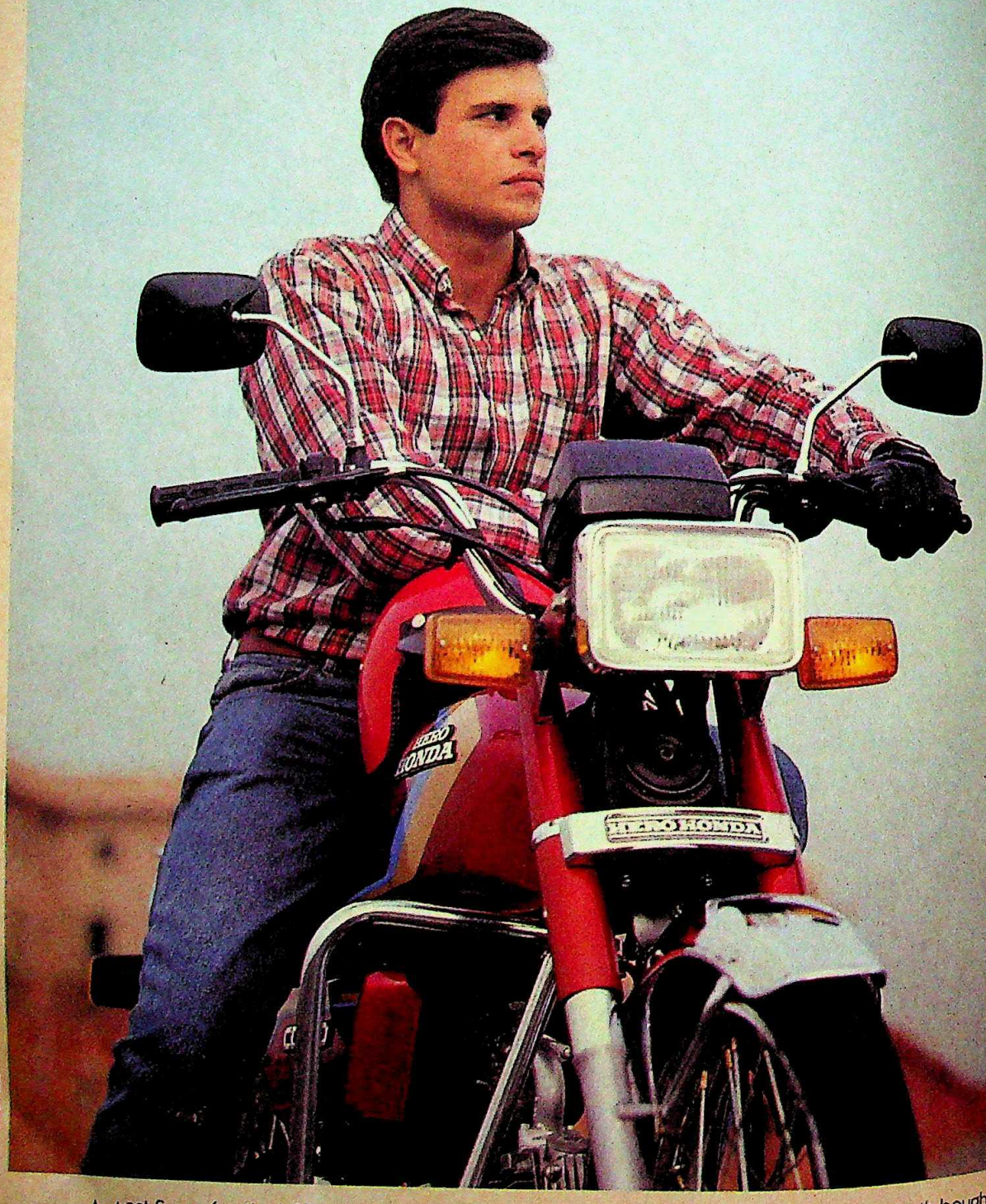
The Hero Honda CD100 Vs The



ULKA-D-HH-532

Meet Sunny (on the left) and Bunty. They are old friends. And old foes. They have rarely agreed on anything in life.

If Sunny loves cricket, Bunty loves football. Sunny enjoys literature, Bunty loves to plunge into the world of facts and figures. Bunty is always formally dressed. Sunny would never be caught in a suit and tie. Sunny works in an advertising agency. Bunty works in a bank.

In their ten years of friendship they have agreed only once. And that was when they both bought their Hero Hondas.

But not really. Because ever since then a war has broken out between the two. Each claims his Hero Honda is better in every respect.

Like fuel economy. The last time they had an argument about whose motorcycle was more fuel efficient, they journeyed a full four hundred kilometres to test it out.

Like toughness. They have taken their bikes through

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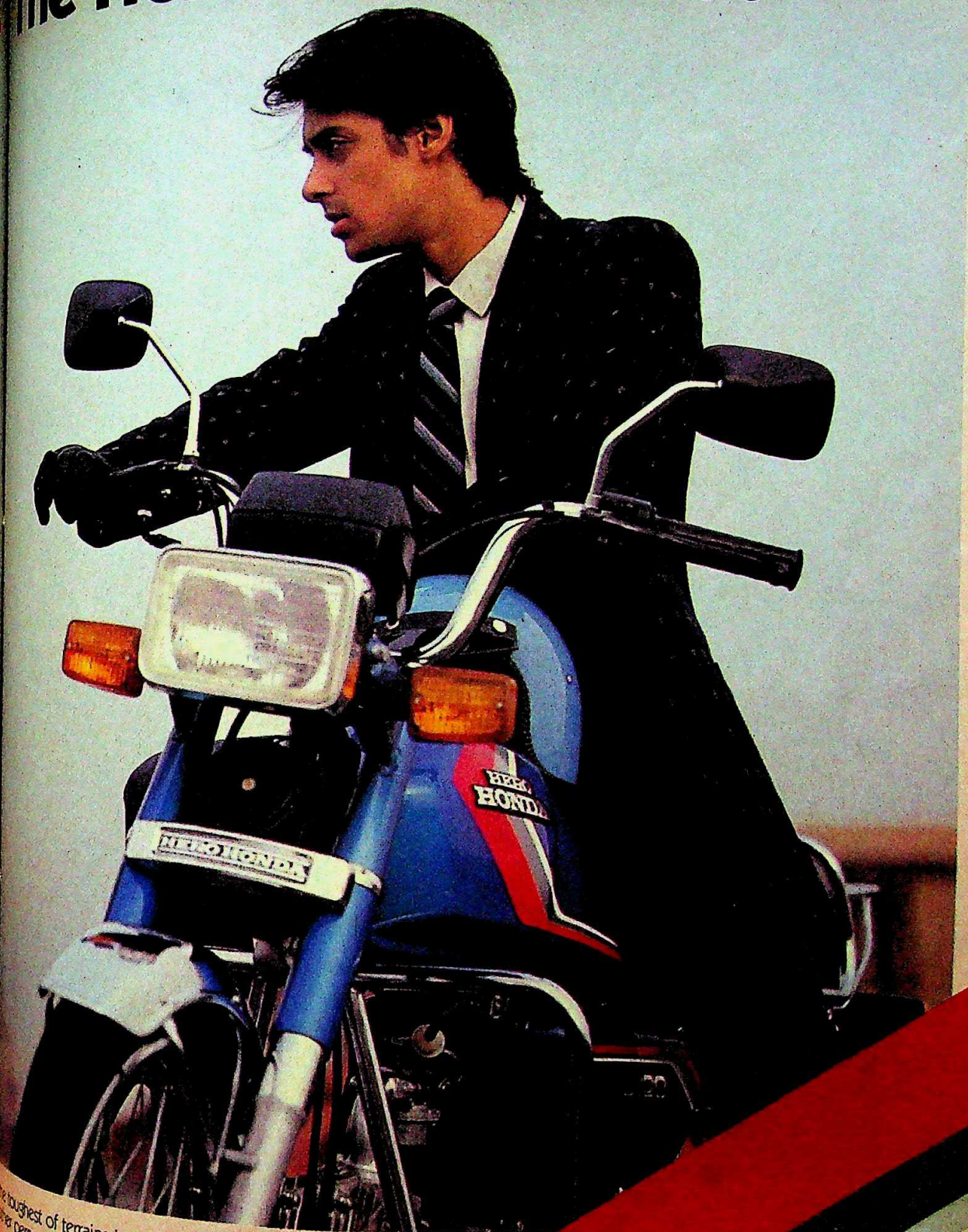
The Hero Honda CD100



the toughest of terrains just to prove a point to the other person.

Like looks. Sunny insists that his red bike is the finest looking bike in town. Bunty feels that his Hero Honda easily commands more attention especially with the girls in his colony).

But we can't really blame the two. It's so easy to be bloody proud of your Hero Honda that you'd never let another bike steal the show—even if the other bike is also a Hero Honda CD 100 — *What a bike!*

HERO HONDA

Fill it. Shut it. Forget it.

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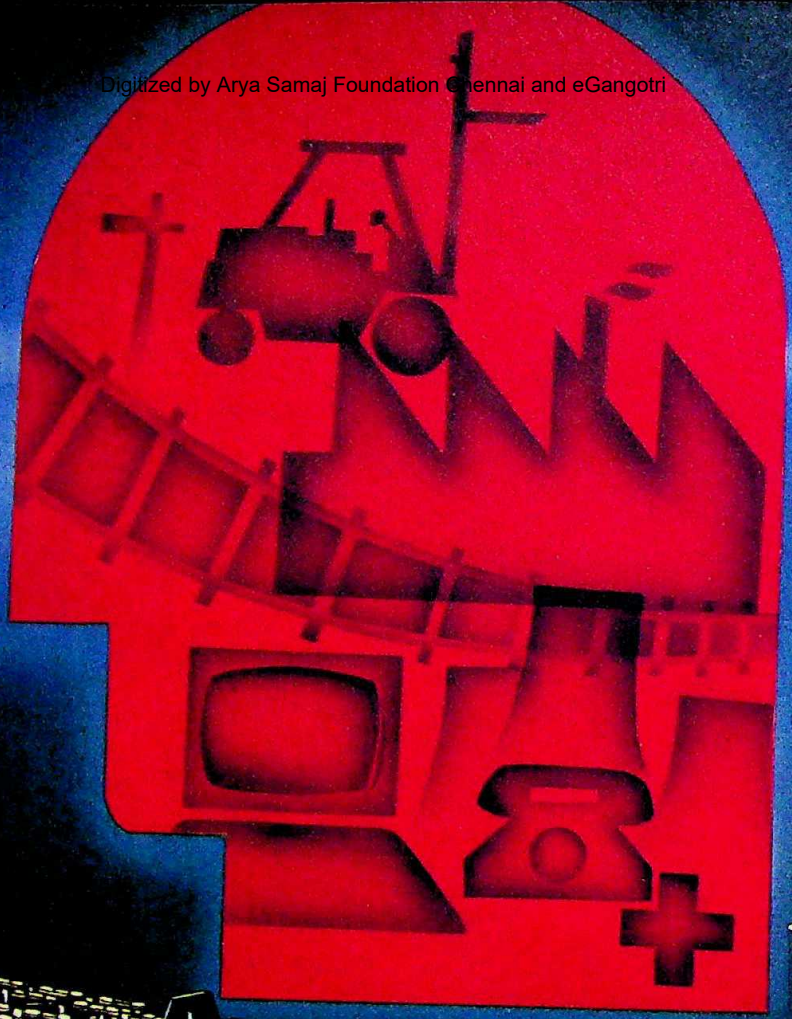

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DISARMAMENT

New Role

Indian heads UN conference

LIMITED successes in foreign policy appear to be the only silver lining in an otherwise dismal period for the Rajiv Gandhi Government. So far, even though fingers are crossed, the Sri Lanka accord seems to be a qualified gain. But what pleasantly surprised India-watchers last fortnight was the unanimous election of Minister of State for External Affairs Natwar Singh as president of the UN-sponsored International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development. The conference was first proposed in 1983 by French President Francois Mitterrand and the General Assembly subsequently passed a resolution to empanel it.

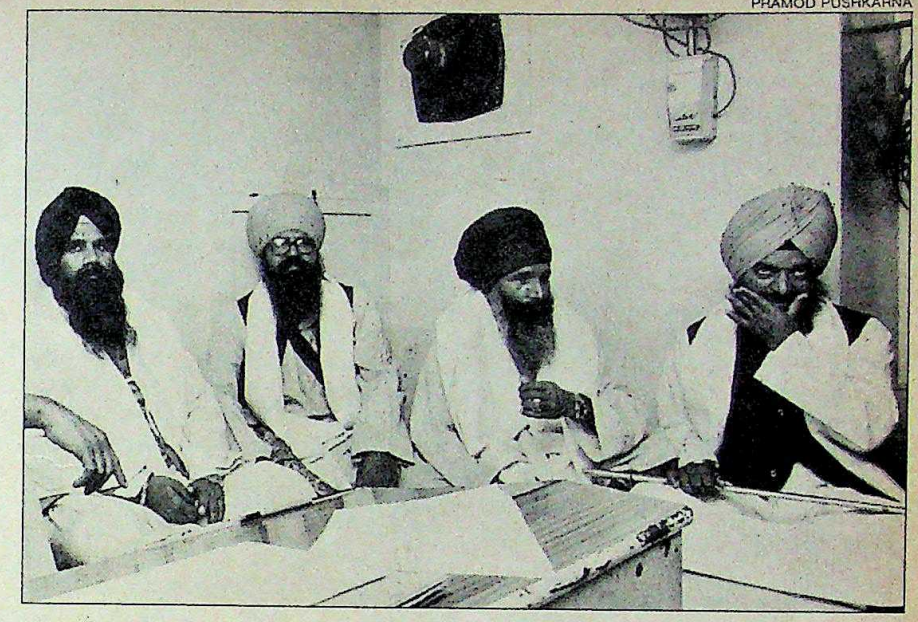
Singh: rare honour

Panelists include eminent personalities like Nobel laureate Lawrence Klein of the University of Philadelphia; Edgar Faure, member of the French Academy; Raul Prebisch, professor, University of Buenos Aires; Agha Shahi, former foreign minister, Pakistan; Walter Scheel, former president, Federal Republic of Germany; and Oleg T. Bogomolov, member of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

The conference is concentrating on proposals designed to end the spiralling costs of the arms race in which global spending has already exceeded $900 billion a year. A draft now under preparation has already met with the disapproval of the US delegation to the UN as it seeks to devise methods to cut arms spending without taking into account the realities of military security. But the Soviet Union and the US's European allies, are supporting the draft, and Mikhail Gorbachev has even sent a message to the conference proposing a discussion of the conference proposals at a specially-convened meeting of the Security Council. The final proposals will be submitted to the General Assembly by Natwar Singh, the second Indian to be elected to an international disarmament conference of this level. The first was Dr Homi Bhabha, elected president of the Atoms for Peace Conference in 1955.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

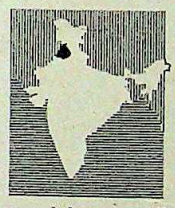


(From left) Priests Puran, Satwinder, Kashmira and Jaswant Singh

PUNJAB

Defiant Call

High priests back militants



AS the first rays of the morning sun reddened the holy sarovar in the Golden Temple on September 9, four high priests of the Sikh panth finally broke a three-week long spell of silence. Assembling in a room at the Darshani Deori, gateway to the Harmandir Sahib, and facing the twice-demolished and still only partially-rebuilt Akal Takht, the priests announced that 16 main militant groups and factions had come together and forged unity in order to make the Sikhs "struggle for freedom" more effective.

A handwritten statement in Punjabi was read out to a group of journalists by high priest Giani Jaswant Singh, the jathedar of the Takht Damdama Sahib. Also present were three of his fellow-priests: Giani Puran Singh, jathedar of the Golden Temple, Akal Takht jathedar Bhai Kashmira Singh and Giani Sawinder Singh of Takht Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib.

For weeks since the dramatic "retreat" of head priest Darshan Singh Ragi, these four high priests had maintained an enigmatic stance on the issues before the Sikh community. But now they issued an open challenge to the Central Government, directing people of the *qaum* to lend all-out support to the militants, charged the police with fake encounters, absolved the terrorists in the state of all blame by saying they were sacrificing their lives for the "freedom" of the panth, and virtually called for the creation of an independent Khalistan. The four head priests urged the followers of the Sikh Panth to rally behind the militants in their "struggle to break the shackles of slavery".

The early morning announcement instantly marked a new phase in Punjab politics, signalled the end of the period when Ragi could have exercised a moderating influence, and served notice that the Sikh religious leadership was ready for open confrontation. Inevitably, it portended a polarisation of opinion in Punjab, and perhaps a further cornering of all factions of the Akali Dal, which even began to look irrelevant in the face of the militant offensive.

The high priests had in fact served advance notice of their latest pronouncement. For on August 17, they had released their first joint statement calling on the various militant organisations to unite. The names of the 16 militant organisations that were to come together last fortnight were not immediately known.

And though observers of the Punjab scene—familiar with the bloody infighting that goes on among terrorist organisations like the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) and the Babbar Khalsa International—may have taken the high priests' announcement with a

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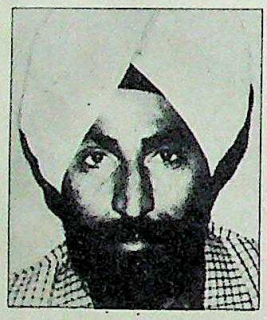
pinch of salt, there were already signs of a nascent coming together of at least some of the terrorist leaders in the state.

Thus, militant leader Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, chief of the newly formed Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan, rejoined the 'panthic committee' four weeks ago, burying his differences with KCF chief Sukhdev Singh, alias 'General' Labh Singh. Similarly, Babbar Khalsa chief Sukhdev Singh is believed to have come to terms with both Manochahal and Labh Singh, both of whom, not so long ago, were his arch enemies. Sukhdev's condition for this, apparently, was that he would be inducted into the five-man panthic committee.

In a further development, the Manjit

Manochahal (left) and Labh Singh



With the priests coming out in support there is little doubt that the militants could emerge with a unified command in the following weeks.

Singh faction of the All-India Sikh Students Federation, known to be the front organisation for the outlawed KLF, has sought the political guidance of the present leadership of the Akal Takht.

Given these developments, there can be little doubt that a broad, united body of militants could emerge with a unified command in the coming weeks. Indeed, the pressure on the militants because of the recent killings and arrests of several top-rung terrorists may force them to hang together rather than hang separately.

Whether such unity can last is, however, in doubt, as is the immediate strength of the militants. One straw in the wind was the delay in the announcement of an 'action programme', till another Sarbat Khalsa on Diwali day in late October. That meeting will be significant because Ragi is expected to be replaced with a more docile head priest, amenable to interference from the militants. Ragi, who in the first place owed his appointment to the last Sarbat Khalsa meeting in January, would have no choice but to bow to the verdict and to step permanently off the stage.

Already, he has been attacked by the high priests. Even earlier, he had been under pressure from the panthic committee, which had started sending 'directives' to the Akal Takht on several sensitive issues. Matters were not helped for Ragi by the fact that three of the high priests had openly defied his leadership, while the fourth (Puran Singh) saw little point in sticking to his moderate opinion. Ragi had also annoyed the militants by taking off what he thought were offensive posters from the Golden Temple's *parikrama* and by lashing out at the militants for their unabated extortion of money from local businessmen in the name of religion. The four high priests recently publicly condemned Ragi for having "deserted the army in the midst of the battle". And the jathedar of the Damdama Sahib called Ragi's retreat a "foolish act".

The militants' unfolding strategy also makes it clear that they aim to use the full authority of the Akal Takht and to get the seal of sanctity for their unholy operations. Their next target could well be the capture of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which will be possible with the help of the Akal Takht priests. Since the SGPC runs over 100 important gurudwaras in Punjab and elsewhere in the country, the militants can use them as sanctuaries. They can also avoid a vulnerable dependence on the Golden Temple, which could always face another police entry at short notice. Control of the SGPC would also give the militants access to thousands of residential and office premises owned by the institutions that the SGPC runs throughout the state. The SGPC also has enormous financial resources and political clout, which the militants could use for their own ends.

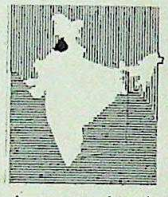
Whether events will actually unfold according to this scenario remains to be seen. But there is little doubt that Punjab has now reached a new situation full of potential for further mischief by the militants, with one bastion after another crumbling in their path or falling in line with their designs.

—VIMUKH SINGH

PUNJAB

Forced Entry

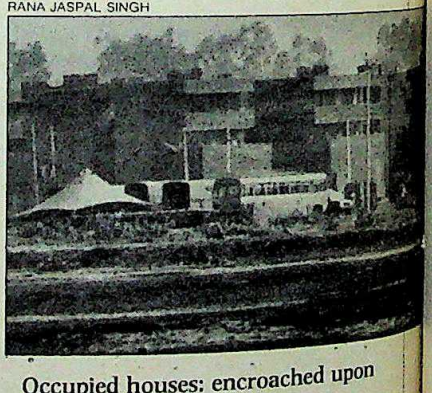
CRPF jawans illegally squat



THE Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) excites strong feelings in Punjab. But one place where it has no sympathisers is a newly-built housing colony, Ranjit Avenue, in Amritsar. For nearly two months, CRPF men have forcibly occupied several houses here—which they are now expected to vacate shortly.

Left out in the cold are allottees who had taken possession after paying between Rs 40,000 and Rs 85,000 to the Punjab Housing Development Board. More unfortunate, the displaced owners are

RANA JASPAL SINGH



Occupied houses: encroached upon

mostly those affected by the 1984 Delhi riots or dependents of army deserters.

The drama began on July 20 when, in a swift operation lasting barely an hour, CRPF jawans broke into over a hundred houses. By evening that day, the occupation was complete: they had set up their mess, a primary health centre, a kitchen and a communication centre-cum-wireless control room in several flats. They also made bunkers, raised a number of brick structures for armed pickets and pitched scores of tents in a children's park where they unloaded barrels of fuel and cartons of ammunition. Sector C of Ranjit Avenue has since

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"Life is just a dream"

"Once in a while, we manage to get away from the cares of the world and enjoy a much-needed holiday. Sometimes we're on a lake, cruising along gently in a 'shikara'. And inevitably, I remember that beautiful old rhyme – 'Row, row, row your boat, Gently down the stream, Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, Life is just a dream.'

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become the unofficial headquarters of the CRPF's 38th battalion.

M.M. Sharma, divisional engineer of the housing board, described the CRPF occupation as "illegal and unlawful" in an official letter to Amritsar's deputy commissioner. He says that the force moved in although he had told its officers earlier that accommodation could not be provided even temporarily since the houses had already been allotted. The Housing Board Commissioner P.P.S. Basoor, who rushed to the spot from Chandigarh the next day, also wrote a strong letter to the Amritsar deputy commissioner condemning the CRPF's use of force.

Julio F. Ribeiro, state police chief and secretary of internal defence, has also criticised the paramilitary force's behaviour at a press conference. Said he: "They are wrong in principle. They have no business to force an entry into residential colonies." He directed Amritsar's SSP Izhar Alam and the CRPF DIG S.S. Virk, who were present, to ensure that the force moved out within three days. Fifteen days later, the jawans continue to live at Ranjit Avenue. Incidentally, even the force's Inspector General, R.K. Mehta, acceded that the colony must be vacated at the earliest.

Virk claims that his officials at Amritsar had been misinformed that the flats were yet to be allotted. He says the force moved in as it was shifted from Calcutta in mid-July at such short notice that it was impossible to arrange accommodation. Maintaining steadily that the houses will be vacated "in a few days", and that the residents are right "in principle", he says, in the same breath, that the district administration must first arrange alternative housing.

Although Virk claims that they have begun vacating gradually, Gursharan Singh, secretary of the Residents' Association says that over 60 houses are still illegally occupied. The association is also fighting on behalf of those families already living in the colony, who complain about their loss of privacy.

There is little assurance for the residents in District Commissioner Sarabjeet Singh's comment that the "final decision has to come from the top". But those at the top are only passing the buck on while agreeing with the harassed residents "in principle". The association had planned to resist the encroachment "at the local level by peaceful agitation". However, since most of the residents are Sikhs, they are afraid to fight the CRPF even peacefully.

—VIMUKH SINGH in Amritsar

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Comrade in Arms

"Comrade?"

"Yes, Comrade?"

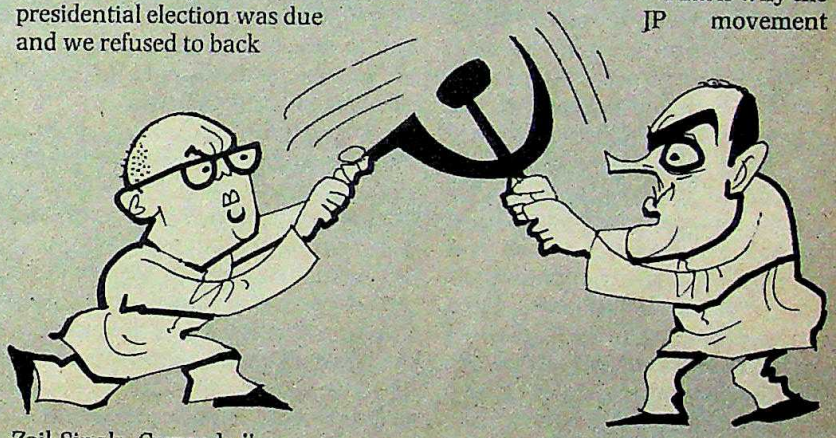
"What's the latest party line, Comrade?"

"We are launching a massive struggle against the corrupt Government of Rajiv Gandhi through the length and breadth of the country, Comrade."

"Why are we doing that, Comrade?"

"In order to end corruption and topple Rajiv Gandhi of course, Comrade."

"But Comrade, we could have done that easily earlier when the presidential election was due and we refused to back



Zail Singh, Comrade."

"That's right, Comrade! We didn't act then because we were more concerned with opposing the forces of destabilisation, Comrade."

"Why was that, Comrade?"

"Because that was our strategy, Comrade."

"And now we forget destabilisation and concentrate on ending corruption, Comrade?"

"That's right, Comrade."

"How can we forget our strategy and do that, Comrade?"

"Because these are our tactics, Comrade."

"So we have decided to throw in our lot with other opposition parties for a nation-wide movement, Comrade?"

"No, Comrade, we are encouraging other opposition parties to launch a movement, Comrade."

"What is the good of that, Comrade?"

"If they launch a movement there can be no quick merger of parties, Comrade, there can only be an alliance."

"And an alliance suits us better because we can never merge our own party with others, Comrade?"

"That's right, Comrade."

"Is that why we are backing V.P. Singh, Comrade?"

"No, Comrade, we are backing V.P. Singh to make sure that the BJP does not back him, Comrade."

"What is the harm if the BJP joins him, Comrade? The BJP was with the others in the JP movement too!"

"That is why the JP movement succeeded, Comrade. They were all united."

"But if we don't want their movement to succeed why are we supporting V.P. Singh, Comrade?"

"Because of tactics, Comrade."

"But if we don't want V.P. Singh to succeed why don't we support Rajiv and strengthen his hands, Comrade?"

"Because of strategy, Comrade."

"So our strategy is to weaken Rajiv and our tactics are to weaken V.P. Singh? What is the use of dividing both, Comrade?"

"To serve our objective of ruling both, Comrade. We divide, Comrade, and we rule. Strategy, Comrade, and tactics!"

"But what of the Revolution, Comrade, the Revolution?

"The Revolution, Comrade? Long live the Revolution! Communists of India unite! You have nothing to lose but your stains!"

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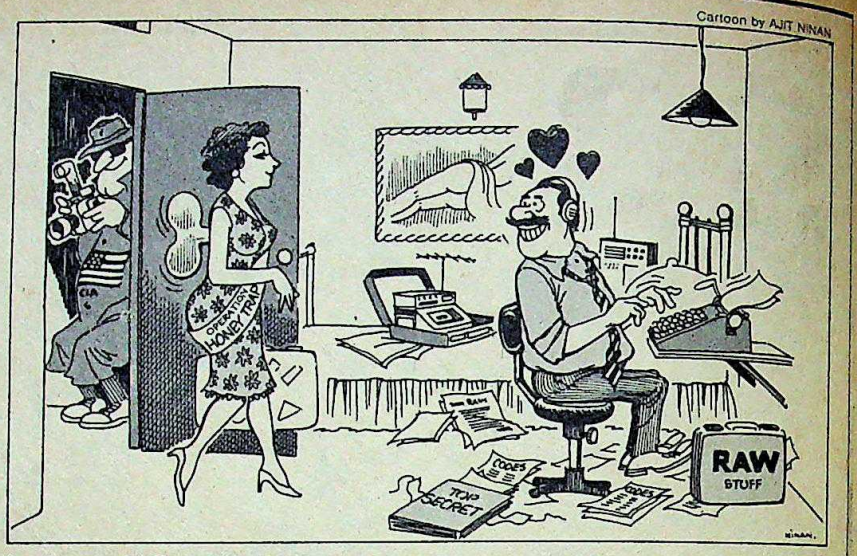
RAW

Spy-Catching

A senior mole is unearthed



THE ceremony at which a retiring senior government official delivers his valedictory address is usually a somber occasion. But it was unusually so at the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) headquarters last month when outgoing chief S.E. Joshi made his farewell speech. Cutting short the formalities, Joshi made the stunning announcement that a senior RAW-man had been arrested and charged with spying for the Americans. Most shocking was the revelation that the accused, K.V. Unnikrishnan, 47, had been in charge of coordinating what many consider to be India's most sensitive covert operation—dealing with Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka.

Shortly before his arrest, Unnikrishnan, deputy inspector general in charge of the RAW mission in Madras, was slated for promotion to inspector general. In fact, his name had been sent to Rajiv Gandhi for final clearance when—just before the Sri Lankan accord was signed—Joshi informed the prime minister that Unnikrishnan had been leaking top secret information to the US over the last two years. An investigation that was recently reviewed by four senior government secretaries established the prima facie case. Unnikrishnan was dismissed from service and lodged in Tihar jail under the National Security Act.

Home Ministry sources say the Kerala-born former IPS officer, from the 1962 batch, fell into what is known in intelligence circles as the "honeytrap" where sex is used to compromise the integrity of—and obtain information from—officials of another nation. It was recently used successfully in Moscow by KGB agents who used alluring Russian beauties to pry secrets out of American marines at the American Embassy.

But in Unnikrishnan's case—according to his own confession—Home Ministry sources reveal, the bewitching female involved was a Pan American stewardess, based in Singapore, who was either directly on the CIA pay-roll or was recruited temporarily for the job. After Coomar Narain's arrest in 1985, the Americans, desperate for alternative inside information sources, approached Unnikrishnan—who, six years before, had been posted as RAW's top man in Sri Lanka. After this posting, he had done a brief stint in Delhi and had refused to join the RAW career service, preferring to return to RAW in Madras, on IPS deputation where, for all intents and purposes, he was the top intelligence man responsible for Sri Lanka operations.

His record in Sri Lanka, Home Ministry sources say, was clean. But American dossiers revealed that he had been friendly with an American consular official and both had engaged in extra-marital sexual escapades together. American dossiers also showed that Unnikrishnan was mortified at the prospect of his affairs becoming known to his wife.

Sometime in 1985, the Pan Am stewardess—or the woman purporting to be one—landed in Bombay and called Unnikrishnan in Madras. Introducing herself as a friend of the consular official he had known in Sri Lanka, she said the official had told her to contact Unnikrishnan when she got lonely and needed virile male company. The RAW-man agreed to meet her at her Bombay hotel and that was the beginning of the relationship. During that year and the next, she arranged for him to fly to Singapore on her own complimentary tickets. It was during these trysts in Singapore that American intelligence took compromising photographs of the stewardess and her unsuspecting quarry.

Sometime last year, an American official stationed in Delhi flew specially to Madras and called Unnikrishnan for a meeting where the compromising pictures were produced. The official threatened to show them to the intelligence officer's wife if he didn't cooperate. Unnikrishnan agreed to meet the American, who had made Madras his base, regularly. And while functioning as an informant, Unnikrishnan even made several trips to the RAW headquarters in Delhi without raising any doubts.

But what began to cause suspicion in the Home Ministry about the possibility of a mole in an intelligence agency was that Sri Lankan authorities appeared to know in advance the details of Indian talks with Tamil militants. During the year's protracted negotiations, the Indian side seemed unable to pull off any surprises vis-a-vis the Sri Lankans, who appeared to possess sensitive information on arms shipments to, and weapons confiscations of, the militants.

In what became one of the largest counter-intelligence operations since Independence, the Government put almost the entire Madras police force—including the DIG—under months of intense surveillance by RAW and the Intelligence Bureau. Phones were tapped and recording devices planted. Suspects were tailed until the sleuths zeroed in on Unnikrishnan and collected documentary and photographic evidence. When confronted at an interrogation centre, he made a detailed confession.

The Ministry of External Affairs was then advised to register a protest with the US Embassy and expel the diplomat involved. But the American had already flown the coop. When Unnikrishnan, after his arrest in Madras, failed to show up for two scheduled meetings, the diplomat sniffed trouble and quietly left the country. There is little doubt that India's intelligence set-up and modus operandi have been significantly damaged. Even secret codes and the working of unscrambling devices had been compromised. The intelligence community has now scrapped the old ones and is in the process of repairing the damage.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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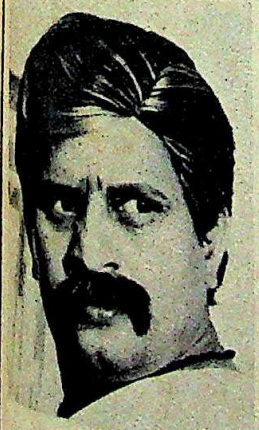

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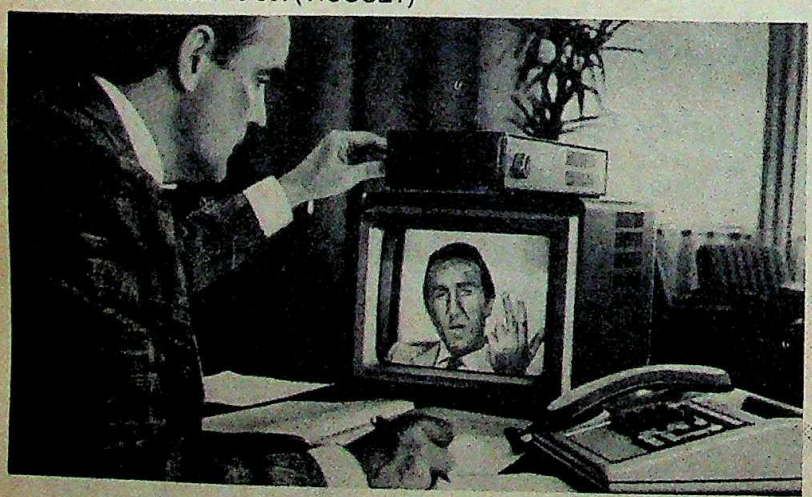

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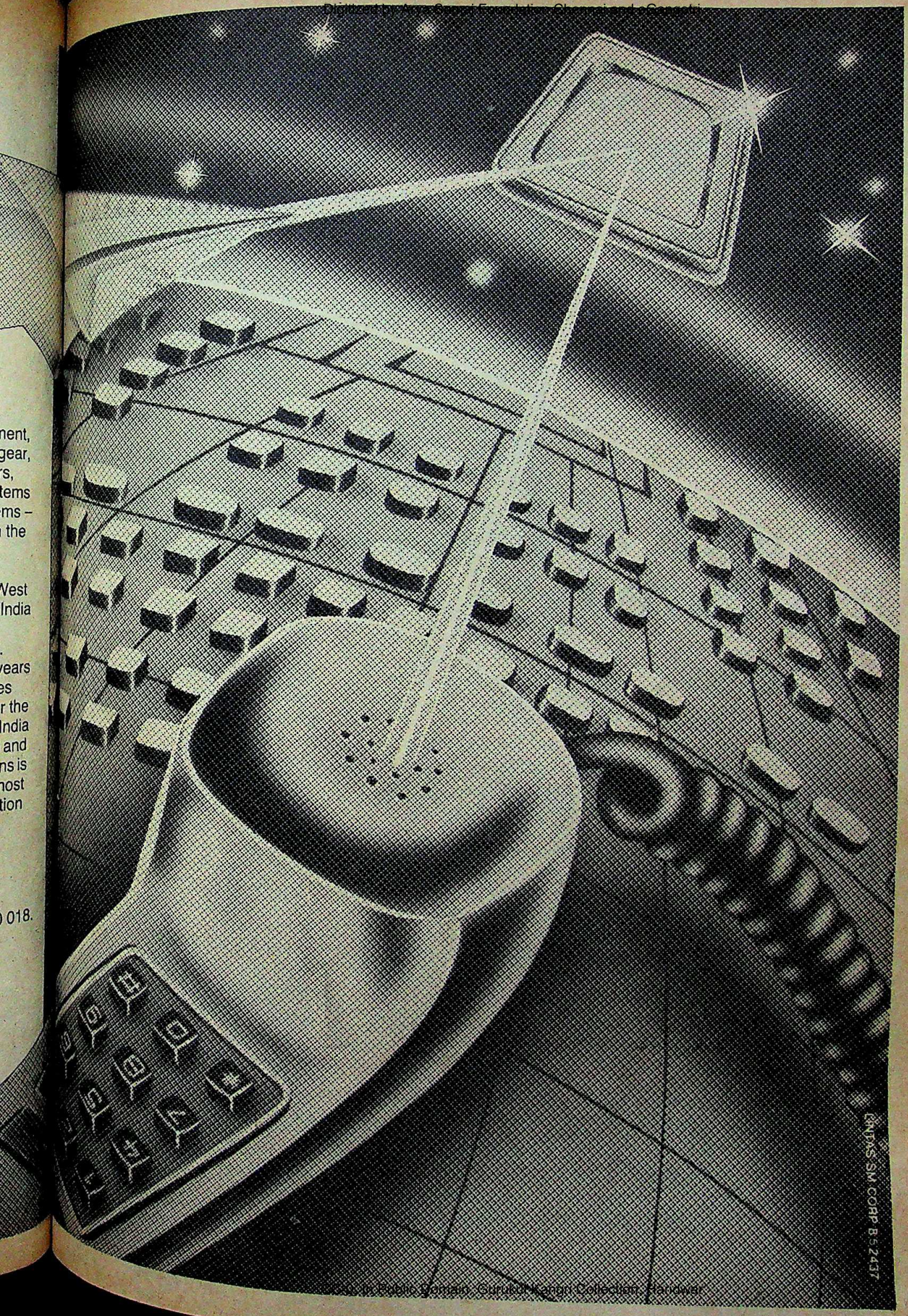

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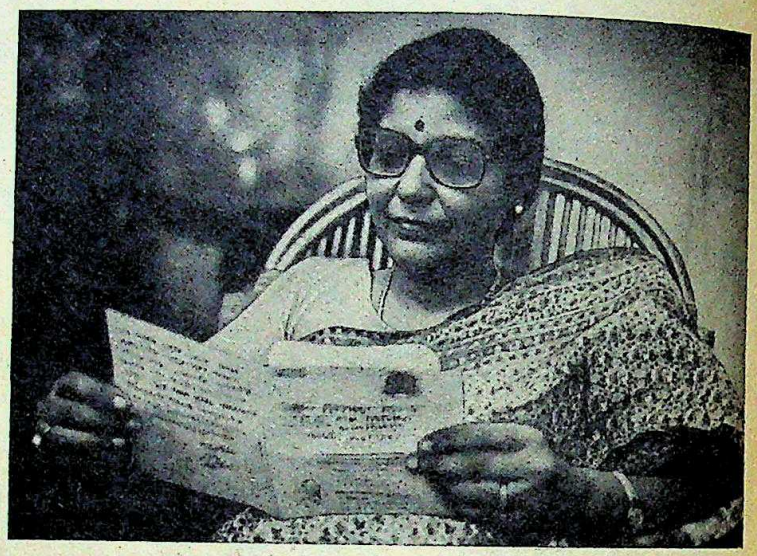

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KARNATAKA

Language of Protest

Not enough Kannada is being used say militants

N. Balasubramaniam looked at the printed form in bewilderment. A retired chartered accountant who had spent the last six years of his career in Zambia, he had recently moved to Bangalore to settle down. He had to fill the form to pay his electricity bill—but he didn't know what to make of it because the entire form was in Kannada.

Puttappa and (right) Hegde: pushing for change

■ *Newly married Sujatha, who had spent all her life in Madras, clambered into an auto-rickshaw in Bangalore and absentmindedly instructed the driver in Tamil: "Go to Ulsoor." The driver snarled in Kannada: "Speak your Tamil in Tamil Nadu. Here you had better speak Kannada."*

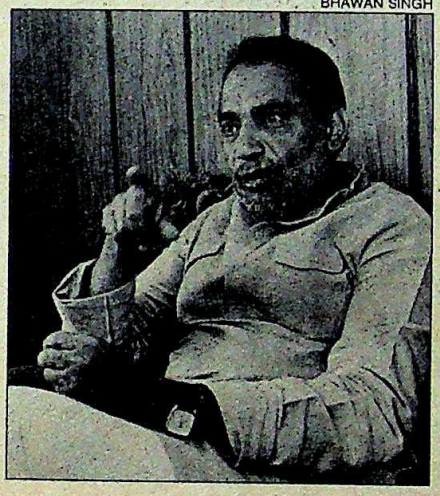
■ *When R. Balaji recently went to the regional transport office to get his learner's driving licence, only Kannada forms were available. None of the 30 members of the public there knew Kannada. A harried clerk peremptorily directed them to fill in the blanks. Says Balaji: "He did not bother to explain anything. What is there to prevent a crook from printing his own form and getting it signed?"*

IN Bangalore, Karnataka's swinging, cosmopolitan, polyglot capital, it is increasingly difficult to get by without knowing Kannada. The city has come a long way from the '60s when outsiders often mistook Tamil to be the lingua franca of the city, so pervasive was its use and so subdued that of Kannada.

Today, though, Kannada militants are vigorously—if belatedly—asserting themselves. In neighbouring Tamil Nadu, for instance, the Tamil identity was firmly established decades ago.

Insecurity now wells among the Tamils and Malayalis whose children will not only have to compulsorily study

BHAWAN SINGH



Although the use of Kannada in the state administration has increased dramatically during Hegde's tenure as chief minister, language activists are not satisfied.

Kannada but may also be squeezed out of jobs in the government sector. Kannada militants, however, complain that enough has not been done.

In reality, however, the Janata Party Government has overseen a dramatic increase in the use of Kannada in the state administration. To hasten implementation, the Government selected a staunch Kannada activist, Patil Puttappa, to head the Kannada Watchdog Committee. As Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde observed: "Thanks to the committee, what could not be achieved in the last 20 years has been accomplished in the last two years."

Due to Puttappa's crusade, Kannada has been implemented 100 per cent in the taluk, subdivisional and district administration and between 60 per cent and 90 per cent at the secretariat level. In comparison, the use of Tamil is limited to 20 per cent in the Madras Secretariat. And yet, unimpressed activists and intellectuals came together on August 9 to publicly declare the need for a language-based party in Karnataka.

Kannada militancy was ignited by the Gokak agitation of 1982. It came about when the then Gundu Rao government tried to dilute the recommendations of a committee headed by Professor V.K. Gokak, a former vice-chancellor of Bangalore University. It had said that Kannada be made the sole first language in schools. The agitation not only forced the implementation of this recommendation but also played a crucial role in the Congress(I)'s ignominious defeat in the 1983 state elections.

Puttappa views English forms and typewriters much in the same way as a medieval missionary would have viewed an infidel. He has replaced all English typewriters with Kannada ones in taluks and subdivisions; 95 per cent of the machines have been weeded out at the district level and 70 per cent of those in the secretariat have also gone.

However, Puttappa's over-zealousness has often sent him skidding on a collision course with other leaders who complain that he has been exceeding his brief. Earlier this year, for instance, he upset Assembly Speaker B.G. Banakar when he insisted that MLAs speak only in Kannada in the House. "He personifies the bull-in-a-China-shop syndrome," said a peeved Janata Party minister. Many share Congress(I) MLA B. Basavalingappa's cry: "You must put this man (Puttappa) on a leash."

Kannadiga militancy springs from increasing insecurity. In Kerala, 93 per cent of the residents are Malayalis; in Tamil Nadu, the figure is 91 per cent; in Andhra Pradesh, Telugus form 85 per cent of the population. But in Karnataka, Kannadigas made up only 66 per cent of the population in 1971—figures for 1981 are unavailable. It marked a decline from 71 per cent in 1956 when the state of Mysore (it became Karnataka in 1973) was formed. And in Bangalore, Kannadigas account for only 27 per cent of the population. Brushing aside questions of uneasiness among minorities,

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Puttappa retorts: "It is we Kannadigas who are feeling swamped by outsiders."

Gokak attributes the Kannada psyche to domination for centuries by powerful neighbours—the Marathas, followed by the Tamils, and more recently the Malayalis. "For 400 years, since the fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom, the Kannadiga has had no place under the sun," says Gokak.

In 1956, the formation of Mysore state was resented by the rest of Karnataka because the Mysore maharajas had a tradition of Tamil dewans who rose to positions of enormous influence. This explains the prevalence of the Tamil language in Mysore and Bangalore. The Malayalis, who arrived in the '50s and '60s, also carved a niche for themselves.

The tension began in the '70s when families of the newly-rich Kannadiga peasantry—from areas that had come under irrigation—began moving towards Bangalore. They found their way to jobs, schools, colleges and housing blocked by people from other states. The swelling resentment exploded violently in the form of the 1982 agitation. The movement cemented the Kannadiga identity, cutting across the usual class, caste and socio-economic barriers.

The agitation spawned at least a dozen Kannada organisations in addition to injecting a new life into the few existing ones. So potent is the issue that it has caused deep rifts even in monoliths like the Roman Catholic Church.

If the minorities have reason to feel that they will gradually be squeezed out, Kannada militants should be satisfied with developments of the last few years. Kannada programmes have been introduced in Bangalore Doordarshan; a Kannada University is being set up at Hampi later this year; all shops and establishments now have to put up signs in Kannada; glossaries of 25 of the 80 government departments have been prepared; in many departments, all forms are available only in the local language; copies of bills and acts in the Karnataka Assembly and Council are all in Kannada; the State Bank of India has opened a Bangalore-based recruitment branch; employees seeking class three jobs have to first pass a test in Kannada.

Language agitators in 1982: violent means

Past agitations, coupled with the continued aggressiveness over the greater use of Kannada, are making linguistic minorities in the state increasingly uneasy.

Very often, the thin line that divides pro-Kannada sentiments from anti-Tamil or anti-Malayali feelings is blurred. Though some activists are at pains to ensure that the anger is not directed against any particular language, the hostility shows up every now and then. Professor Murthy, a Bangalore University professor and the main organiser of the Writers and Artistes Guild, says angrily: "We are against Tamils and Malayalis because they do not want to learn Kannada. They are clannish and keep bringing more and more of their relatives to Bangalore."

Sentiments such as these, coupled with attacks on Tamils during the agitation in 1984, sponsored by the fans association of Raj Kumar, a matinee idol, has fuelled insecurity in Bangalore's linguistic minorities. The Gokak agitation earlier hadn't helped either.

Last year, a group of them even sent a memorandum to the President protesting against the state's Kannada policy. Says K. N. Harikumar, the Kannadiga editor of the daily *Deccan Herald*: "The minorities' fears arose out of the atmosphere of intolerance and intimidation created by the agitation."

Some more oral concessions by Hegde last month can only add to the sense of helplessness in minority ranks. He has agreed that a committee will be set up to implement the Sarojini Mahishi report which recommends that 85 per cent of the jobs in Central undertakings should be reserved for Kannadigas; that no more English medium primary schools will be sanctioned; and that Kannada will be a compulsory subject in all examinations conducted by the state public services commission. Students who pass out of Kannada schools and colleges will also gain 15 per cent grace marks for professional courses; students will similarly get weightage while appearing for the state public services examinations. Hegde also assured that a committee would be constituted to select Kannada books to be purchased by the Government—Rs 50 lakh has been set aside annually for this purpose.

And yet, the agitators do not think that Hegde is going far enough. Says Murthy: "Neither the Janata Party nor the Congress(I) can deliver the goods. We Kannadigas are seething with discontent." And recently, a delegation of the Writers and Artistes Guild warned Hegde: "Unless you come to the rescue of the Kannadigas, your party and other national parties will be burnt to ashes."

Although the Gokak agitation took place on a united note, there are now deep schisms dividing the literati and the street fighters. Kannada activists who wish to start a language-based party say they have basically three options. The first is to invite Raj Kumar to lead the movement. The second is to ask Hegde to form a regional party and the third is to launch a party and wait for a leader to emerge. What they are not willing to wait for is the growth of Kannada usage at its present pace.

—ANITA PRATAP in Bangalore

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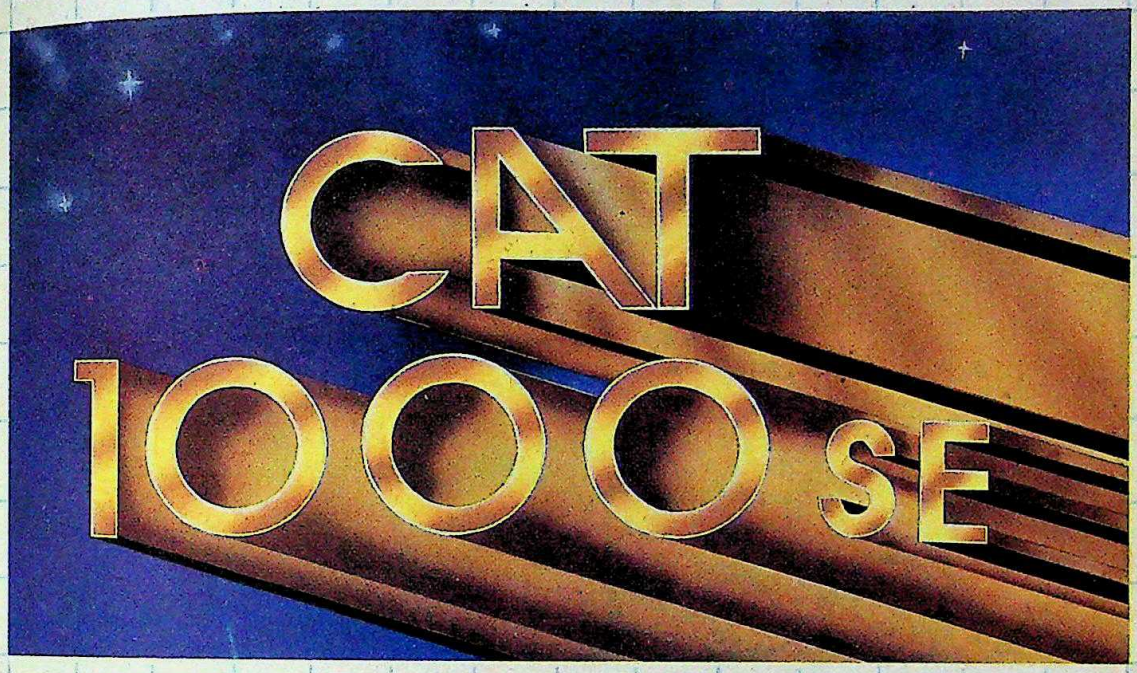

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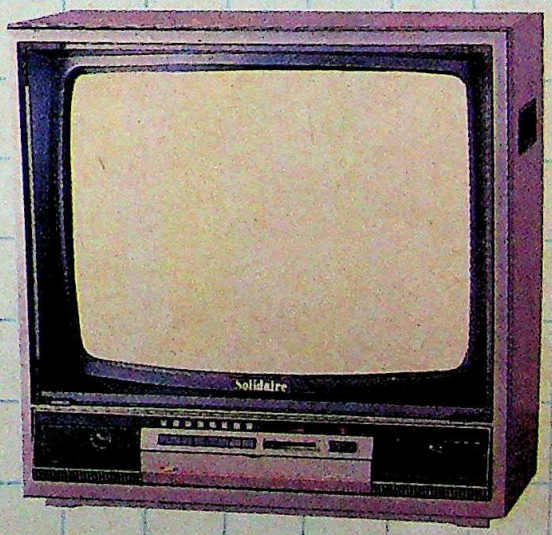

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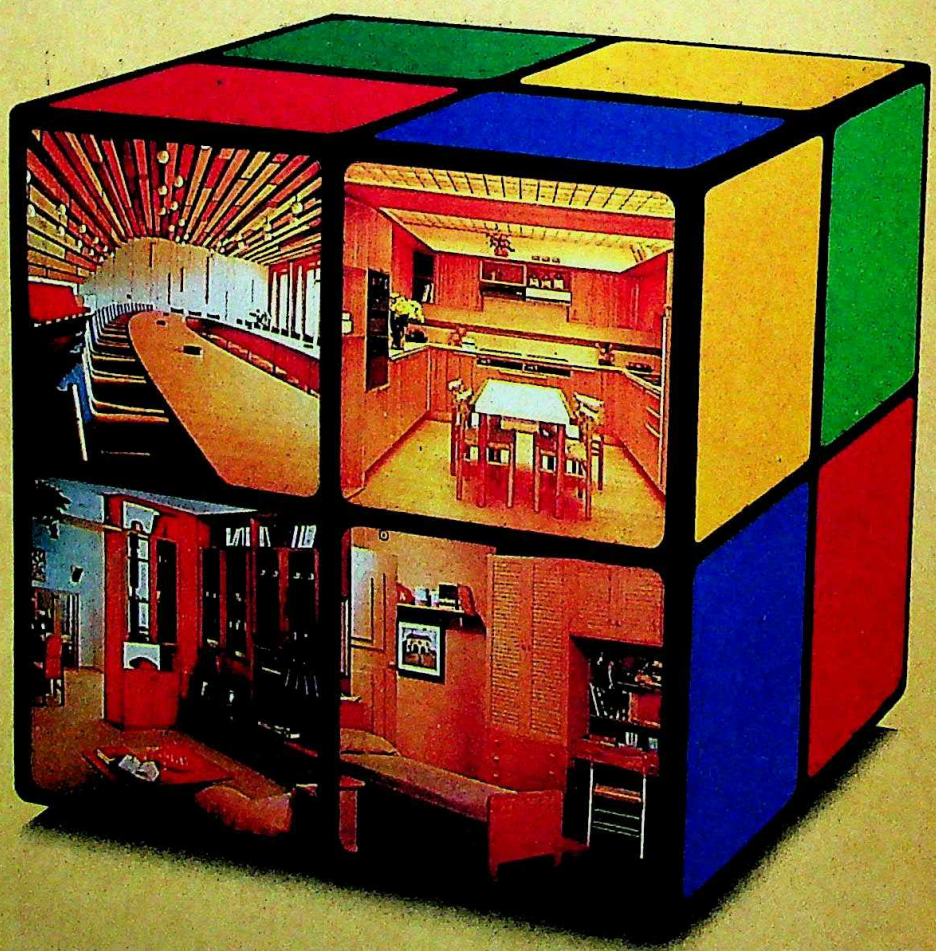

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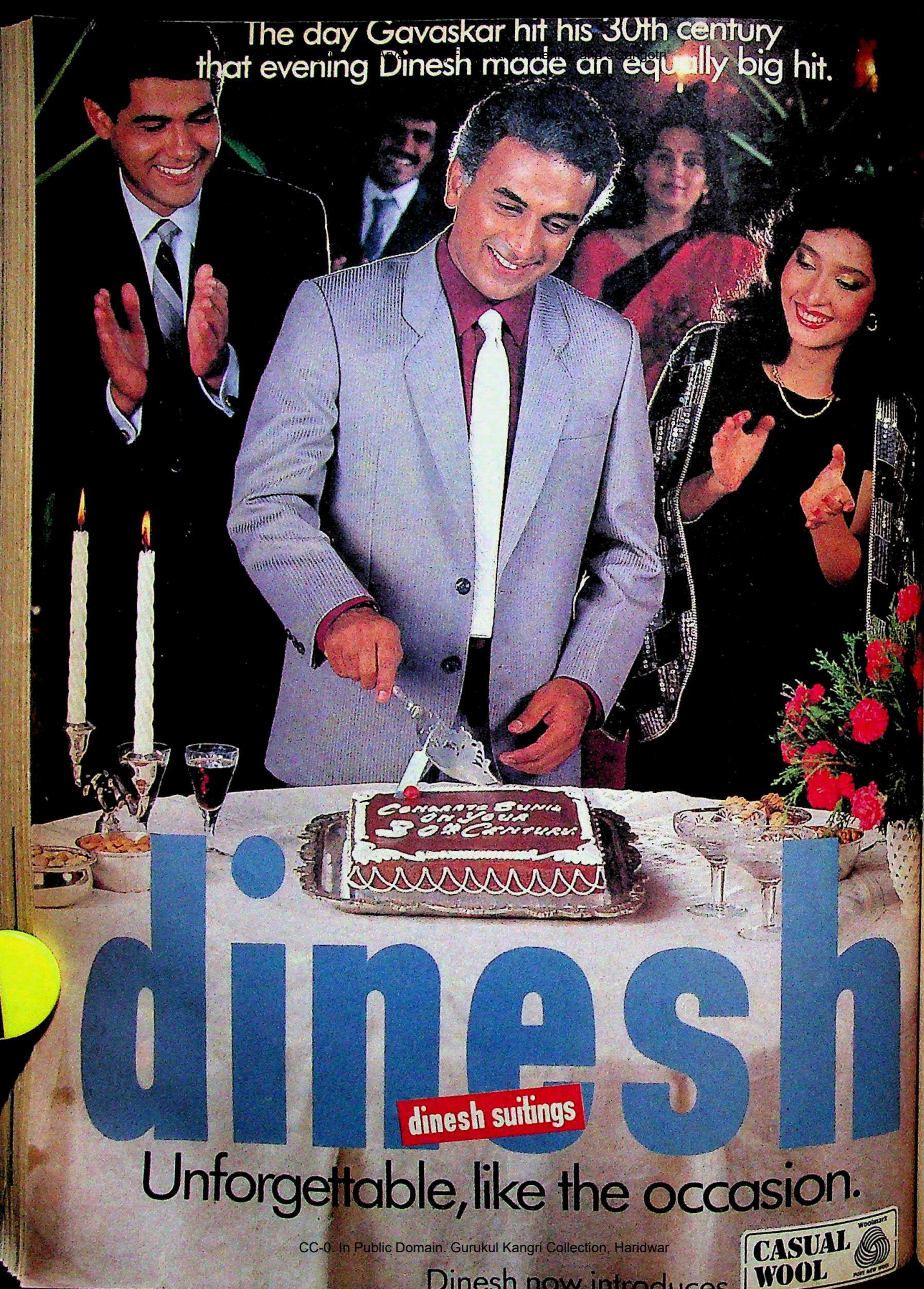

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AMETHI

Battle Cry

Rajiv's visit boosts morale

FOR inhabitants of the country's best-known constituency, it was a familiar sight. The chocolate coloured jeep speeding down the rutted tracks leaving behind a cloud of billowing dust—and the accompanying cavalcade. But this time, even the illiterate villagers could scent the difference in the air, the stirrings of a new and decisive battle. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's extended visit to Amethi last week resembled nothing more than an absent king returning to reclaim his legitimate throne from the pretenders.

But if Amethi was where the leader chose to pitch his tent, the real battleground was much larger—Uttar Pradesh, the biggest state in the country and the increasingly-vulnerable Achilles' heel of the ruling party's northern electoral strongholds. By restricting his visit to Amethi and the adjoining Rae Bareli district, the strongholds of prominent dissidents Sanjay Singh and Arun Nehru, Rajiv's dual strategy was transparent—to reassure the fence-sitters that he was taking the battle to the dissidents' backyard and convince them that the electorate still owed its allegiance to the party and the prime minister.

He may have succeeded in accomplishing the first objective, but the second is debatable. Unlike previous visits, Rajiv deliberately shied away from addressing any public meetings during his three-day stay. In fact a public meeting in Gauriganj in Sultanpur district scheduled for September 11, was hastily switched to a party workers meeting after intelligence reports stated that the Sanjay group planned a black flag demonstration at the meeting. The report was based on Sanjay's visit to Amethi on the eve of Rajiv's visit.

But as it transpired there was no show of strength in Amethi. Whether by deliberate design or fear of failure, the Sanjay group was conspicuous by its absence during Rajiv's tour covering all the six blocks in the two assembly segments—Salon and Tiloi—of the Amethi constituency. All the six block pramukhs of the two segments and seven others from Jagdishpur, and Gauriganj segments were paraded at the airport receiving line when Rajiv arrived. Only three block pramukhs of the Amethi segment absented themselves.

Sanjay Singh remained in Lucknow and later claimed: "At least nine of the 16 block pramukhs of Sultanpur and three of the five MLAs of the Amethi seat are with me and will come out in the open when the time comes". The Sanjay group consider it victory enough that Rajiv did not hold a public meeting. Said Sanjay: "He could not probably muster up enough confidence to address the public in Amethi."

As a propaganda ploy, it is a highly effective one and considerably diluted the political thrust of Rajiv's tour. The prime minister and his wife Sonia, mostly sped down village roads, stopping only when he saw groups of villagers to talk to them about the drought from his vehicle. Even his reaction to their complaints was the stereotyped line: "*Yehi sab to dekhne aaye hain* (We have come to see all this)."

PRADEEP SHAH

Rajiv talking to Amethi villagers

Compared to his previous visits, the security surrounding him this time blanketed the visit from the press—state Government officials were under strict instructions not to divulge any details of the programme to journalists.

Ironically enough, most of the villagers were also unaware of the prime minister's visit because of his unscheduled detours to see things for himself. And though most of them were wary of criticising Rajiv openly, they had no such inhibitions about his challengers. Said Ram Naresh of Fursatganj: "If Rajiv Gandhi is corrupt, those who have left him are no lesser evils." Added Ahmed Mian, owner of a tea-stall in Jagdishpur: "At the moment V.P. Singh and Sanjay are catching everybody's interest but all this will die out soon. If Rajiv Gandhi could not find time for Amethi so couldn't Sanjay when he was in power."

But party loyalists were obviously emboldened by the visit. Said Devender Pandey, MLA from Jaisinghpur: "Rajiv's visit will whitewash whatever little stains the traitors had left." Added block pramukh Raghunandan Singh: "Both Nehru and Sanjay had never mattered in the politics of the two districts. They were just basking in Rajiv's glow. This visit will be the last nail in their coffins."

The real test, however, will come when V.P. Singh carries his campaign to Amethi, probably within the next fortnight. The state Congress(I) leadership has no one who can take on Singh and revitalise the sagging morale of the party rank and file. The recent revamping of the party hierarchy offers adequate proof. Party leaders had been insisting that the UPCC(I) chief Mahavir Prasad, MP, be changed. But though he submitted his resignation early last fortnight, Prasad was retained. What is more demoralising is that two of the three new general secretaries appointed—Gulab Sehra and Bachcha Pathak—are controversial figures. The two had serious allegations of corruption against them and it was for this reason that Singh, then UPCC(I) chief, denied them party tickets for the 1985 assembly elections.

Despite all these odds, the prime ministerial visit has been seen as a political blood transfusion for the ailing party in the state. And chief minister Bir Bahadur Singh looks now like a political survivor, not in imminent danger of being ousted by the dissidents.

—DILIP AWASTHI in Amethi and Rae Bareli

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MADHYA PRADESH

Shocking Examination

Virginity test on nurses creates public outcry

NEVER has anything of the kind ever happened before. Eighteen unmarried nurses, recruits to the Government D.K. Hospital in Raipur, were forced to undergo pregnancy tests. The incident, which took place in July, but came to light only last fortnight, led to a public outcry in Madhya Pradesh because the virginity of the women came into question.

The moral indignation grew so strong that nurses went on strike on September 11, demanding action against four guilty hospital staffers, including medical superintendent, Harsh Vardhan and gynaecologist Dr Shobha Sharma. They wanted the guilty to be either suspended or sent on leave. Junior doctors and class three employees also threatened action.

"Our virginity has come under question," lamented the girls, 22 years to 24 years old. Worst of all, they were all subjected to the per vaginal (PV) examination which includes inspecting the hymen. Said an appalled Chief Minister Motilal Vora: "There are no government orders to conduct such tests." Under pressure, the state Government, which had first ordered a departmental inquiry, ordered a magisterial inquiry. Vardhan was also shifted from the hospital but the nurses were unimpressed and decided to keep away from work. Taken aback by this, the Government then sent Vardhan on long leave on September 11.

"No test, no salary, we were told," said Malini Jacob (all names of the nurses examined have been altered to conceal their identities). Kamini was refused her salary cheque when the clerk learnt that she had not had the check-up. The nurses were paid their salaries after 18 days.

The hospital administration says that the nurses—who included 18 unmarried and two married women—were asked to undergo the tests following "certain discrepancies" in the certificates produced. But said Vardhan: "Nothing like a virginity test was intended or took place." He admits, however, that asking for a gynaecological certificate was unusual.

The regular rule is that women in an advanced state of pregnancy are temporarily disqualified from recruitment to a government job, to prevent the immediate use of maternity leave provisions. Normally, a medical certificate from a chief medical officer of a government hospital is considered adequate.

All the 20 new staff nurses had submitted this certificate of fitness signed by the competent authority. Subjecting the unmarried girls to such a test, then, had the obvious purpose of determination of pregnancy and, as such, of virginity.

Though official sources refused to elaborate, it is learnt that the hospital authorities suspected that the two married nurses were in advanced stages of pregnancy. Why then were all of them sent for examination? "We did not want to discriminate," is the peculiar logic offered. In any case, even if there were doubts about the unmarried nurses, they should have been sent, under the rules, to a medical board instead of the hospital's gynaecology department. The young nurses and their senior colleagues pleaded unsuccessfully with the gynaecologist on duty, Dr Sharma, not to use the PV examination. Sharma, though, hotly denies this. She insists that the superintendent's orders for a gyanaecological check-up implies a PV test.

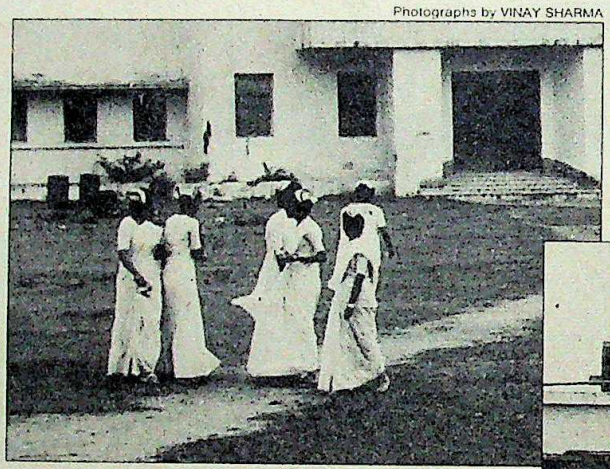
Why Vardhan ordered such an examination is the first part of an unsolved riddle. The second part is Sharma's choice of a PV test. Pregnancy can be determined quite simply by conducting a urine test. Apparently, the hospital did not have the facilities to conduct this—in which case it could have been conducted elsewhere. If even this were not possible, an abdominal examination, or failing that a per rectal (PR) examination should have been carried out. The PV should not have been used except as a last resort—and the circumstances clearly did not call for this extreme step. The internal PV test can be painful and can rupture an intact hymen. Not surprisingly, the test was a traumatic experience.

Though hospital records apparently show that the PV test was conducted only on the two married nurses and the PR tests were carried out on the rest, the nurses maintain this is a cover-up. The women went and complained to an unsympathetic Vardhan, but not too strongly, for fear of losing their jobs. The sordid details emerged only after the nurses' association promised support. The nurses have now asked District Magistrate Sunil Kumar to issue an order recording their representation as a police first information report.

Most of the nurses, who belong to poor families, are afraid that Vardhan will get off lightly. Asked an indignant nurse: "Would they have conducted the same test if they were recruiting a doctor or an IAS officer?" There are no prizes for guessing the answer to that one.

—N.K. SINGH in Raipur

Photographs by VINAY SHARMA



Some of the nurses (above) and the D.K. Hospital: outraged sentiments

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JINDA

A Sensational Arrest

Top terrorist is captured, but he reveals little

TO Indian security forces and to the public at large, he was the most dangerous man in the country. Yet, when Harjinder Singh, 25, better known—and feared—as Jinda finally reached the end of his bloody road last fortnight, the manner of his capture was not quite in keeping with his larger-than-life image.

When Jinda was arrested by the Delhi police, it was because they had specific knowledge that he was frequenting the Majnu Ka Tila gurudwara, in the city plastered with his posters. Policemen had actually to wait the whole of the previous day for his appearance, and when he turned up the next day along with an accomplice Satnam Singh alias Bawa, he was captured. Both of them had a reward of Rs 1 lakh each on their heads.

But the fear he instilled in the police was such that, when he was cornered, the eight-member police posse panicked and the deputy commissioner leading it shot Jinda in both thighs with his .32 service revolver to immobilise him. The drama of an "encounter" at the Timarpur road crossing had to be enacted in order to justify the shooting. Senior police officials admitted later that though they would have liked to keep his interrogation secret, his arrest "had to be publicised as he was injured". By the premature announcement of his arrest, they enabled some of his accomplices to cover their tracks.

Jinda's contact men in the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) Labh Singh and Manochal, have gone underground in Punjab after issuing a threatening letter to the press that if any harm comes to their colleague they will "act accordingly". Intelligence reports from Punjab said that the two were seen in the Golden Temple a couple of days before Jinda's arrest and have now disappeared.

The first inkling of Jinda's presence in the capital came about a month ago when he attempted to kill the wife and relatives of Union Home Minister Buta Singh as they went to see a movie in a Connaught Place cinema hall. The attack was aborted as more people unexpectedly joined them for the movie.

The Majnu Ka Tila gurudwara had been under surveillance for some time for suspected terrorist and extremist activity and the movements of "new faces" were being noticed. Bawa was first spotted by the sleuths frequenting the gurudwara. He was tailed to the New Okhla Industrial Area (NOIDA) house where he was staying with his wife and two sons. Close vigil was also kept in Patel Nagar where Bawa had met three other Sikhs. Jinda had shaved off his moustache when he visited the gurudwara on August 30, but his was too familiar a face to be missed by the intelligence sleuths.

Jinda's capture by the Delhi police has dealt a decisive blow to extremist activity outside Punjab. But he has not disclosed much on the terrorist network.

The medium built, wheatish-complexioned, 5 ft 7 inches tall terrorist has, however, not turned out to be the goldmine of information on terrorist networks in the country as had been expected. He was involved in the Rs 5.8-crore robbery case in the Punjab National Bank, Ludhiana, and in the assassination of the former army chief General A.S. Vaidya, besides the killing of two policemen in Udaipur and bank robberies in Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab.

Jinda "doesn't know much" about how the terrorist organisations are operating, says one of his interrogators. They now refer to him as a "third rung" operative of the KCF who was "essentially a hit man". Says a Delhi police officer: "He was given specific tasks and weapons to carry out plans, but outside Punjab he had autonomy to pick and choose his targets." He has revealed details about underworld hide-outs and meeting places but since these are changed frequently, the information may be of little use.

Police parties which were rushed to several places in Punjab have now returned more or less empty handed. They have caught Jinda's mother but the old lady says that she has not seen him for years, since he took to petty smuggling and got involved with Surinder Singh Sandhu, a close associate of Bhindranwale.

Jinda has obviously no ideological underpinnings to his terrorist career. The only political comment that he has made so far is that Satwant Singh "was a fool" to get a lawyer to defend himself after assassinating former prime minister Indira Gandhi. Jinda told his interrogators that he (Satwant) "had done his job" of becoming a martyr.

However, intelligence agencies have been able to extricate details from Jinda about his modus operandi and confirm that his was the only extremist gang operating outside Punjab.

Six people have already been arrested for giving shelter to him or facilitating his movement. They include two property dealers, one from Delhi's Gandhi Nagar across the Yamuna and the other from NOIDA; Balwant Singh, a taxi-driver hired by them in the city; and three small businessmen from Patel Nagar, Karam Singh Dhillon, Major Singh and Ujagar Singh. The last three were running errands for the two terrorists like providing taxis and getting in touch with property dealers. About Rs 1.58 lakh in cash, suspected to be part of the Ludhiana bank robbery booty, were found at their residence. Two pistols, one Chinese assault rifle, one Sten gun and gold biscuits worth Rs 3 lakh were also recovered from Jinda and Bawa.

Jinda's capture by the Delhi police is their biggest success since the apprehension of the accused in the transistor bomb blast cases of 1985. And with his arrest the terrorist potential outside Punjab has certainly received a set-back. "He is a high profile and much publicised criminal. His arrest will restore public confidence in the police," commented a senior police official, on what has been the most sensational terrorist capture.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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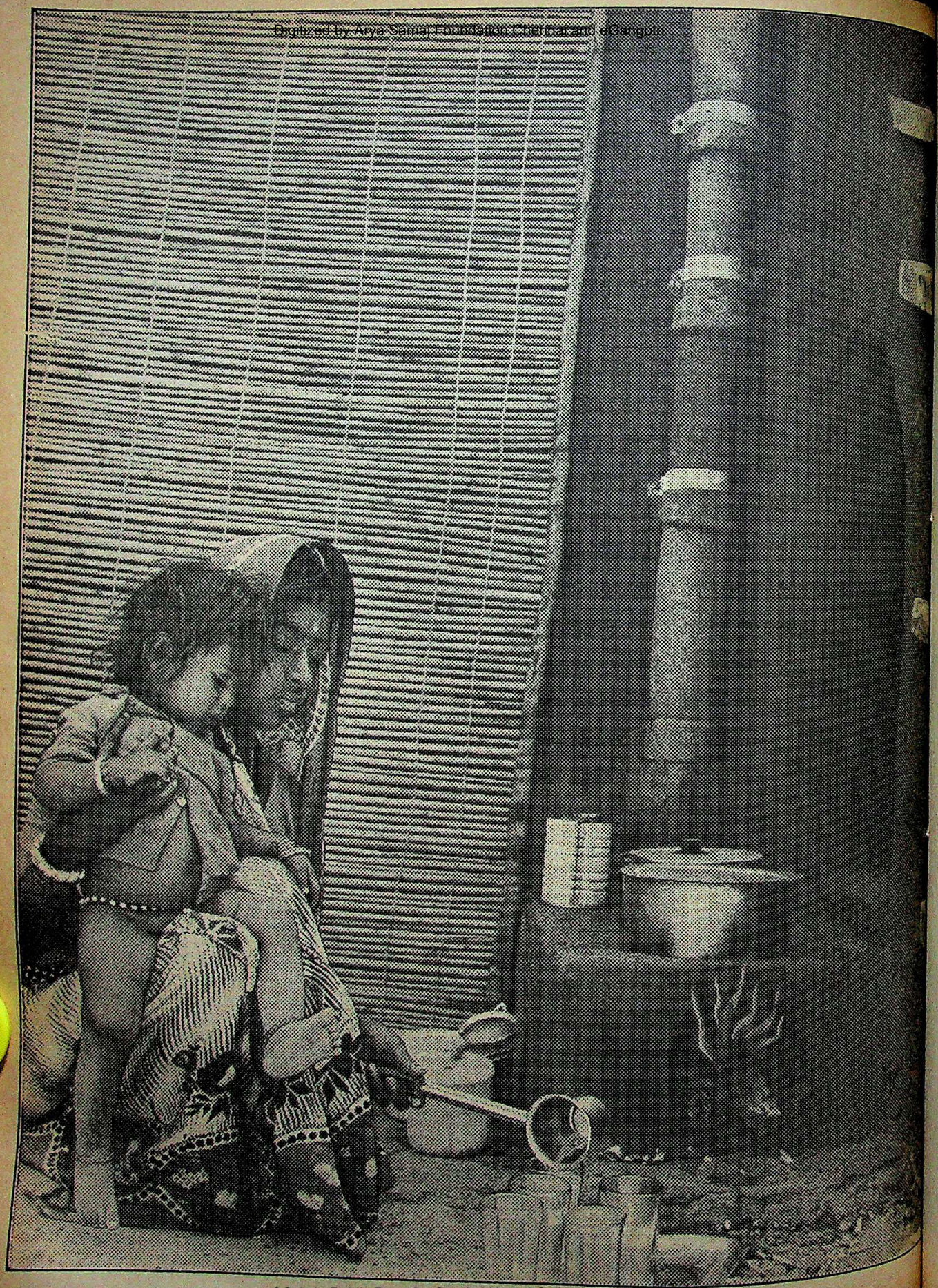

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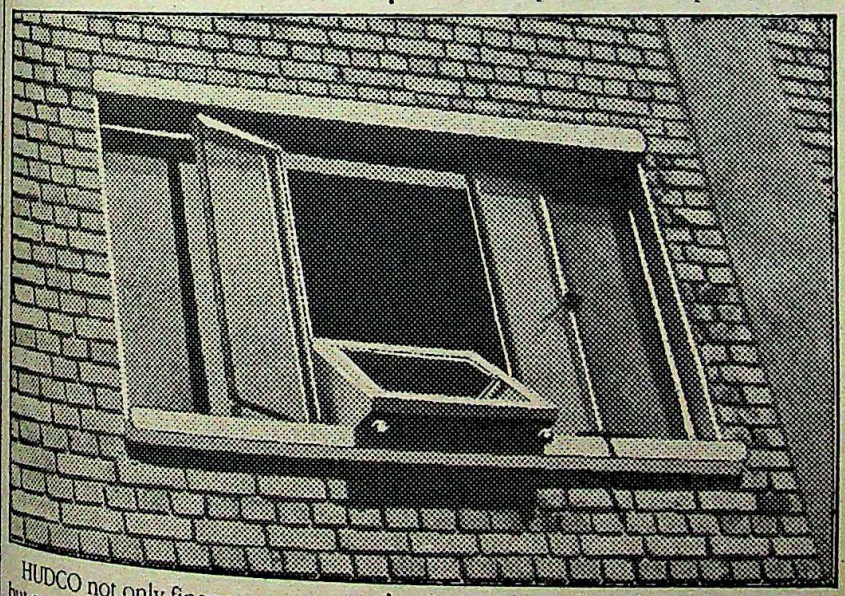

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MANIPUR

Dangerous Confrontation

The army and the state Government lock horns

A strange situation has developed in Manipur. Unlike elsewhere, Chief Minister Rishang Keishing's primary political opponents are not party dissidents but the Indian Army. How serious a turn this confrontation has taken was proved in the state capital, Imphal, on September 9. On that day, the Manipur People's Party (MPP) called for a bandh to protest the killing of villagers and the destruction of property by the army.

The army's reaction was unprecedented. It transported about a thousand demonstrators from the area where it was said to have run amuck and tutored them to shout slogans decrying the MPP and some political figures opposed to the military. Keen to avoid a clash, Imphal's district administration clamped prohibitory orders in the area.

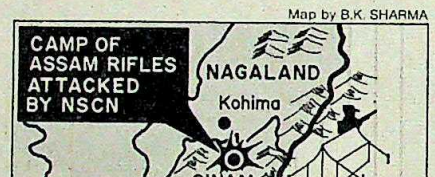
The central cause of the present confrontation was army brutality following a stunning raid on July 9 by the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) on the Assam Rifles'—a paramilitary force—company headquarters at Oinam village, Senapati district. The insurgents—who want to secede and form an independent Christian state—numbered 60 when they attacked the force which was headed by an army officer. Of the 37 jawans present, nine were killed by the hail of bullets while the rest fled.

The arms haul that the NSCN made, after breaking into the armoury, was the largest ever in the country. It proved that the NSCN—under Thingaleng Muivah—wasn't a "dying force" as had been made out by army and state intelligence reports. The three tonnes of guns and ammunition that they cleaned out included 90 self-loading rifles, 10 light machine-guns, 22 Sten guns, 28,052 rounds of ammunition, 396 hand grenades, 300 detonators, 60 bombs and two mortars.

But Havaldar B.R. Pillai, whose legs were chopped off, managed to wire the Assam Rifles post at Jwalamukhi about the attack, before he died. Realising that the army had been alerted, the NSCN was forced to abandon its plan to force the villagers of Oinam (population: 1,000) to help carry the arms load to its training camp in the Somra tracts in Burma, about 60 km away. Instead, they compelled the villagers—some of them children less than 12 years old—to hide the loot in the thick bamboo groves and forests nearby.

The raid was a severe, and unexpected, blow to the army's morale. In Oinam, jawans mixed freely with the local population and provided them entertainment and subsidised goods from the army canteen as part of a public relations exercise. Said Lt-Colonel C.P. Singh, commanding officer-in-charge at Oinam: "We never expected that these villagers would stab us in the back."

Map by B.K. SHARMA



The army intelligence network had remained oblivious to repeated visits to the area by NSCN leaders over the preceding four months. The attack might have been in retaliation for successful raids by the forces on NSCN camps earlier this year. Indeed, two weeks before the Oinam massacre, the state police had passed on information of a possible strike at an isolated outpost of the forces but this information was ignored.

When 'Operation Bluebeard'—to recover the arms—was initially launched, Oinam and 10 villages nearby were cordoned off, put under curfew and systematically combed. For three days, Major-General Prem Lal Kukrety, inspector general of Assam Rifles, and his men pleaded with villagers to give them information. Says Kukrety: "Politeness was not helping. The weapons were too many to be lost. We thrashed the villagers and had to break them down. Soon, we started making substantial recoveries."

By last fortnight, the army had recovered 63 self-loading rifles, 10 light machine-guns, two Sten guns, 260 hand grenades, 13,000 rounds of ammunition, two mortars, 56 bombs and 275 detonators. The rest of the haul may already be in Burma and could well cause havoc in the North-east in the coming months.

But the success was achieved at enormous human cost. "As a punishment", jawans systematically forced residents who helped the NSCN to destroy about a hundred houses in Oinam and other villages. Even children who had been made to carry the loot were arrested. "What did we get out of all this?" laments Raoping, 33, former headman of Oinam. And as L. Jonathan, a village contractor, says: "By harassing innocent people, the army is only creating more insurgents."

But worse was yet to come. By last fortnight, 14 villagers of the district had been shot dead by the army in "encounters". Kukrety swears that none of those shot was innocent and that these were, in fact, genuine encounters. His stand, however, is vociferously opposed by both the Manipur Police and Keishing who claim that the suspects were murdered. Said Keishing: "In the name of fighting insurgency, innocents cannot be killed." The MPP, in a memorandum to the prime minister, also demanded an inquiry into the encounters. Said O. Joy Singh, MPP legislator: "In a democratic set-up, such army atrocities cannot be tolerated."

When five men of the Oinam area—Mathomi, Khua, Rangkhew, Esso and Shumai—were killed, the army claimed

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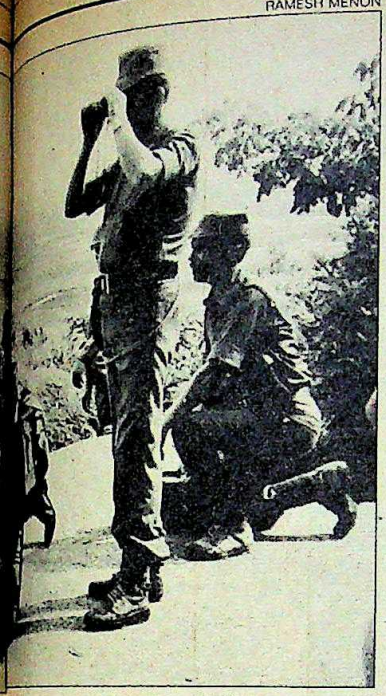
RAMESH MENON



Army vigil (left) and children arrested after Oinam raids: tragic reaction

Though Chief Minister Rishang Keishing denies all links with the insurgents, the army accuses him of encouraging them.

that the insurgents had shot them while they were leading an army column to an arms cache. Yet, as the Manipur Police pointed out, all of them bore bullet injuries in the back instead of the front where, logically, the NSCN bullets should have hit them. In another incident, a post-mortem showed that Thaba, 32, of Khongdei village, died of hanging. But Imphal police disregarded the "encounter" theory and registered a case of unnatural death.

The tension between the army and the state Government has also grown because military officials accuse Keishing of encouraging insurgency. They suspect that the Oinam raid was masterminded by the self-styled NSCN Captain Wang Atem, who was released on bail by the Keishing Government in March this year. Atem had been arrested in 1982 after he was involved in the killing of 21 jawans in Manipur. A month earlier, the Manipur Government had also released R.H. Raising, another NSCN leader. Then, in April, 15 rifles were looted from a village protection group in Chasad, Ukhrul district, which is the chief minister's constituency. Keishing, however, maintains that the Centre has not responded to his repeated demand for a ban on the NSCN. "The NSCN is out to kill me," he says, bringing attention to an unsuccessful NSCN plan to ambush his convoy a couple of years ago. Keishing also alleges that the army is forcing people to sign affidavits that attest to his involvement with the insurgents. And yet, many in Imphal suspect that Keishing's statements against insurgency are merely rhetoric.

Despite his protests, the army now maintains that insurgency cannot be controlled as long as Keishing continues in office. Army officials insist that certain politicians knew of the Oinam raid and allege that the NSCN operates in the North-east with the cooperation of these leaders. Repeated interrogation of villagers, they say, revealed that independent MLA Benjamin Banee from Senapati district was fully aware of the impending raid. He was finally arrested at his residence.

But it was the search of Education Minister Lui Kang's residence that really heightened the ill-feeling. Suspecting that some NSCN supporters had taken shelter there, all 13 inmates at the minister's home were rounded up, questioned, then released. The furious minister offered to resign but Keishing called a cabinet meeting which condemned the army action and its "atrocities on innocent villagers". Echoed Kang: "The army cannot cover up its mistakes in Oinam by harassing innocent citizens."

The army is also, predictably, at odds with the local police whom it accuses of feeding it misleading information, apart from releasing insurgency suspects on bail. Army officials point out that none of the more than 5,000 criminal cases registered in Manipur last year has resulted in a single conviction.

All these suspicions have been aired before the Governor, General Krishna Rao, and the Central Government. In fact, when Rajiv Gandhi visited the North-east last month, he even asked Keishing why he was receiving reports that his government was not cooperating with the security forces.

Manipuri villagers are trapped in a no-win situation between the army and the insurgents. Of the 413 people killed by the NSCN in Manipur since 1965, most were suspected informers. And the army too comes down with a heavy hand even if the villagers have been coerced into assisting the insurgents. Lt-General Malay Kumar Laheri, director-general of the Assam Rifles, agrees that villagers are caught in a pincer. "Many innocents suffer during an army crackdown. The only way is for civilians to courageously build up a resistance against the NSCN," he says. But this is easier said than done. The well-entrenched NSCN has massive support in Ukhrul district in Manipur and is now attempting to expand its base in Senapati district.

The primary concern of the villagers remains what it has always been, through the recent history of the troubled region: to stay out of the way of the opposing forces. But this has proved to be an impossible task.

—RAMESH MENON in Oinam and Imphal

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WEST BENGAL

Losing Faith

Set back for Gorkha struggle

MORE than anyone else, Subhas Ghising is the figurehead, symbol and leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). But a new and dangerous situation is now developing in the Darjeeling hills, with Ghising's hold over the movement starting to wane, rival claimants to the leadership mantle setting up parallel organisations, and vital sections of the Gorkha population threatening to flock to other banners. Worryingly for the Government, Ghising's rivals are more hardline activists, less amenable to persuasion and unlikely to agree in a hurry to a negotiated settlement of issues.

Clearly, the former army corporal's failure to get concrete assurances from the Centre and the West Bengal Government for Gorkha statehood and citizenship has finally begun to shake the local people's faith in his leadership. And though the Gorkha leader insists that he has "not given up his demand for a separate state", he is increasingly faced with a credibility problem.

"Ghising has gone too far. He is in no position to say that Gorkhaland is not a possibility. We have suffered so much only to have a separate state. How can we give up this demand?" said Bal Bahadur Dewan, secretary for over two decades of the Singamari Motor Syndicate. The district administration too recognises that Ghising is no longer an undisputed leader. Said D.P. Patra, Darjeeling district magistrate: "We are more concerned about the militants and a section of ex-army servicemen who are now attempting to take the lead."

The new challengers have emerged from the ranks of the GNLF in the last few months. And there are several straws in the wind to suggest that Ghising's hold is weakening. The Kalimpong unit of the GNLF, for instance, refused to withdraw the 13-day bandh on the eve of Ghising's talks in New Delhi on July 22, in spite of his call to do so. And dissidence within the GNLF has been growing, leading to open conflict.

Thus, on August 26, Ghising's supporters in Lopchu, led by a schoolteacher K.B. Rai, kidnapped four dissidents and threatened to liquidate them. Fortunately the police were informed in time and prevented the crime. A Border Security Force picket has since been posted at Lopchu at the request of the GNLF dissidents. According to Raj Kannaujia, assistant superintendent of police (operations), kidnapping and assault on dissidents have become the order of the day.

Ghising with GNLF women members

ASOKE BOSE

Ghising's failure to get concrete assurances on Gorkha statehood and citizenship has begun to shake people's faith in his leadership.

The Gorkha Volunteer Cell, a youth body created by Ghising to take over the functions of the police and some of the administration, is also now doing just as it pleases. Local people complained that they were being forced by khukri-wielding members to donate money to the GNLF's coffers—with the contributions ranging from Rs 10 to Rs 5,000.

As the situation slowly gets out of hand, GNLF leaders R.P. Waiba, C.K. Pradhan of Kalimpong and the Dong brothers—Bharat and Lakpa—in Darjeeling are asserting themselves. Waiba has the die-hard support of some hill-district ex-servicemen. The Dong brothers in turn have openly criticised Ghising and intelligence circles fear they are forming the Gorkha National Liberation Tigers—on the lines of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam—as a parallel set-up to wrest control from the GNLF.

Another group that is fast emerging on the scene is from the ranks of the army. Intelligence sources in Calcutta revealed that Gorkha officers in the British army—two colonels, a major and a captain—together with some retired officers were trying to gain control of the GNLF's Gorkha National Ex-servicemen's Association in order to dictate the course of the movement.

The authorities, fearful of a Punjab-like agitation erupting in the Darjeeling hills, have embarked on a scheme to register all ex-servicemen in order to give them employment, and keep them away from the hot-heads. "If senior army officers decide to take the plunge we could have a situation like that which General Shubeg Singh created in the Golden Temple," a district administration officer said with obvious worry.

A sense of disillusionment with Ghising's leadership is evident even in the lower ranks of the GNLF. This has been to the advantage of the CPI(M) who claim that large numbers have been flocking to them for protection. "Thirty workers and residents of the Dhoteria tea estate have sought our protection," disclosed a CPI(M) district committee member. Trying to capitalise on the developing situation, the CPI(M)-affiliated Centre for Indian Trade Unions is making every effort to win the tea garden workers by negotiating with the state Government for Durga puja bonus. "We know that the tea garden owners have suffered losses but we will not accept it if they refuse to give bonus. The minimum of 8.33 per cent has to be given," asserted Bomjan, a CPI(M) leader.

The state Government on its part is moving gingerly, wishing to avoid any confrontation. Said state Home Secretary, N. Krishnamurti: "The situation is very fluid and we have to proceed very cautiously." Ironically enough, the administration is now hoping that the man whom it once considered responsible for creating the Gorkhaland problem will reassert his hold on the hill population and bring the situation "under control". Whatever happens in the future, this particular hope is likely to be frustrated.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN in Darjeeling

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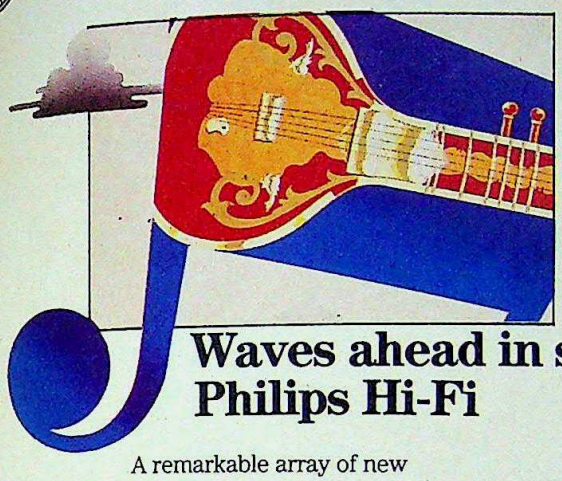

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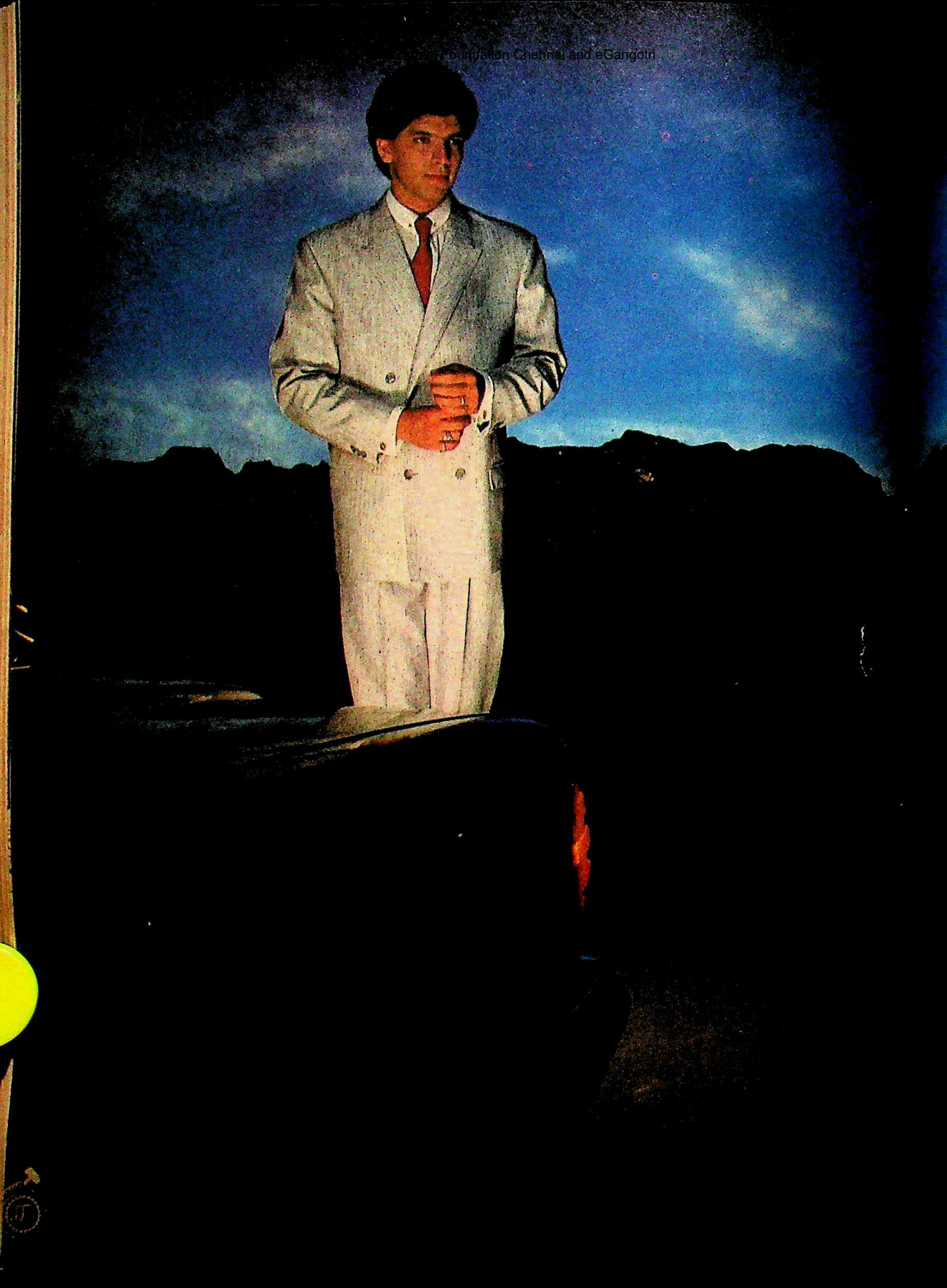

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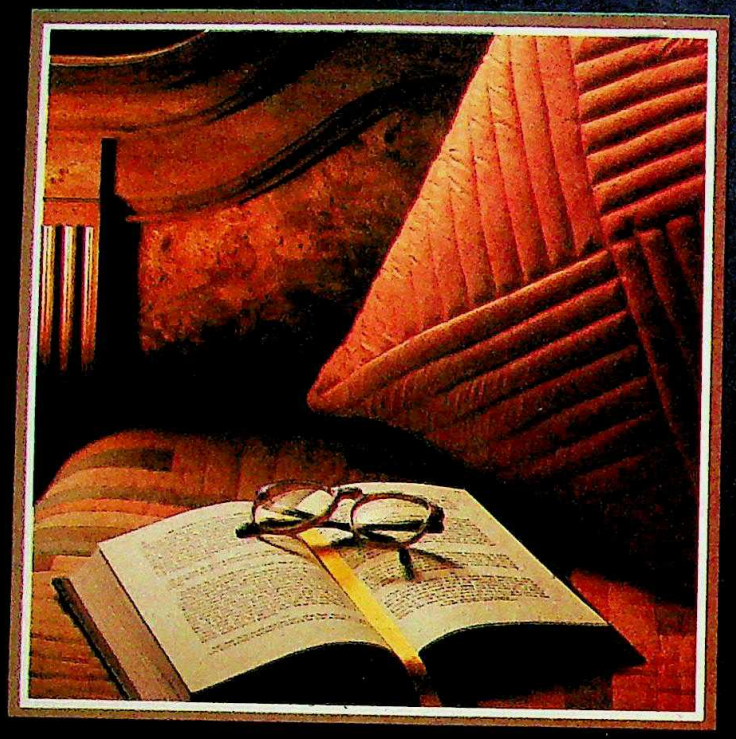

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TEACHERS

In Disarray

An accord causes confusion

EVEN going by the Government's record of failed accords, the recent one struck with 2.3 lakh university and college teachers was in a class of its own: it was aborted even before it was born. With the continuance of the strike in Maharashtra, Bihar, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and all Central universities, the hopes of an immediate resumption of classes is now fading away.

The 31-day country-wide strike by AIFUCTO (All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations) which started as a demand for pay revisions in 1978 has now snowballed into a negation of the New Education Policy. Teachers who have been ignored by the Centre since a 1973 pay hike were further agitated when a one-man committee report by Professor R.C. Mehrotra—former vice-chancellor of Delhi University—in their view, went against them. The report, made public earlier this year, was rejected as "anti-democratic", "elitist" and "designed to suit the recommendations of the new education policy". Teachers said it sought to give them financial sops while cutting down on the autonomy of institutions, undermining merit and diluting the standards of higher education. The teaching community has since been agitating against it.

When the teachers decided to go on an indefinite strike on August 4, the Ministry of Human Resources Development hurriedly chalked out a scheme to revise Mehrotra's recommendations and on June 17 the states were ordered to implement it. But the revised scheme too was condemned primarily because it sought to abolish internal promotions. Also criticised was the fragmentation of pay structure into seven grades—now brought down to five in the September 4 agreement—instead of the existing three because the teachers said it would block promotional avenues.

Reiterating its plan to go on a nation-wide strike, the federation wrote to Human Resources Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao on July 27—the letter went unanswered—highlighting 11 demands, which included:

- Maintaining a status quo with regard to the grades.
- Continuing the present schemes of promotion to the posts of readers and professors.
- Total Central funding for the first five years to implement national scales everywhere simultaneously.
- Inclusion of agricultural universities and technical institutions in the pay revision. Librarians and physical education teachers also to be included.
- Creation of posts for readers and professors in every university.
- Payment of interim relief in all states at par with Central universities.
- No negative change in the existing service conditions.

Teachers demonstrate in New Delhi

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The September 4 agreement which the teachers' representatives struck with the Government has shocked the bulk of the strikers. They feel severely let down by their leaders.

When, true to their word, the teachers struck work, the pressure on the Government to settle the dispute increased. Rao was particularly keen to sort out matters before Teachers' Day on September 5. Two days before the accord was reached General Secretary Mrinmoy Bhattacharya said that the Government had agreed to concede a "substantial" chunk of the demands and that the only hitch was its reluctance to cow down to AIFUCTO, a left-oriented body.

The federation's negotiating team consisted of three CPI(M) members (including President K.K. Thekedath and Secretary Satyasadhan Chakravarty), three people from the CPI—among them Bhattacharya—and two Congress(I) men. This should have ensured that all views went represented but when the agreement came, the teaching community was shocked.

The agreement, described as a "decided compromise" by Bhattacharya and the "best in the given circumstances" by Thekedath, did not achieve any of the 11 demands in full. "This is a sell-out," protested the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) President M.M.P. Singh. Swiftly getting together the organisations that felt let-down, he called for continuing the strike.

The CPI(M)-dominated DUTA's action embarrassed the three Marxists negotiators, leading to the resignations of Thekedath and Chakravarty from their posts. And at the meeting of the federation's national executive on September 6, all the negotiators offered to quit, admitting they had made a mistake because they had feared that the strike would peter out. The CPI(M) Politburo also condemned the agreement. From the Centre's point of view, a positive outcome was that it had succeeded in scuttling the agitation besides throwing the teaching community into confusion.

Having broken the movement, the Government is now hopeful that its "no work no pay" policy will chastise those teachers who are holding out. But the immediate sentiment in the academic community is that the 10-year-long agitation is far from over.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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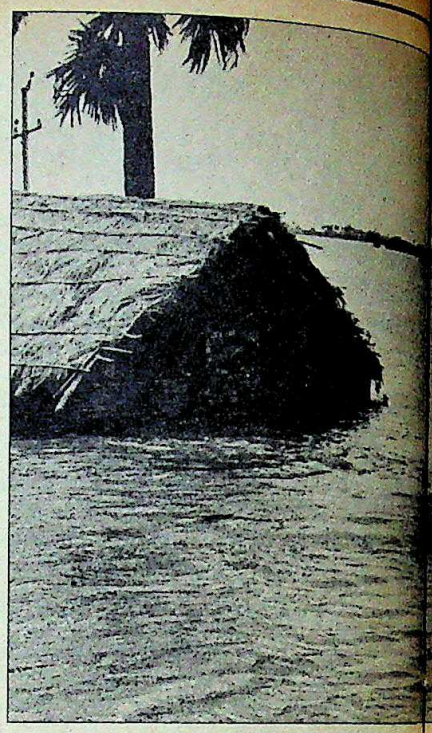
FLOODS

Death and Devastation

Heavy rains in Assam and Bihar create havoc



THIS year's monsoon has visited a dual tragedy on the country—a merciless drought in 21 states and floods swamping the remaining ones, causing damage of equal intensity. The worst flood-hit states have been Bihar and Assam where, till last fortnight, the state governments were fighting to contain the havoc. INDIA TODAY *correspondents* RAMESH MENON *and* FARZAND AHMED *toured Assam and Bihar respectively to cover the damage. Their report:*

UMADHAR SINGH, a Marxist legislator from Darbhanga in Bihar, has been sending repeated three-word telegrams to the state capital over the last fortnight. They read: "Help, Help, Help." In Assam, the Brahmaputra, a lifeline for millions along its 2,906-km route, has turned into a veritable death trap.

The toll, as always, is a statistical jumble that can never describe the true dimensions of the devastation. But the figures are frightening enough. The floods that have deluged northern Bihar have left 446 people dead, destroyed 70,000 dwellings and severely damaged another 3.5 lakh houses. Twenty-seven lakh tonnes of standing crops worth Rs 538 crore have already been lost. The total loss, according to initial state government estimates: Rs 1,132 crore.

In Assam, the picture is equally grim. Sixteen out of 18 districts have been affected—that means nine million people in 11,500 villages. And about 1.8 lakh cattle have perished. Crop damage totals Rs 131 crore and over 500 bridges and culverts have either collapsed or been swept away. The floods, which came in three waves in the last three months, have killed 111 people and 12 lakh people are huddled in 1,565 relief camps. The estimated loss: Rs 1,000 crore.

What lends greater tragedy to the drama is that both Assam and northern Bihar are flood-prone. The heavy rain has exposed not only the lack of effort so far in terms of permanent flood-control measures but also that politics continues even in desperate situations.

Though Assam is by now used to the annual ritual of floods, this year has been one of the worst. Rainfall in Dibrugarh town, for instance, during the first 24 days of July, was the highest recorded in 50 years. In Barpeta and Nalbari districts, communications remained cut off over a long period, and for days, people sat on roof-tops and trees, awaiting assistance. The army and air force were pressed into action to rescue the marooned people and airdrop food packets. For the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, nature had presented a critical test. The 1987-88 state budget has a meagre provision of Rs 7.25 crore for relief and rehabilitation and, somewhat inevitably for a non-Congress(I) state, numerous sos messages for financial aid to the Centre were ignored. Snapped an angry Mahanta: "Relief delayed defeats the very purpose of relief." And a state government advertisement recently was headlined: "The state is fighting a battle alone."

The desperate need for funds was also underlined in a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi submitted by the AGP on August 21. But even belated Central aid will probably only be a drop in the ocean of misery.

Last year, the Centre forwarded Rs 31 crore towards flood relief after the state Government put in an estimated Rs 338 crore. Last month, after the second wave of floods, the state estimated that it would need Rs 339 crore to help the affected and rebuild a shattered economy. What it got was a paltry advance of Rs 7.5 crore.

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) then shot off a memorandum to Rajiv saying that he had ignored Assam although he had not only visited other states but granted financial aid on the spot. It added that though New Delhi often declared that Assam's assets were the nation's assets, the state's problems seemed to be hers alone. After repeated requests, an AASU dharna and a photographic exhibition of the floods to mobilise public opinion in the capital, Rajiv made a fleeting trip in late August and sanctioned

Map by B.K. SHARMA

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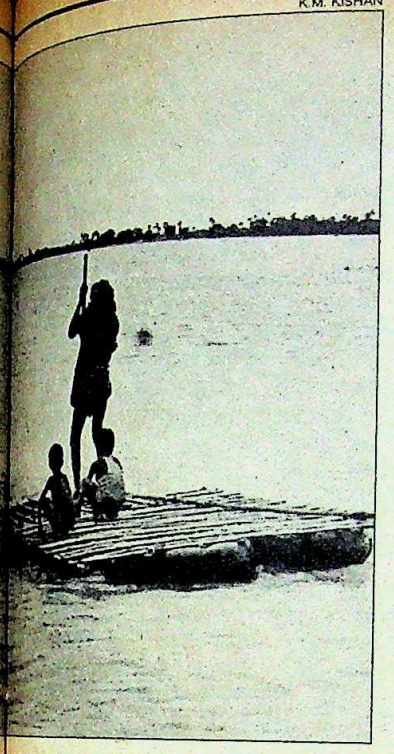

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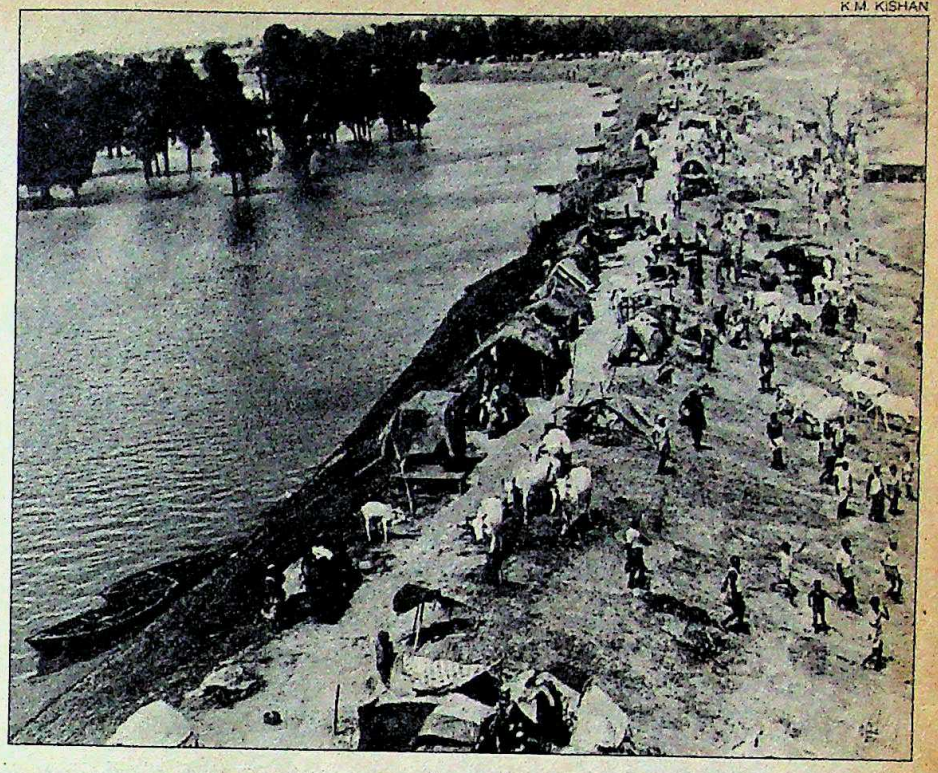

In Bihar a villager rows to safety (extreme left); the makeshift shelters of families displaced by flood-waters (top); and an Assamese couple seeking dry land

Rs 20 crore. But to be fair to the prime minister, the AGP also did not miss a chance to make political capital.

As the floods started to recede last week, the AGP Government began trying to assess the damage. Says Revenue Secretary Birendra Mohan Hazarika: "The floods have shattered the state's economy. If financial aid does not arrive soon, there will be a severe financial crisis."

Both governments, though, share the responsibility for the lack of flood control. The Centre set up the Brahmaputra Board in 1980 to study ways of controlling river waters. The board submitted a flood control master plan to the Centre in March 1983, but nothing has been heard since.

Its main recommendation was the construction of two multi-purpose dams at Dihang (Rs 8,600 crore) and Subansiri (Rs 3,068 crore) in Arunachal Pradesh to harness the Brahmaputra. Though the proposed dams would generate electricity, they would also displace several thousand people. The coming up of the Dihang project alone would mean that 35,000 people would have to move elsewhere.

Assam is keen on these projects as they would impound 34 per cent of the river water and reduce water level by more than six feet. But the ecological effects of such massive projects are yet to be ascertained. Warns Assam's former chief conservator of forests, Prafulla Chandra Das: "It will be dangerous to okay these without careful study."

So far, embankments along the river have made little difference—due to political priorities. Following a decision in the early '50s, nearly 4,000 km of high embankments were built. Initially, this worked well but, over time, as refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan moved into riverine areas, they cleared the area of vegetation. Eager to create vote banks, politicians vied to recognise the settlers as Indians. As the thick foliage disappeared, there was nothing to break the torrent of rain and the embankments began collapsing. This year, 86 of them broke, flooding huge areas.

Dredging of the heavily silted river would help but this is far too expensive for the state Government to try on its own. Mahanta feels that, with the help of World Bank loans, the Centre must go ahead

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with the dams. "Floods have stood in the way of economic development of the state and only permanent measures can tackle this regular menace," he says.

That stance was being echoed by his counterpart in Bihar, Bindeshwari Dubey, but with less conviction. The floods in northern Bihar have been described as the worst in the century. Roads, railway systems, crops, cattle, houses and even the 3,400 km-long protective embankments along the major rivers have simply vanished. "It's unprecedented, it's unparalleled," muttered Dubey, as he belatedly tried to gear up the official machinery. But former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, after a six-day tour of the affected areas, declared that neither the state Government nor the Centre has been able to comprehend the enormity of the disaster.

The state Government, though, does say that Bihar's economy, and particularly that of the 24 northern districts, "has been ruined for ever". According to official estimates, the destroyed road network would alone need Rs 126 crore to be repaired, and another Rs 21 crore would be required for the revival of the power supply network in the areas under water.

That figure does not include the loss caused to the five lakh people rendered homeless. As many as 13,912 villages on the course of the Ganga, Gandak, Mahanadi, Kosi, Bagmati and Adhwara rivers have been repeatedly ravaged since mid-July leaving virtually nothing for the 1.30-crore population to survive on. Floods in north Bihar are an annual ritual and for the last six months, the authorities have been talking about preventive measures. But when the rains came, the hollowness of the promises became evident.

Records show that the loss due to floods in Bihar—which accounts for 20 per cent of the country's flood-prone areas—amounts to Rs 42 crore annually. Another Rs 30 crore is spent each year on anti-flood work, 80 per cent of this money going into maintaining and strengthening embankments. Although 64 lakh hectares are flood-prone, only 29.13 lakh hectares—or 45 per cent—are partially protected. The rest of the land is entirely at the mercy of nature.

THIS year, even that partial protection disappeared following at least 140 breaches in the embankments. "What happened to all the money spent on the construction of embankments and the recurring expenses on their maintenance?" asked BJP MP Kailashpati Mishra in a memorandum to Governor P. Venkatsubbaiah last fortnight. But the Government reported to the Centre that none of the embankments had come apart due to erosion. "Who is right, only the uprooted people can confirm," retorted Janata leader Raghunath Jha.

Waiting for food in a Bihar relief camp: belated assistance

Also exposed was Irrigation and Power Minister Ramashray Prasad Singh who told the Assembly in early July that "over 70 per cent of the flood protection works have been completed". He had also suggested that the Government was more prepared than before to deal with the swollen rivers.

But let alone protection, the state administration seemed incapable of even providing relief or rescuing the marooned. For days on end, people cut off from the world, survived with little to eat or drink. Yet, Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Rajesh Pilot, co-ordination incharge for Bihar, Bengal and Assam, after visiting some of the relief camps, declared that government efforts were satisfactory.

Despite government claims of providing massive food relief, last fortnight there were reports from the interior of food riots and police firing. Even the flying visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Purnea was of little use—he announced a mere Rs 50 lakh in Central assistance towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, an act that Purnea MLA Ajit Sarkar characterised as "a cruel joke". The state Government on its part announced the release of Rs 23.5 crore towards relief work.

Opposition leaders say that the Dubey Government has callously ignored their demand to constitute an all-party committee to coordinate relief measures. The Government instead constituted a cabinet subcommittee headed by the chief minister and a co-ordination committee headed by Chief Secretary R. Srinivasan to monitor relief operations.

Mishra, Dubey's arch-rival, last fortnight, called upon national leaders to make Bihar's floods a national issue. He said the suffering was greater now than in the 1934 earthquake after which Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had personally supervised relief work. But then, the current generation of leaders isn't the same one.

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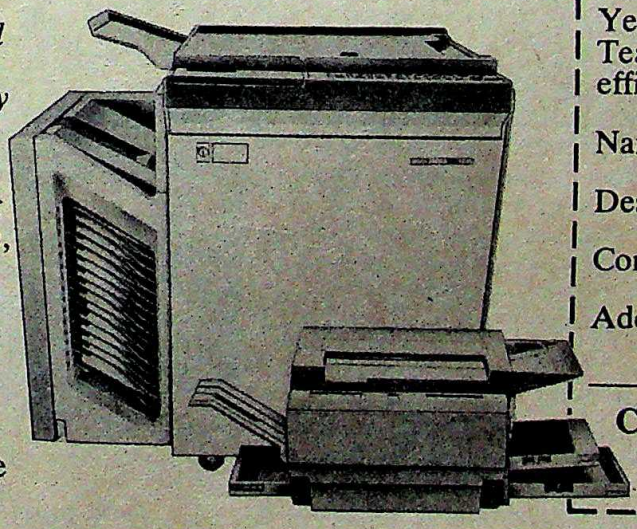

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Face to Face

LAST fortnight, Orissa Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik and friend-turned-arch-rival Basant Kumar Biswal finally faced each other after a two-year political struggle. Biswal led a six-member fact-finding team of dissidents to Koraput, Kalahandi, Ganjam and Phulbani districts, areas Patnaik also visited last fortnight. Soon after, the two argued heatedly at a meeting of Pradesh Congress(I) Committee about the extent of the drought—Biswal, naturally, alleged that Patnaik was unwilling to concede deaths in the area.

Biswal was forced to come out openly against Patnaik because the chief minister is trying to ease him out of a number of positions he holds in several organisations. He currently heads the Orissa Olympic Association, the Utkal Gomangal Samiti, the State Cooperative Union and Orissa Scouts and Guides. He has already been eased out from his post as head of

Biswal (left) and Patnaik: political rivals

the Orissa Cricket Association.

He maintained his grip on the Olympic association last fortnight by seeking the intervention of the high court but the offensive against him is unlikely to slacken. Also under question is Biswal's continued grip on Orissa's second-largest daily, *Prajatantra*, of which he is the working chairman. And while the do or die battle goes on, the state administration continues to suffer.

Suspicious Mission

THE 15-day-old goodwill mission launched by the youthful Dr Ramesh Pandey—Bihar Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey's controversial son-in-law—has created a political storm. The Sadbhavana Samiti (goodwill committee) aims to do the impossible: provide succour to the flood-affected, reconstruct nearly 70,000 demolished houses through rural cooperative societies, provide medicare and adopt orphaned children—all without collecting money.

Senior opposition leaders allege that the samiti had amassed crores through unaccounted donations. Controversial Congress(I) MP Ram Swaroop Ram even complained to the prime minister that the samiti was extorting money and materials from contractors and businessmen in the name of flood relief. Even former chief minister Jagannath Mishra claimed that the whole thing was a fraud. The charges brought forth a denial from the samiti last fortnight and the allegations were described as "a smear campaign" directed at Pandey only because he was related to the chief minister.

But suspicion about the organisation's working grew when some senior ministers inserted advertisements for the samiti and then Doordarshan covered it favourably. Well placed sources within the Congress(I) allege that the samiti merely put its seal on material already collected by official committees concerned with flood relief, and distributed them. Odd too—considering the severely disrupted roads and communications—was the organisation's boast that it had already distributed 51,000 food packets within 10 days. What is certain is that a new focus for controversy has emerged.

Jacket Racket

UTTAR Pradesh ministers are seeking additions to their wardrobe. The state Home Department has renewed its demand to the Centre for the import of 75 bullet-proof jackets to meet an imaginary extremist threat in the Terai area. These unusual status symbols will cost Rs 70 lakh. The initial request for the import of the 70 jackets, made in December last year, was rejected by the Union Home Ministry this August on the ground that there was no apparent threat to the life of the state's ministers.

But Uttar Pradesh's leaders have been pining for this security apparel ever since top functionaries in New Delhi were permitted to wear them because of a genuine threat. But ministers in Lucknow egged the state's Home Department on into making a fresh request, saying their lives were as precious as those of VIPs in New Delhi.

The extraordinary security arrangements for Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh illustrate the official paranoia. His escort comprises two motorcycle riders with Sten gun wielding guards riding the pillion, and three cars loaded with armed men. Remarked an intelligence officer: "Extremists have added glamour to our chief minister's convoy."

Security Ritual

AT a time when the Gujarat Government is enforcing austerity to combat the drought, it has been compelled to pay a high premium to ensure peace during festivals, given the sharp rise in communal conflict.

The annual Rathyatra of the Jagannath Temple in Ahmedabad has been the occasion of communal riots for the

SALIM KAZI

Police patrol on Moharram: costly exercise

past two years. So, the Government was recently forced to deploy a massive additional force that included the army. And an army helicopter was also used for aerial surveillance.

This ritual, barring the helicopter, was repeated once again

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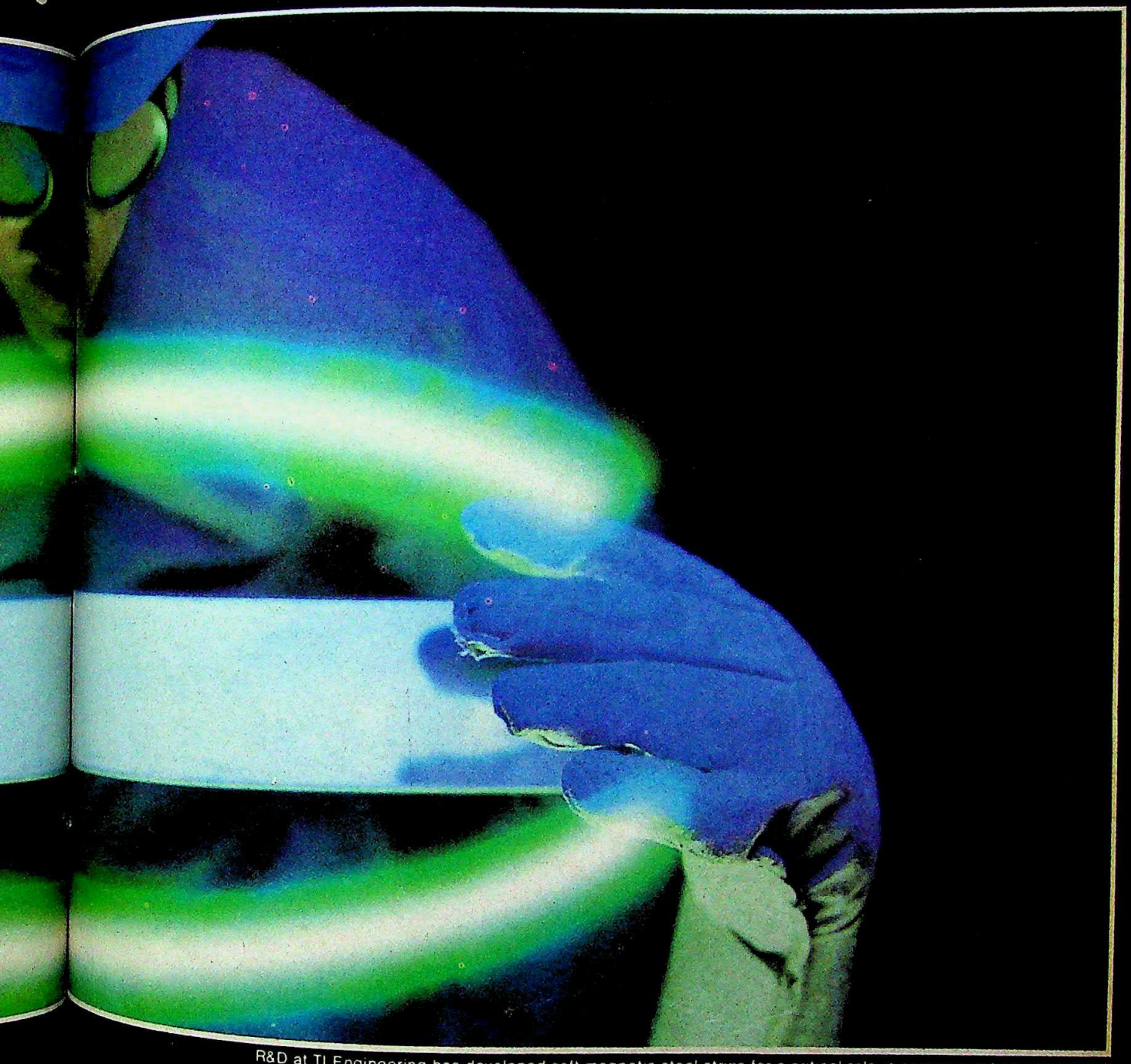

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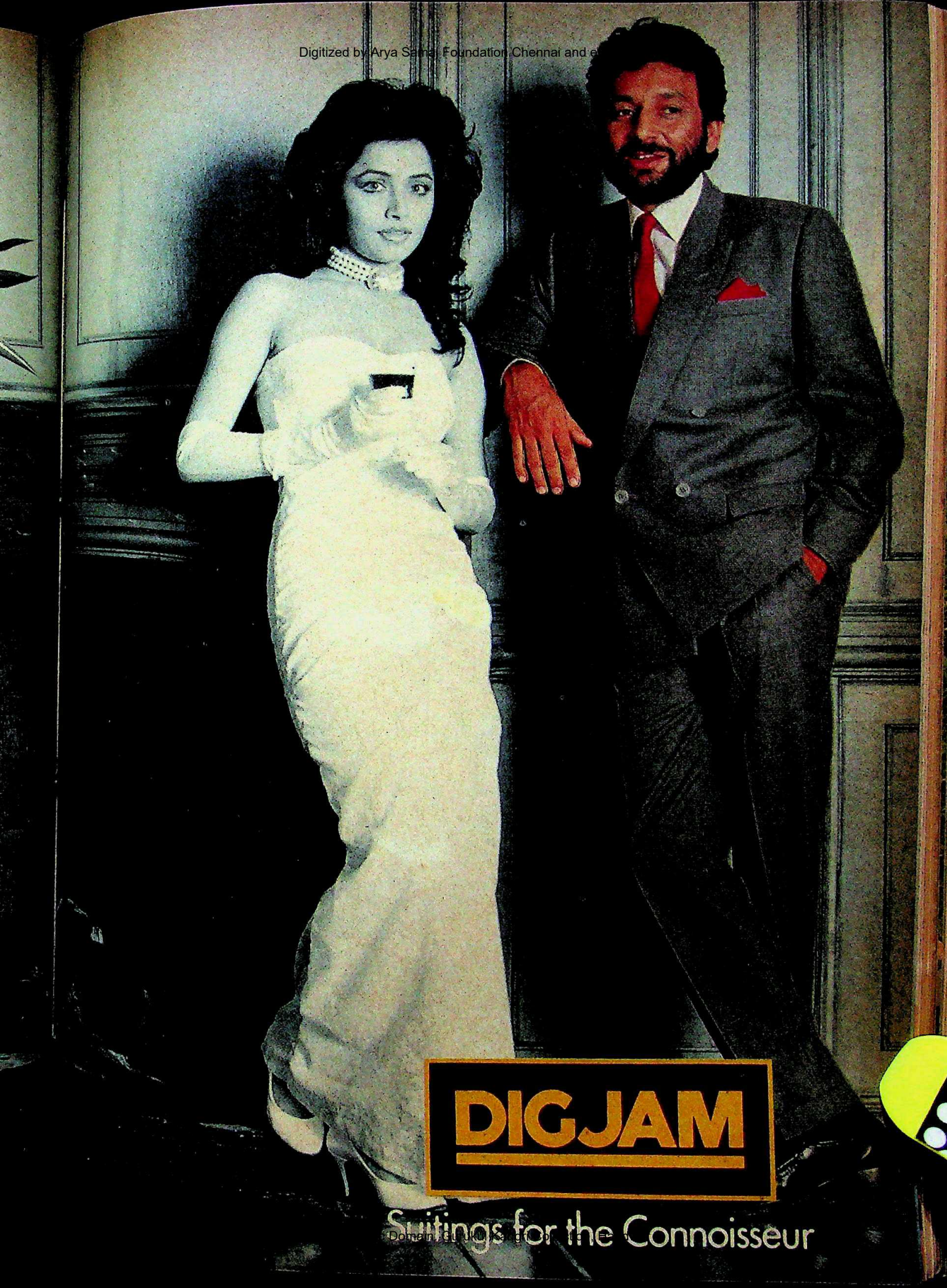

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last month during Janamashtmi. And last fortnight, on the occasion of Moharram in Ahmedabad, 7,000 additional security personnel from the state police and paramilitary forces had to be deployed to prevent the out break of communal conflict. The helicopter too was back in the air to create, more than anything, "a psychological impact", admitted a senior official. The expenditure: nearly Rs 10 lakh.

It is easy to see why the Amarsinh Chaudhary Government is taking no chances. The chief minister has come close to losing his chair more than once because of his inability to put down communal violence.

Covert Conversion

PIQUED by prying eyes, the Churhat Children Welfare Society—the controversial brain-child of Union Communications Minister Arjun Singh—has decided to shift its operations outside the ambit of a hostile Madhya Pradesh Government. The society, which had recently been on the firing line for its money-minting lottery scheme (INDIA TODAY, August 31) has now applied for its conversion into a limited company for promoting charity

R.C. SAHU

The society's board (above); and Arjun Singh: hushed affair

under section 25 of the Companies Act. The application was made to the regional director of the Company Law Board, Western India region, Bombay, for registration as a company with limited liability, without the addition of the words "Private Limited" to its name. One of the immediate benefits will be that most state government agencies will not be able to interfere in its affairs, though the society will continue its activities from Churhat, which is Singh's home town.

Operation Reincarnation was a hush-hush affair. The society fulfilled its legal obligation by inserting a notice on July 18, 1987, in *Dainik Vindhyavani*, an obscure Hindi daily (circulation claimed: 6,000), which is published from the district headquarter of Sidhi. It invited objections within 30 days of its publication.

News reached Rewa—the divisional headquarter—and Bhopal late, as copies of the *Vindhyavani* are not available even with the Directorate of Public Relations. However, two Sidhi Congressmen, obviously Singh's opponents in group politics, filed objections with the Company Law Board. The petition—alleging that the aim of the conversion is to render infructuous any order of the state Government to probe the society's scandals—will ensure that the controversies engulfing the VIP society are kept alive.

Pitched Battle

UNRULY scenes are not new to the Shiv Sena-controlled Bombay Muncipal Corporation (BMC), but last fortnight's fracas was the most undecorous ever. It took place when the J.B. D' Souza committee report, already submitted to the state Government, was being discussed. The report strongly criticised the BMC's mishandling of the city's draft development plan.

Dhulla: charged up

The trouble arose when Congress(I) leader R.R. Singh got up to make his statement, and accused the ruling party of wantonly proposing to convert land reserved for public purpose for commercial use. The Sainiks, including Mayor Ramesh Prabhoo, would have none of it, breaking the tradition of permitting the opposition leader to have his say. In the melee, Congress(I) Corporator Kanti Dhulla was accused of spitting on the Sainiks, which he denied.

The pitched battle between the corporators ended with the Congress(I) members, some of whom were injured, trooping to the nearby Azad Maidan police station to lodge complaints against the Shiv Sena leaders. For Bombay's residents, the fracas was another dramatic reminder of just how much the city's administration has declined in recent years.

Crucial Crusade

WILL the birth anniversary of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan on October 11 see the birth of another protest movement in Bihar? With Vishwanath Pratap Singh's three-day visit to the state scheduled to begin on that day, non-Congress(I) activists are busy making hectic preparations. Congressmen, however, are careful to dissociate themselves from the former defence minister. Even the former chief minister, Jagannath Mishra—whose supporters helped V.P. Singh from behind the scenes on his last visit—has disowned Singh and his vocal supporter, Congress(I) MLA Jaikumar Palit.

Uncertainty within the ruling party spread after former Uttar Pradesh transport minister—and expelled Congressman—Sanjay Singh visited Patna to explore the possibility of launching a JP-type of movement against the Congress party and the Central leadership. The "Bihar Nagrik Sangh" for V.P. Singh's crusade—to be launched from the historic Gandhi Maidan—will most probably be headed by Palit. The support of former MP Shankar Dayal Singh and Saryu Roy, convener of the JP Vichar Manch, has also been enlisted by the dissidents.

Till now, from the ruling party, only Palit, Satyadeo Singh, MLC from Dhanbad, and supporters of legislator Ranjit Singh have openly sided with V.P. Singh. This, coupled with Mishra's public denial of all association with the former Union minister, indicates that the dissidents' task is going to be difficult. The ultimate test, though, will be the public response to the visit.

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BOFORS

Cost of Cancellation

Scrapping the deal would cause serious problems

THOUGH pressure mounts on the Swedish Government and Bofors to unearth the facts about the controversial Indian deal, in Stockholm, Swedish officials express pessimism about any immediate revelations. Meanwhile, in India, the Opposition has demanded that the Bofors deal be scrapped. But senior army officials insist that any such move would leave the country dangerously vulnerable. A report:

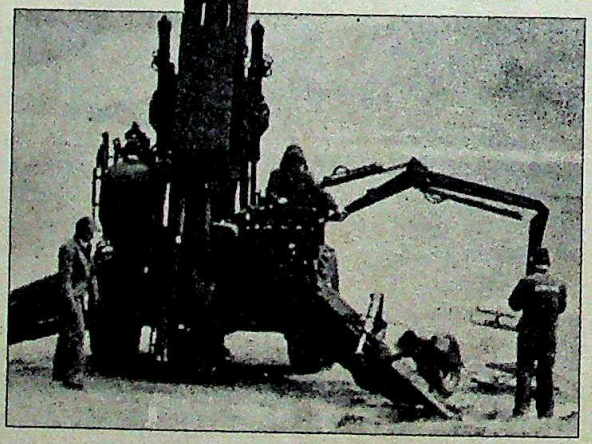
TO the layman, and opportunistic opposition leaders, there appears to be one logical way for the Government to obtain absolution for its alleged transgressions in the Bofors deal—cancel the Rs 1,705 crore contract with the recalcitrant Swedish armaments manufacturer.

But nobody has so far bothered to ask the most crucial question of all—what would be the cost of cancellation? In strictly military terms, according to senior artillery officers, the cost would be unacceptably high. A wide range of senior army officers unanimously, and forcibly, insist that scrapping the contract will leave the army dangerously vulnerable.

In fact, the time it took for the Bofors deal to be finalised—the army requested for a 155 mm medium artillery gun in 1977 and the contract was signed in March, 1986—is only one indication of the wide-ranging implications of cancelling the Bofors deal. It could be argued that alternative and comparable 155 mm weapons systems like the French GIAT have already been field-tested in Indian conditions and therefore the lead time in signing a fresh contract would be considerably reduced. But even then, it would take a minimum of two years for its induction—a gap that, artillery officers say, would be fatal. A spokesman for the French Defence Ministry told INDIA TODAY that it could not comment on the hypothetical thesis as to how speedily the French could commence deliveries were the Bofors contract to be scrapped.

The key factor, as always, is the US-made 155 mm Howitzers that the Pakistan Army has had for some years and which triggered off India's search for a comparable system. The Indian Army requirement was—and is—for a medium gun capable of firing heavy artillery at a long range. In operational terms, the gun would be deployed against enemy armour like tanks and armoured personnel carriers, troop-carriers, roads and bridges. Its range, over 30 km with special long-range ammunition, would ensure that it could not be detected or destroyed by enemy fire except from the air.

In strictly military terms, the cost of termination would be unacceptably high and leave the army dangerously vulnerable.



Contrary to reports in the media, officers involved in the evaluation trials insist that the Bofors gun is the best available, though the French system was comparable. To cancel the contract now would not just delay the induction of a new system but lead to any number of related problems. These include:

► The Bofors deal incorporates a transfer of technology clause for indigenous manufacture of the weapons system for which preparations have already started. A new manufacturer may not agree to transfer technology, specially if it is, or is likely to be, a standard NATO weapon. In any event, it would mean remodelling the army's manufacturing units to produce the new systems, a costly and time-consuming effort.

► The Bofors contract is also for numerous sub-systems and sub-contractors for the towing vehicle, the ammunition, the sights, fire-control computers and navigational systems. In the event of a new competitor, contracts for sub-systems will have to be renegotiated, in some cases, with manufacturers whose equipment is more compatible to the new gun.

► In the nearly two years since the other 155 mm systems were evaluated, modifications, alterations and the introduction of new elements are certain to have been carried out by the manufacturers. Thus, retrials of the gun under Indian conditions will be needed.

► The financial package will also have to be renegotiated—at a disadvantage to India. If the Bofors contract is cancelled, India will be desperate to get a comparable system as quickly as possible, which will allow the manufacturer to dictate financial terms. This is in addition to normal escalation costs which could now be a considerable amount—according to one estimate, an additional Rs 300 crore.

► The Indian Army would be faced with a duality of equipment since Bofors has already started delivery of the gun. Army personnel who have already been trained in the complex electronic systems that the Bofors gun is fitted with will have to now be retrained on the new system, or an entirely new batch of men assigned to master the new gun. In any case, no army would like to have an inventory of two comparable but different systems. The induction of a new system will make a mockery of the army's efforts to standardise its artillery. It would also entail a reassessment of strategy and deployment plans and acute problems in having to order and store two separate sets of spares and ammunition, apart from the different maintenance requirements.

► Any new weapon operating in Indian conditions of excessive heat and dust will face teething problems that take time to rectify. This will again delay the process of operational induction.

► A new manufacturer will not be in a

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position to conform to the same supply deadlines as Bofors. The French, for instance, probably manufacture around 50 pieces of their 155 mm gun a year for the French Army. For them to produce the 400 guns in two years that India has contracted for will mean setting up new assembly lines or modifying existing ones. The cost for that will inevitably be tagged on to the contract price.

▶ Any weapons agreement on the scale of the Bofors one will have a stiff penalty clause for cancellation of the contract, except if the gun is found defective or does not perform to specifications. Since the army is quite happy with the performance of the Bofors gun, the penalty that India will have to pay will be inordinately high. In a briefing to *Blitz* last July, Rajiv also made it clear that if the contract is cancelled for no fault of Bofors, the case can be taken up by them for adjudication to the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The penalty, by the prime minister's own estimate, could be over Rs 500 crore. However, an ICC spokesman in Paris told INDIA TODAY that they would have a role only if the contract contained a specific clause mentioning ICC arbitration. Defence Ministry officials refuse to comment on whether such a clause exists.

According to army brass, the three key elements in their requirements are: delivery schedules, production schedules and absorbment capability. All three will be put dangerously out of kilter if India is to go in for a new system. They also say that the army cannot take the rap if, during the estimated two-year gap, the country is left vulnerable. But they also take comfort in their belief that neither will scrapping the Bofors contract be a politically expedient move. Any such cancellation will warrant playing into the Opposition's hands and reinforce their claim that the gun was not suitable all along.

Steven Chappell, spokesman for the London-based Campaign Against Arms Trade, said: "We have been monitoring the Bofors controversy. We do not have any previous examples of such massive defence deals being cancelled by the customer. Changes in political climate or political administrations is one way contracts have been dishonoured."

The only previous instance of major arms contracts being cancelled was after the fall of the Shah of Iran. The only way in which the Bofors contract can be cancelled is in the unlikely instance of the fall of the Shah of India.

—DILIP BOBB with RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

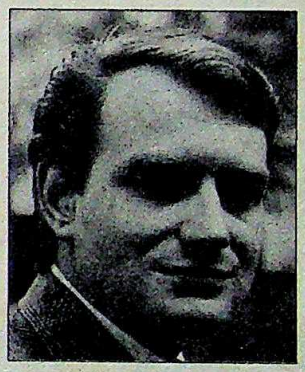
SWEDEN

The Disclosure Debate

Scepticism in Stockholm about any new revelations

BAFTER months of flip-flop evasiveness, during which time the company's name has been dragged through the mire, its credibility has taken a severe jolt. The fact was that Bofors' possible disclosure of the names of those who received money in the sale of the 155 mm Howitzers to the Indian Government was received with scepticism in Sweden.

Commentators and independent officials in Stockholm, like press ombudsman Thorsten Cars—who is also director of the Institute against Bribery—insist that it is still "early days" for anticipating revelations at the latest reported offer of Nobel Industries Chairman Carlberg to Foreign Minister Sten Andersson. It does appear that with the scheduled launch of three different investigations examining various aspects of the artillery deal—one being a police inquiry in which senior personnel of Bofors would be grilled by the Public Prosecutor Lars Ringberg—the artful firm was being forced to adopt a more reasonable attitude.



> "As far as the deal with India is concerned, the Swedish Government has tried to sit on two stools."
>
> ANDERS BJORCK
> *MP and TV personality*

Even so, taken at face value, Bofors' latest stance has hardly evoked confidence. Indian Ambassador Bhupatrai Oza said: "I have met various officials of the Swedish Government as well as senior officers of Nobel Industries and Bofors countless times. Very little has emerged from all this. In fact, as far as Bofors is concerned, I will be convinced after they have given us all the details we require."

Foreign Minister Andersson has been quoted often, in the Swedish media, on his—and Trade Minister Anita Gradin's—anxiety to make all aspects of the field gun deal public, at least as much as the laws allowed. But even Swedish ministers like Andersson have opponents who doubt their stand. One of them is Anders Bjorck, a high-profile conservative MP and a familiar figure on Swedish television. Bjorck is also the vice chairman of the parliamentary constitutional committee which is scrutinising the question of Swedish weapons sales abroad and the Indian deal.

Bjorck measured up to his image as one of the country's bluntest politicians. Speaking to INDIA TODAY, he said: "As far as the deal with India is concerned, the Government has tried to sit on two stools. They dislike selling weapons. They are all disarmament crusaders. At the same time, they very much wanted to sell these guns to India. Now, they want to maintain as low a profile as possible. Well, they cannot have everything. If you want to sell Howitzers to India, you must be able to stand up and say, 'We sold to India'. There is nothing to be ashamed of. But Palme was the perfect master of wearing two faces."

However, senior MP and social democrat, Olle Svensson, points out that it is wrong to make allegations even before the parliamentary inquiry has begun. Svensson, who is chairman of the constitutional committee, hastens to emphasise its "independence" and "objectivity". The committee consists of 15 MPs—seven from the ruling social democrats, three from the conservatives, two from the centrists, two from the Liberal Party and one from the Communist Party.

What critics like Bjorck would like is more debate in Sweden about the Government's role in the Indian deal of which little has actually emerged. The Conservative Party is not opposed to arms sales abroad—except to certain black-listed countries in the Middle East—and points out that India does not figure in the list. Some conservatives have been confi-

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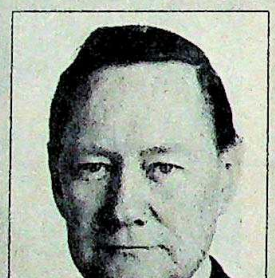
CARL JOHAN ABERG

"We will not hide anything"

CARL Johan Aberg, 57, Sweden's under secretary of state for foreign trade is perhaps the one Swedish government official most closely associated with the Bofors artillery deal with India since 1982. He was part of Palme entourage to New Delhi, the now celebrated visit when the Swedish premier met Rajiv Gandhi before the Bofors deal was finally clinched. Despite numerous requests to speak on the issue, Aberg rarely grants interviews in the Swedish press. Talking to London Correspondent RAMESH CHANDRAN *in his spacious office in Stockholm, Aberg attempts to present a Swedish Government viewpoint on the controversial affair. Excerpts:*



> "There was nothing in the audit bureau's report which pointed towards bribes having been paid."

Q. It now seems that there is no more doubt of the Swedish Government's determination to unravel the affair. Three different inquiries should be able to tell us what everybody wants to know: who got the money?

A. The Swedish Government does want to help as much as we can. We now have the official police investigations led by the public prosecutor. Then there is the constitutional commission which is examining the Government's role. We have also created the citizen's commission consisting of respected Swedish citizens who may be able to look at confidential documents and then make an assessment of what they have found. Mind you, they are not allowed to make secret information public.

Q. This parliamentary commission's brief appears interesting. They are investigating exclusively into what extent your government encouraged the Bofors deal in India?

A. They are in fact looking into the overall issue of Swedish export of armaments. The Indian deal figures in it. As in India, we have an opposition here too that wants to make something very dramatic out of this affair.

Q. Who chooses the members of the citizen's commission? Can they question Bofors' managers?

A. The Government chooses the members—not in their capacity of being politicians but from other fields and as highly regarded Swedish citizens. The citizen's commission does not have the power to question Bofors or study the company's papers. But it will certainly have access to all Swedish government documents which have anything to do with the Indian deal.

Q. What prevented you from making the National Audit Bureau's report public?

A. The problem is that the Central Bank of Sweden which made certain confidential information available to the National Audit Bureau had laid down stringent conditions that under no circumstances should these be made public. We simply cannot break these conditions. So the Central Bank's secret information remained confidential. You have to understand that we have a deep-rooted tradition in Sweden. The Government cannot interfere with any of these investigations—be it one started by the Central Bank, National Audit Bureau or the police. There are strict divisions here. There are certain societies where governments, for instance, can influence the police. Not in this country.

There are also other governments which can order the Central Bank to open all its books. Not in Sweden, for the Central Bank is not the bank of the Government but it is the bank of the Parliament. We simply have the right to nominate its chairman.

Q. Nevertheless, there is an element of discrepancy here. When the National Audit Bureau initially presented its report to your government, it did not find that Bofors might have broken Swedish laws. The public prosecutor later on decided there are suspicions that bribes might have been paid in the Indian deal....

A. Look, you have to be very careful with the wordings. We, in the Swedish Government, did not say that no Swedish laws were broken. There was nothing in the bureau's report which pointed towards bribes having been paid. The public prosecutor, in his judgement, decided that there was a case for an investigation. The key factor here is: he decided to start his investigation "in the name of public interest". He started studying requests from the Indian Government for further clarifications and decided in the "public interest" to begin an inquiry. The Swedish Government did not make a wrong judgement.

Q. Would you also emphasise that the Swedish Government is as enthusiastic as everyone else to get the truth?

A. Yes, of course. We are keen that Bofors prove they told us the truth about what they told the Indian Government, that there is nothing unusual about these payments. I haven't the slightest interest in hiding anything in this affair.

Q. The problem is that the prime ministers of both countries have been indirectly implicated in the deal. You were in Delhi with Palme. Did he take an unusual interest in the deal?

A. First of all, let me say it wasn't just the prime ministers but even heads of state of the competing countries pushed hard for the deal. It is quite natural then that the Swedish prime minister should be interested in his country winning the contract. All countries involve their governments, credit institutions and guarantee corporations in such deals. There is nothing unusual in the Swedish Government's interest, especially considering the competitive edge.

Q. At first there was speculation that the National Audit Bureau's report gave names of Indians who received kickbacks. Now it seems that no names have been mentioned but company names with numbered accounts in Swiss banks have been disclosed. Can you say which is the accurate version?

A. I am not authorised to comment on this.

Q. The last remaining option now is the public prosecutor. He has access to all Bofors papers and can quiz the

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company's managers. But should prosecutor Ringberg think that there is no suspicion of Swedish laws being broken, then all this will remain secret?

A. Yes. There is no guarantee whatsoever that every detail will be made public by the prosecutor. It is his judgement. But with his investigations we are breaking one more wall which is access to Bofors but with no guarantees.

Q. How long will his investigations last?

A. Too many people have been on the wrong side of speculations. So I wouldn't hazard a guess.

Q. Several hundred Indians have been writing letters to the Swedish prime minister's office. Is anyone in the Swedish Government taking notice?

A. Yes, these letters have in fact been directed to my department by the prime minister's office and we are giving them the most serious consideration.

Q. The obstacle in all these investigations so far has been the firm Bofors. It has a record of gun-running and an assortment of clandestine deals. Surely there must be some way your government can bring pressure on the company to behave?

A. The Government cannot involve itself directly in a private company's affairs. However, because of its past problems, there has been a change in top management at Bofors. The new managing director has been very decisive and has effected changes.

Q. We are amazed by the discussion on a nuclear aspect of the Bofors 155 mm gun—an issue that has not surfaced in India at all. Is it possible for a small nuclear warhead to be fired from the Bofors Howitzer as is being argued here in Stockholm?

A. We cannot exclude this possibility. In theory this seems possible. However, defence experts have warned strongly against any such move. First, the range is not sufficient to protect those who fire the gun from the dangers of radiation. Besides this all the dimensions need to be upgraded.

Q. Has your government at any stage received any indication that the Indian Government might consider cancellation of the Howitzer contract to bring pressure on Bofors?

A. No. We have heard no such thing. On the contrary both the Government and the Indian Army are most satisfied with the gun which I believe is the most capable of its kind.

dently claiming that the Palme government pushed hard for the Indian contract. They say that former Bofors' head Martin Ardbro, as well as Foreign Trade Under Secretary Carl Johan Aberg *(see interview)* were "in the same plane which flew back Palme from Delhi".

Among the essential issues that Bjorck has raised are:

- ► When did the Swedish Government first get knowledge about plans to sell the Howitzers?
- ► Did Olof Palme and his government act to ensure that Bofors clinched the contract?
- ► What sort of special export credit guarantees were furnished?
- ► How did the EKN (the Swedish Export Credit Guarantee Board) handle the whole affair?
- ► What was the role of the Swedish Embassy in New Delhi?

The heightened interest of the Swedish Opposition in the Bofors' Indian deal is understandable. The affair is bound to be extensively discussed in the party congress of the social democrats this month. The question of weapons' sales—deeply frowned upon by many Swedes—is bound to be a potentially damaging issue in next year's election campaign.

> "I am not convinced that the Government is a helpless onlooker when faced with Bofors' misdemeanours."
>
> TOMAS FISCHER
> *Stockbroker*

Amongst the fiercest critics of the Swedish Government is the multi-millionaire stockbroker Tomas Fischer. His article in the *Aftonbladet* several weeks ago triggered off a volley of questions against the EKN, its chairman Harry Schein, and its controversial role in providing financial guarantees for the Indian deal. Fischer's financial views are held in regard in Stockholm, notably due to his reputation as the "whiz-kid of the Stockholm share markets" and he is also acknowledged to be one of the closest friends of the reclusive Bofors' majority share holder Eric Penser.

At his sprawling villa facing a lake in Djursholm, an elegant Stockholm residential district, Fischer says: "I am simply not convinced that the Swedish Government is such a poor, helpless onlooker when faced with Bofors' misdemeanours. All it needs to do is to threaten to withdraw the company's licence to manufacture arms. Tell the Bofors managers bluntly, 'unless you talk, we will withdraw your licence'. Since they didn't do that, I guess the Government did not have such a strong interest in hearing the full Bofors story."

"Besides", adds Fischer, "who do you think stamped 'secret' all over the National Audit Bureau's report? Not Mundebo (National Audit Bureau director general) but the Government." The stockbroker is only one amongst an increasing number of prominent Swedes who argue that Sweden should not even have considered India as a potential customer for Swedish arms because it is an "area of conflict". He, and others like former disarmament ambassador Inga Thursson, maintain that India was in simmering conflict with her regional neighbours and riven by domestic strife.

Critics say that the militarisation of the Third World is a menace to progress and development, and there was little that Sweden could do to stop that. But, there was no reason at all for Sweden to encourage this militarisation with hugely subsidised weapons' sales. After all, the Bofors-Indian deal was the second largest "aid project" undertaken by Sweden with a developing country.

Most officials here seem to favour meting out exemplary punishment, should it be proved that certain Bofors senior officials were guilty of having broken Swedish laws. But the problem, according to press ombudsman Cars, is in proving what constitutes bribes. Some Swedish observers also feel that despite the latest Bofors offer to the Indian Government, it is unlikely that the company will offer the precise names of Indian officials who may have received these commissions. What is more likely, according to them, is that names of companies will be offered to the Indian Government. It will then be up to the Indian revenue sleuths to figure out who were their mysterious owners, a formidable task if the companies turn out to be registered in tax havens.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Stockholm

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GAS TRAGEDY

The Bhopal Bonanza

The disaster has come as a windfall for many

IN keeping with its dubious status of the worst industrial disaster in human history, the Bhopal gas tragedy is also threatening to represent the biggest-ever bonanza for a host of people. Fly-by-night operators, doctors, lawyers, officials, self-styled social workers and petty politicians are all busy reaping financial benefits as the Government and the Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) pump in huge amounts of money into the city. Principal Correspondent N.K. SINGH *reports:*

HE is not a particularly well-known lawyer. But he shuttles almost every month between New York, New Delhi and Bhopal, operates from five-star hotels and charges a fantastic fee. He has been retained by a New York firm that represents UCC which has spent an estimated $50 million (Rs 65 crore) so far to fight the Bhopal case.

A doctor in one of Bhopal's worst-affected slums has a roaring practice going. He has discarded his cycle for a new Maruti car. He has constructed a double-storied building and has also bought a plot to set up a nursing home.

Two months ago, the house of a storekeeper attached to the chief medical officer, gas relief, was raided. Articles valued at Rs 2.25 lakh were recovered. His relatives, interestingly, had purchased two plots in the recent past.

Thirty-three months after the Bhopal gas tragedy, such rags-to-riches stories are legion in this disaster-ravaged town. Many of them are indirect beneficiaries as UCC contests the $3 billion (Rs 3,900 crore) damage suit. With the corporation's future hinging on the outcome, UCC's strategy has been simple: delay the outcome using every legal loophole possible. The result: a gold-mine for local representatives of the corporation or the Government of India, many of whom have been yanked out of relative obscurity.

Leading the field are the dozen or so lawyers engaged by the corporation, most of whom are paid several thousand rupees in fees for each hearing in the Bhopal district court. In addition, a battery of American legal experts flies down to Bhopal for most hearings. Each hearing is estimated to cost UCC around Rs 5 lakh.

The stakes are sky-high. The protracted legal battle in US and Indian courts has already cost the two sides close to Rs 74 crore—Rs 65 crore for UCC and Rs 9 crore for the Indian Government.

UCC is not the only mother lode. The Government also pays 10 lawyers fees that run into thousands of rupees every month. One of them is an obscure Bhopal lawyer, nearly briefless until recently, who is paid Rs 8,000 per month. His ruling party connections obviously helped. Another government counsel whose bumbling in court is proving embarrassing, is also with the Congress(I).

Not that the political connections are all one-sided. A powerful Congress(I) politician, who is also a private medical practitioner, was retained by well-known American lawyer John P. Coale, to issue medical certificates to prospective clients. How much he finally earned—he charged the lawyer $3 (Rs 39) to examine ordinary patients and $30 (Rs 390) for those with grievous injuries—is anybody's guess.

After lawyers, Bhopal's medical practitioners have bagged the largest slice of the cake. Private medical practitioners, particularly those living around the Carbide plant, have done extremely well for themselves. Many of the estimated 69,000 methyl isocyanate (MIC) patients have turned to them rather than stand in queues in government hospitals.

According to UCC, it has also "funded visits to the US by Indian medical experts to attend special meetings on research and treatment for victims exposed to MIC." The Indian "experts" who took advantage of Carbide hospitality include doctors from Bhopal and Bombay. Social activists fighting for the gas victims have alleged that a powerful pro-Carbide lobby exists

Ambulance used to ferry government employees

Only a portion of the vast funds earmarked by the Government has actually been spent on the sick. The rest has been misutilised.

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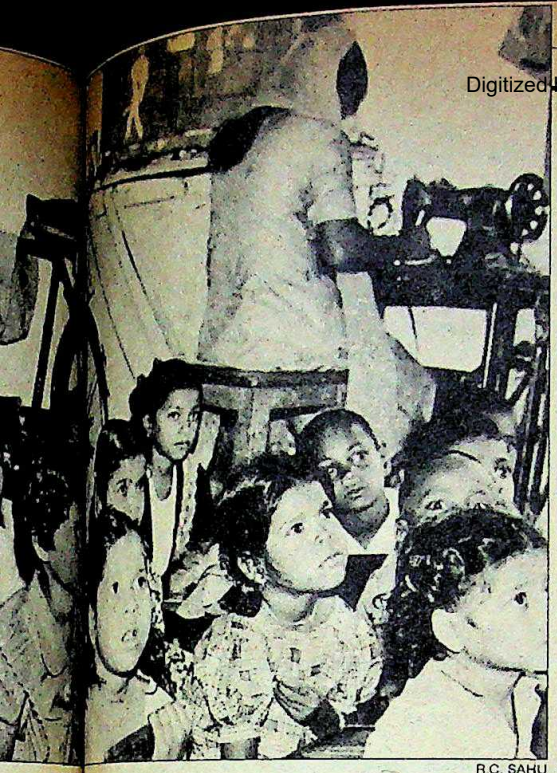

R.C. SAHU

Children under the care of a controversial voluntary group

All kinds of voluntary organisations have sprung up. Most have profited more than the victims they set out to help.

RAJESH JAIN

within the city's medical establishment. "Some doctors have been consistently trying to play down the damage to victims," says Alok Pratap Singh of the Zaherilli Gas Kand Morcha.

The integrity of well-known Bhopal citizens has also come under question. Coale himself figured in a controversy in mid-1986 when Washington-based attorney C.S. Sastry, who had briefly worked with Coale, accused him of paying off people in Bhopal. He alleged that a Coale associate had offered Bhopal's then mayor, Dr R.K. Bisariya, $2,500 (Rs 32,500) and free trips to the US for his "trouble and efforts". Both Coale and Bisariya dismissed the charges. But it is an extraordinary coincidence that Bisariya chose Coale to represent Bhopal city in the event of a law suit being filed in the US.

Social organisations with dubious credentials have also got profitably into the act. In May 1986, UCC donated $1 million (Rs 1.30 crore) to the Swiss-based organisation, Sentinelles, "for medical, educational and training programmes in Bhopal". No one has heard of Sentinelles in Bhopal. Admits Tomm Sprick, UCC's assistant manager for corporate communications: "We don't know what happened to the money."

Indira Iyengar, a ruling party activist and social worker, was less fortunate. She started a non-profit company—Bhopal Technical and Vocational Training Centre—to assist victims and had it registered with the Home Ministry under the Foreign Exchange (Contribution) Act (FECA). She received an initial contribution of Rs 16 lakh from Arizona University.

But the Government found in July 1986—a month after the centre started functioning—that it was actually UCC money routed through Arizona University which had received a grant of $2.2 million (Rs 2.86 crore) from the multinational. The centre was closed down after its bank account was frozen.

The Central Bureau of Investigation last month filed a case of FECA violation against Iyengar and her sister, Sushiela Ghosal, another company director. Though Iyengar denies she received any remuneration directly from the company, she concedes that her trips abroad were paid for by the university from UCC funds. She admits too that more trips abroad were in the offing.

Other voluntary organisations have been actually accused of collecting information on victims' health on behalf of Carbide. UCC had claimed in the Bhopal court that the Union Carbide Employees' Bhopal Relief Fund, Inc., distributed $1.20 lakh (Rs 15.6 lakh) to organisations to carry out relief. One of the recipients was AGAPE (Action For Gas Affected People). However, Denis Carneiro, AGAPE's chief coordinator, refused to reveal details of funds received. The hospital AGAPE ran was supervised by Dr P.D. Loya, local medical officer of Union Carbide India Ltd. Its credentials became suspect when it made its confidential records available to two American doctors sent by UCC. The hospital was abruptly closed down without explanation in July last year.

Another case involved the Madras-based World Vision of India, one of the organisations accused by leftist Christian groups in the country of adopting "unethical practices". According to James Samuel, its area officer, the organisation is running a kindergarten, coaching classes for school-going children, adult literacy classes, sewing classes and a health care centre—all in a 9 sq mt room hired for Rs 100 per month in a slum soon after the disaster. But spot checks show that his claims are grossly exaggerated—the children number about 10 daily and not 200 as Samuel claimed.

The mystery of why figures were being inflated was solved this summer when several children, whom the organisation had taken under its wing, received belated Christmas cards from their "sponsors" in the US. The addresses of the sponsors were neatly blacked out to prevent direct contact between them and the children. One card, from Margaret Perini of Williamsport to "Dear Deepak" informed him that she was "delighted" to be his sponsor and asked him to write back to her.

By blacking out the addresses, there was obviously no way in which Deepak or any of the other children could have replied. Samuel claimed he had "no clear idea" of what the sponsors sent, but inquiries reveal that each of them dispatches $10 (Rs 130) a month for a child's upkeep. The monthly expense per head on children who attend kindergarten does not exceed a few dozen rupees.

If gas victims are now questioning where all the money supposedly meant for their rehabilitation has been vanishing, it

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is hardly surprising. Of the Rs 146 crore spent on relief so far, only Rs 41 crore have been spent on medicare or in direct assistance to the victims. Last fortnight, scores of MIC patients mobbed Chief Minister Motilal Vora when he visited the gas-affected areas, complaining that hospitals were not providing them medicines. Meanwhile, charges that the money provided for relief is being misused have been growing and examples abound.

The Gas Relief Department, for instance, spent Rs 10 lakh last year, five times the allotted budget, to publicise its work in glossy brochures, an indication of the distorted priorities. This year a similar amount will be spent which will include air fare and hospitality for journalists from outside the state. And yet, two months ago, the state Government asked the Assembly to approve an additional Rs 2.65 crore for the department—half the additional money was intended for the purchase of furniture and new vehicles.

THE Health Department has been equally liberal with the purchase of vehicles in the name of helping the victims. In truth, however, the vehicles, displaying ambulance signs, are being essentially used to transport department employees. Apart from this, officials connected with relief have been making frequent trips to the US, supposedly in connection with the case—Rs 3 lakh have been spent so far on this count.

But easily the most brazen instance of misplaced government priorities was the initial provision of Rs 5 crore for developing a new airport in Bhopal as part of the Madhya Pradesh Government's plan for the "welfare of gas victims". It was only after a massive public uproar that the plan was shelved. In fact, the Rs 322-crore plan for Bhopal's development—the money is expected to be provided out of the compensation—includes Rs 8 crore to introduce electric trolley buses in the city—all in the name of gas victims.

No area of relief work, it appears, is sacrosanct. When the state Government announced it would provide a subsistence grant of Rs 1,500 to gas-affected families earning less than Rs 500 per month after the tragedy, fictitious identity papers and understatement of income were freely used to claim the money. Fraud was eventually detected in a total of 551 cases involving Rs 8.26 lakh.

The real tragedy of Bhopal is that the victims seem to be the only ones left out of the great Bhopal bonanza.

LAW CASE

Endless Wait

FOR the Bhopal survivors, after two years and nine months of the tragedy, the end of the long, dark, legal tunnel actually seems to be receding. Twenty-eight hearings and several judges later—District Judge M.W. Deo is the fourth—the case in the Bhopal court is yet to progress beyond the preliminary stage. Deo himself seems weary and, sympathising with the victims of the gas tragedy said that they would find it hard to maintain their courage "to wade through the jungle of law...to reach the final goal—justice and compensation".

The greater the delay, the better for Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) in the $3 billion (Rs 3,900 crore) case. The saving of interest on the compensation it would have to pay will in itself be an enormous sum. Besides, the legal tangle helps UCC make a point that an out-of-court settlement is preferable. UCC has so far offered only Rs 8.60 crore in interim relief—which amounts to about Rs 160 per victim—and that too at the instance of judges in Bhopal and New York.

Initially, it took the Government four months to file a case in New York. A year later the case was sent back to India. It then took the Government four months to file the case in Bhopal. The pleadings here are not yet over. After that, the Bhopal court will take up discovery proceedings—presentation of UCC's internal documents—and only then will evidence be presented.

R.C SAHU

UCC lawyers in Bhopal court: delays

"It will take us one year after we go into the merits of the case, but I doubt if we will be allowed to reach that stage," said a government lawyer.

The Government, though, also shares at least some blame for the snail-like progress. For instance, the initial summons to UCC could not be sent because government lawyers had affixed inadequate stamps for postage. Later, there was more delay because the summons had wrongly been addressed to UCC's New York office instead of its headquarters in Danbury, Connecticut.

But UCC's delay tactics were transparent. The multinational refused to accept summons sent later—and these returned unserved to the Bhopal court four months later. Again, for example, on October 6 last year Carbide lawyers watched proceedings in court but failed to appear. They finally turned up for the first time only on October 30 last year, after causing a two-months delay, because of the court's ex parte injunction. Indeed, Attorney General K. Parasaran alleged in the court later that UCC was raising "all sorts of objections" to delay the suit.

But UCC—which has some top-notch lawyers including Fali Nariman and J.B. Dadachandji—has also exposed the Indian Government's shortcomings in court. It was revealed recently that the scheme framed by the Central Government to register the claims of victims had failed to become operational for two years because no notification had been issued.

Clearly, neither UCC nor the Government is emerging in a particularly good light as the case unfolds ever so slowly.

—N.K. SINGH

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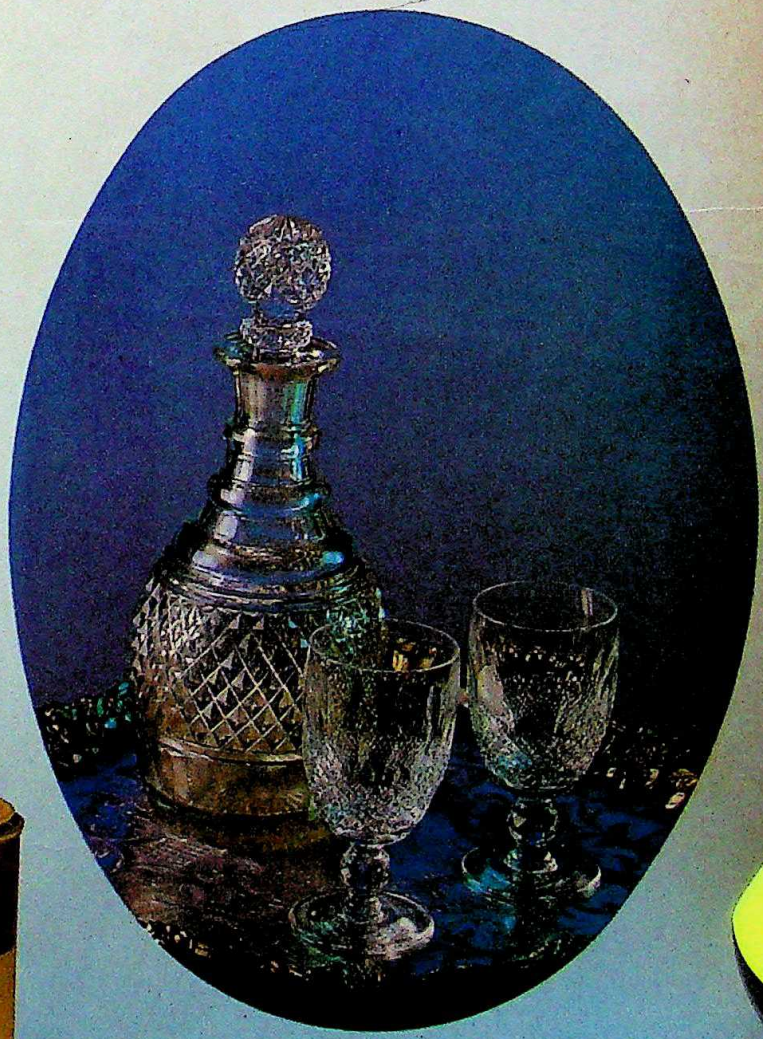

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BERGER PAINTS

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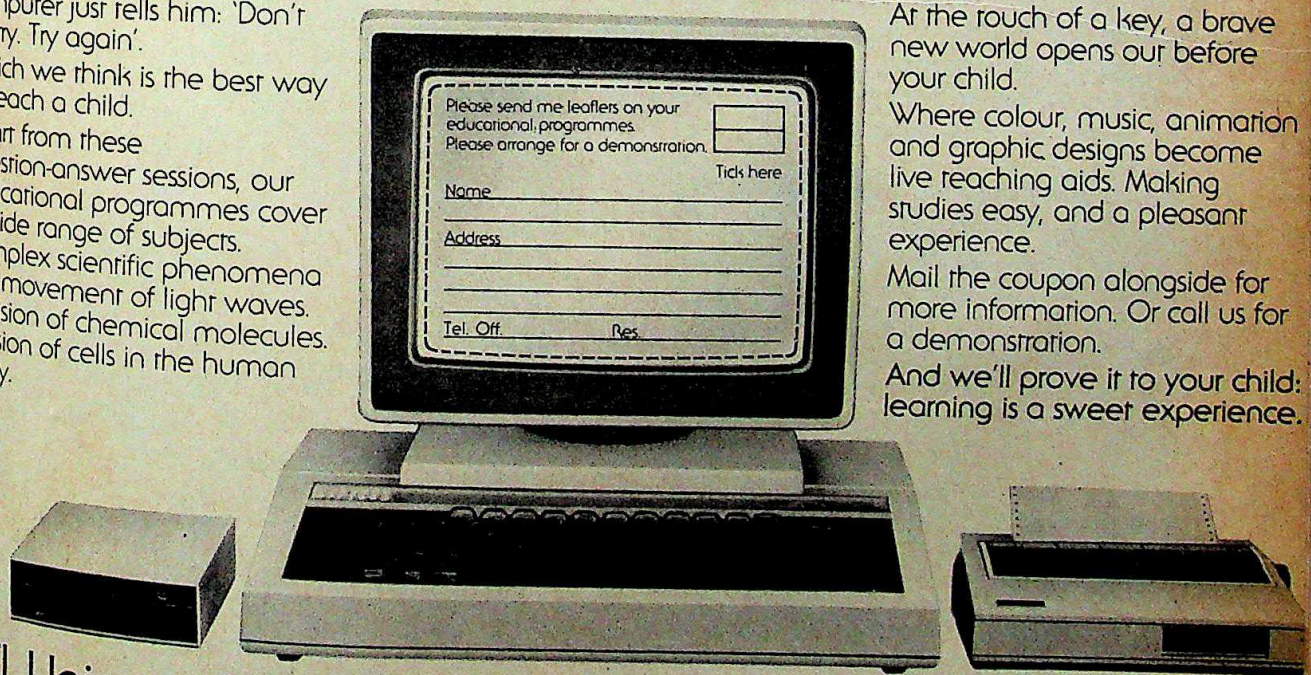

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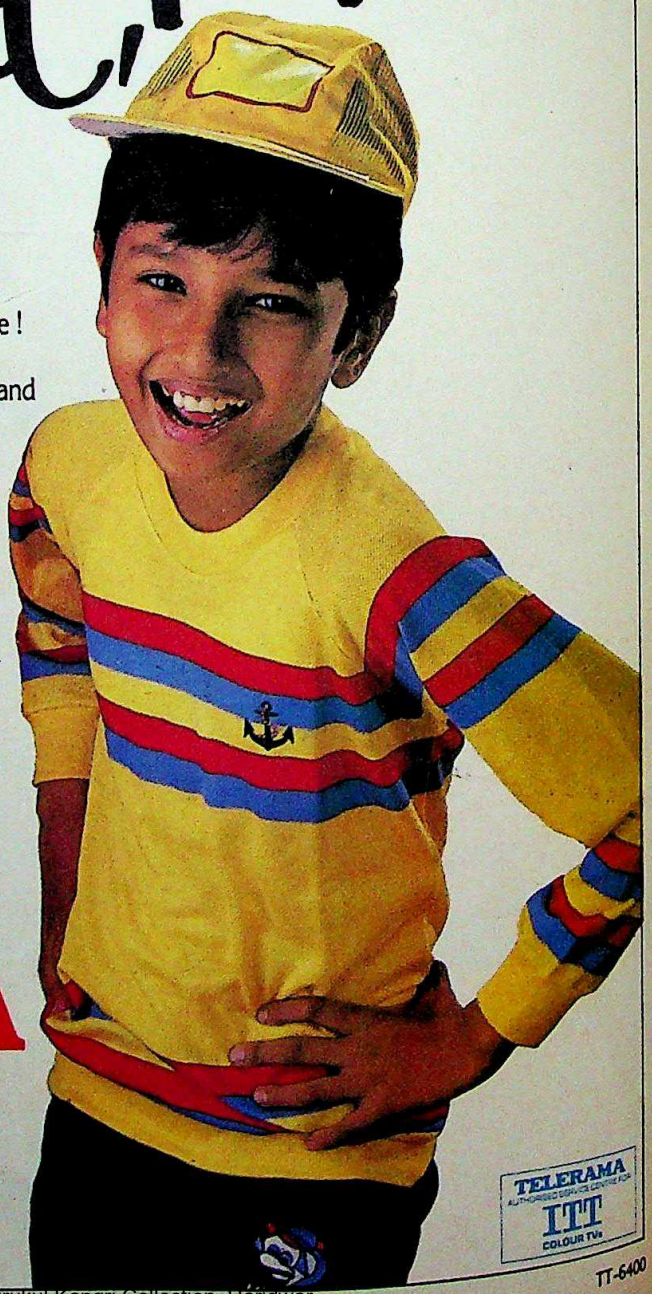

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MULTINATIONAL RACE

THE race for grabbing at one go the 40 per cent British shareholding in Ashok Leyland and 60 per cent holding in Ennore Foundries is now mainly among foreign companies, with Rahul Bajaj being the only serious Indian contender. Among the foreigners in the running are international truck manufacturers like Hino of Japan and Daf of Holland, and the American engine company Cummins. Most Indian contenders seem to have fallen out of the race as the Government is unlikely to permit the remittance abroad of Rs 40 crore (which is the asking price). Bajaj has tied up with Fiat Iveco to get around this problem and the two will make a joint bid. The other option for Indian contenders would be to follow the route that S.K. Birla took to bag Chloride India, by going for a public issue of the shares abroad through Merrill Lynch. But existing Indian truck manufacturers and C.K. Birla of Hindustan Motors have all dropped out of the race. Meanwhile, several non-residents are still in the running, including the Hindujas, but not (apparently) the Chhabrias. All bids have to be in by the end of September, and the winner will be known in the second half of October.

STAKING A CLAIM

THE contest to manufacture glass shells for colour TV picture tubes is hotting up. The latest to enter the fray is the state-owned Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers whose proposal to join hands with Bharat Electronics, which already has a licence, is pending with the Fertiliser Ministry. The Aditya Birla-run Grasim Industries, picture tube manufacturer Samtel India and a Gujarat Government joint sector company are already in the running. The rush is because demand for the picture tubes, now pegged at around two lakh a year, will soar to an estimated 10 million in the next seven years. The Government is expected to grant just two licences.

CREATING CAPITAL

CASH-STRAPPED companies are increasingly discovering that surplus real estate can yield gold. The latest to do so is the Gramophone Company of India. Taken over by the R.P. Goenka-group two years ago, it remains in the red (accumulated losses: Rs 20 crore). Faced with a financial squeeze, it now plans to raise about Rs 10 crore by putting up and hawking middle-income flats on a seven-acre plot near its factory, on Calcutta's outskirts. In a bid to use idle production capacities, the company is also diversifying into making ornamental chests for export, PVC flanges for irrigation pipes, and melamine plates. A project to turn out knocked-down wooden furniture for hotels is also planned.

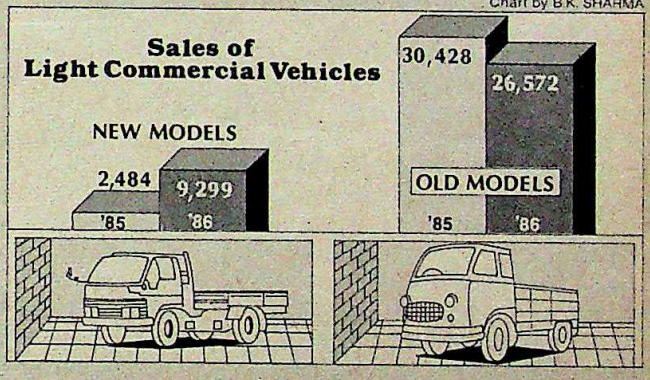
EXPANSION PLANS

NOW that the move to hawk the overseas majority holding of Tribeni Tissues has been dropped, the speciality papers company is busy surveying expansion prospects. On the cards are investments of up to Rs 15 crore in projects to manufacture more profitable kinds of papers such as carbonless paper, made in India only by a few small units. The burst of activity in the Calcutta-based enterprise comes in the wake of its British parent, Wiggins Steape, changing its mind on moving out. Gillette International and two non-resident Indians had been in the race for the shares, with Gillette even promising that the Poddars, with whom Gillette has formed a shaving products company, would not be associated with Tribeni.

MOVING AHEAD

THE new light commercial vehicle (LCV) companies are now starting to move ahead. Sales are on the upswing, registering a 274 per cent rate of growth between the calendar years '85 and '86 (*see chart*), and DCM Toyota and Eicher Motors expect to break even this year. The new companies also seem to be chewing into the older LCV firms' market: sales of some of the older firms' vehicles have dipped.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Although the growth rate is exaggerated because of the low base, the trend is buoying. Disadvantaged by the soaring value of the Japanese yen, the new firms were rescued some months ago by the Government which granted them excise and customs duty concessions of over Rs 20,000 per vehicle.

BYPASSING OBSTACLES

THE Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, which requires foreign companies to dilute equity holdings in Indian subsidiaries, may not have squeezed their dividend earnings at all. A study of 43 subsidiaries by a financial daily shows that all of them capitalised their reserves before equity dilution and then issued bonus shares. Put simply, this suggests that firms such as Colgate Palmolive, Ingersoll Rand and Food Specialities, paid their foreign shareholders more by way of dividends after diluting their equity than before, through the simple expedient of issuing bonus shares on the enlarged capital. Dividend on foreign equity accounted for 45.7 per cent of the total dividend payable for 41 companies, but 31.4 per cent of this was claimed by bonus shares and only 14.3 per cent was payable on the original equity holding.

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THE CHHABRIAS

New Corporate Sheikhs

The brothers launch a fresh takeover spree

THREE years ago, no one in India had heard of the Chhabrias. Today, they rank among the most important business groups in the country, controlling some of the largest companies, with total group sales of Rs 900 crore and more. That is in addition to their $500 million (Rs 650 crore) business abroad. Yesterday's nobodies are today in the same league of established business families as the Thapars, Singhanias and Modis.

Over the last four months, the Chhabria name has been mentioned in almost every major corporate deal. Since June, they have acquired machinery manufacturing company Mather & Platt, turnkey project contractors Hindustan Dorr-Oliver and two-wheeler tyre producer Falcon Tyres. They also bid—unsuccessfully—for battery giant Chloride India and nearly acquired International Instruments (makers of Yenkay meters). Now their names are mentioned in connection with the prospective takeover of the heavy vehicles company Ashok Leyland and a reported raid on engineering giant Larsen & Toubro. For two brothers whom no one had heard of in 1984, Manohar and Kishore Chhabria have come a long way in a very short time.

If the Chhabrias burst on the scene with the takeover bid in early 1985 of Shaw Wallace, the Dubai-based Manohar had actually slipped into the Indian business arena a few months before that, by being the backroom partner with R.P. Goenka in the offshore takeover of the tyre colossus, Dunlop India. Shortly after that he also acquired the 113-year-old Madras-based company Gordon Woodroffe, which specialises in leather exports.

For two years after that, the Chhabrias were occupied with a fierce battle for gaining control of Shaw Wallace. Beginning as outsiders who had to fight their way through the Company Law Board and allegations of violating the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA)—the charges were dropped early this year—the brothers finally succeeding in moving into the Shaw Wallace management about four months ago. Ever since then, it has been a takeover spree.

In Mather & Platt, they have acquired the 60 per cent foreign shareholding from an Australian company, for £14 million (Rs 28 crore). The Bangalore-based Falcon Tyres came cheap because of accumulated losses. And the Chhabrias will pay $9 million (Rs 12 crore) for the 66 per cent foreign shareholding in Hindustan Dorr-Oliver, with the deal to be completed by December. The three companies between them have combined sales of Rs 90 crore. And to get them, the Chhabrias have shelled out Rs 40 crore in hard cash.

This is on top of another Rs 60 crore that has already gone into their earlier acquisitions: Shaw Wallace, Dunlop, Gordon Woodroffe and a 7.5 per cent stake in Bayer India. And yet, Manohar Chhabria, only 41, says he has been stretched to only 20 per cent of his financial ability. There is little doubt that the man who went to Dubai virtually penniless in 1973, then made his fortune in West Asia by selling Sony TV sets, is today a businessman with awesome financial muscle.

The takeovers have often been achieved in the face of competition from some really big names. R.P. Goenka and some non-residents were rival bidders for Mather & Platt, and the Hindujas were in the running for Dorr-Oliver. Word even has it that as soon as it became known that the Chhabrias were interested in Chloride India, the asking rate for the company shot up 30 per cent. (The company eventually went to S.K.Birla.) And International Instruments would have been in the bag had its local management not preferred the Mahindras as partners.

If the Chhabrias are today the new takeover tycoons—"My reputation now helps me," confesses Manohar—they insist that they have not bid for either Ashok Leyland or Larsen & Toubro. Is that because they are not interested in any more prize catches? "No, I will not pass up any opportunity that comes my way, but I must now concentrate on doing something with the companies that I have," Manohar explains. Then why did he undertake such a rash of takeovers in the last four months? "Because I wanted to prove that I am nobody's frontman, that I have enough money of my own." That was a rueful reference to the charge that, in the Dunlop and Shaw Wallace cases, Manohar had been fronting for Goenka and liquor baron Vijay Mallya.

Having proved that he is a substantial businessman in his own right, Manohar clearly wants to consolidate, prove that he can manage companies well, and change his image of a corporate raider. "I have never raided any company," he stressed last fortnight and added: "I have only bought when foreigners wanted to sell. And the local managements should welcome an Indian replacing a foreigner." He is in fact busy working out plans for his various companies, and the plans are ambitious. Indeed, his acquisitions can now serve as a springboard for future growth. Both Mather & Platt and Dorr-Oliver have either cash reserves or substantial spare borrowing capacity. Says Manohar: "Imagine if such horses are let loose. You will see the fantastic results."

Both companies will soon expand their share capital base, reduce the foreign shareholding to get out of FERA restrictions, and then look aggressively for growth. Manohar even plans to buy the French company in the international Mather & Platt chain, so that he can use its technology to help its Indian counterpart expand into the business of food processing machinery.

Kishore Chhabria: taking care of Shaw Wallace

The third new acquisition, Falcon Tyres, will be made a subsidiary of Shaw Wallace, and will then move into the big league in the tyre business, graduating to four-wheeler and truck tyres. Manohar says of the perennially losing concern: "It will make a profit this year."

The NRI millionaire is aiming particularly high for the Rs 14-crore Gordon Woodroffe, which is still losing money two years after he took control. "This

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company has terrific potential," he says. "I will make it a Rs 100-crore company in two or three years," mostly by expanding the booming leather export business.

That may sound like tall talk. But in a sense, Manohar Chhabria has already shown what he can do. Orson Electronics—which is in consumer electronics—struggled for four years after he started it in the late '70s, losing money and failing to fully use its installed capacity. Then the company suddenly shot into high gear and, in the last couple of years, has trebled its turnover to its present Rs 85 crore. In another two years, says Manohar, that figure will be Rs 200 crore. "We have barely scratched the surface of the market, and my ambition is to make it a Rs 500-crore company."

Similarly, Nihon Electronics (which makes colour TV sets sold under the Orson brand name) was a privately held Chhabria concern that no one had heard of, till it became a public limited company last year. In its first year, Manohar proudly says, the company has already hit a turnover of Rs 20 crore and exceeded profit and dividend expectations.

Certainly, the two brothers know what they are about. Kishore explained last fortnight that they targeted companies by looking at the payback period on their investment, and preferred companies that were profitable and had stable managements. Said Kishore: "We don't have expert managers with us whom we can put into a company that we acquire. So we like to keep the existing management; we want companies that need minimum managerial input. And we try to make sure that after we take a company nobody leaves it. Our track record on this is in fact quite good."

THAT'S not strictly true, of course. There have been some departures from both Gordon Woodroffe and Shaw Wallace. But the general point is valid. "Even in Gordon Woodroffe", says Manohar Chhabria, "we have maintained the company's traditions. But we are modernising the plant, bringing in younger people. And we have closed down the engineering division because it kept losing money." Also, because of overmanning, Chhabria is thinking of introducing a voluntary retirement scheme.

Even as the brothers have begun to concentrate on the management tasks facing them, the business world wonders what kind of commodities they are as entrepreneurs and proprietors, what management style they have. Kishore's role will be confined mainly to running Shaw Wallace, where as managing director he says he will tackle the problem of turning around the loss-making divisions, and merge several of the existing subsidiaries into the main company through a major restructuring operation. But the spotlights are really on Manohar, who is the chairman of all his companies in India and who will set the tone for the group's growing operations. And Manohar himself says: "My basic growth was from trading, but I've now become an industrialist. Now that I have tasted industrial power, this is the future for us."

Discussions with senior executives in Chhabria companies revealed the picture of a man who has a fine business sense, who is aware of the fine detail of his business, and who goes through all the data sent to him at his corporate headquarters in Dubai. He is not a dictator in the boardroom, and believes in meeting his top management socially in order to get to know his people. In fact, one of his first decisions after taking over as chairman of Shaw Wallace was to revive the practice of an annual staff ball.

He is not afraid to delegate, is not interested in the day-to-day minutae, and simply told a company president whom he hired: "Your success is my success." He thinks big, and stresses financial aspects in his reporting systems.

But Manohar Chhabria's biggest test may still be ahead of him. For months the corporate grapevine has been buzzing about a growing dispute with R.P. Goenka over Dunlop, which the two had jointly acquired in 1984. Chhabria is the non-executive chairman and Goenka's son, Sanjeev, the deputy managing director. While both Manohar and Goenka declined comment on their problems with each other, the dispute seemed to have reached a stage where one or the other would have to make his exit. And the odds were even on who would eventually keep the prize acquisition. Said a neutral observer: "R.P. Goenka is the uncrowned king of guerrilla warfare; but don't be fooled by Chhabria's casual manner. He knows how to make calculated moves."

While the business world waits to see what exactly will happen in Dunlop, Chhabria has already come a long way from the time in 1985 when he said he considered himself to be Goenka's third son. And there can be little doubt that, whatever happens in Dunlop, he will remain a major and growing presence on the Indian business scene.

—T.N. NINAN

Investing Rs 100 crore in half a dozen takeovers, the Chhabrias have become as sizeable a business presence as the Thapars, Singhanias or Modis, and yet have the financial muscle for even more takeovers.

Manohar Chhabria: ambitious expansion plans

THE CHHABRIA GROUP IN INDIA

Companies Promoted	Sales (Rs Crore)
Orson Electronics	85
Nihon Electronics	20
Acquisitions	
Dunlop India	483
Shaw Wallace	220
Gordon Woodroffe	14
Mather & Platt	34
Falcon Tyres	10
Hindustan Dorr-Oliver	47
TOTAL	913

Table by RAJEEV MADAN

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BIRLAS

The Grand Partition

After months of tension, a friendly parting of ways

THE great Birla split finally promises to end the way it began, with reasonable amicability. After months of tense wrangling, exercise of the group's enormous money power (combined assets: about Rs 4,000 crore) on the stock-market, and at times bitter and open dispute, the five branches and sub-branches of the country's leading business family have settled on a modus operandi to separate their individual businesses.

The settlement—arrived at last month, according to one family source, but much earlier according to another—is different from the initial proposal in August 1986, of a grand, composite partition plan. Through the months of wrestling with the complex issues involved in trying to get this done, the Birlas finally realised that the task was quite simply impossible, and that each Birla company would have to work out individually what would be done about its shareholding.

As the first breakthrough in this new 'bilateral' or 'individual' approach, Aditya Birla will arrange to buy, from other Birla companies, the shares they hold in the two most important units that he manages: Grasim Industries (turnover: Rs 472 crore) and Hindustan Aluminium (Hindalco, with a turnover of Rs 322 crore). A similar de-linking will then be done by Sutlej Cotton, controlled by Aditya's uncle K.K. Birla (*see family tree*). And other companies will, over the next year, put an end to the cross-shareholding that resulted from the original four Birla brothers going into projects jointly by using family trusts and a clutch of investment companies that eventually became mother units. If things go smoothly, the Birlas will have formally split within five years of the death of family patriarch G.D. Birla in the summer of 1983.

The sums involved in this exercise—unprecedented in scale—are colossal. K.K. Birla, Aditya and his father B.K. Birla are expected to pay out a net sum of anything between Rs 100 crore and Rs 200 crore—most of it coming from B.K. Birla and Aditya. That should give the other Birlas (S.K. Birla, G.P. Birla and his son Chandra Kant, and M.P. Birla) tremendous cash liquidity and additional financial muscle to invest in new projects or take over companies. Though S.K. Birla commented wryly that "only the Government will become cash rich, because most of the money will go as capital gains tax," an industrialist related to the Birlas said the Birlas are much too clever to allow this to happen and that in order to save tax, a lot of the money would be invested in tax-free facilities offered by the Unit Trust of India and the Industrial Development Bank of India.

Table by RAJEEV MADAN

THE BIRLAS
CORPORATE LINE-UP AFTER ELIMINATING CROSSHOLDINGS*

	Sales (Rs Crore)
M.P. BIRLA	
Birla Jute & Industries	297.23
Universal Cables	81.35
S.K. BIRLA	
Jiyajeerao Cotton	107.83
VXL India	100.00
Mysore Cements	84.12
K.K. BIRLA	
Zuari Agro	141.44
Sutlej Cotton	60.24
Texmaco	66.99
Hindustan Times	15.56
B.K. BIRLA/ADITYA BIRLA	
Grasim Industries	397.45
Hindustan Aluminium	294.46
Kesoram Industries	141.85
Jayshree Tea	82.13
Indian Rayon	180.99
Century Spinning	283.54
Century Enka	85.59
G.P. BIRLA/C.K. BIRLA	
Hindustan Motors	337.84
Orient Paper	175.17
Sirpur Paper	48.06
ASHOK BIRLA	
Zenith Steel	132.64
Tungabhadra Industries	65.74

*Only major companies listed

While the news of a breakthrough on the separation question confirmed earlier assessments that the family was far too conscious of its position and reputation to make a public spectacle of itself (like several other business families have done), there were many occasions in the last few months when events moved dangerously close to the precipice.

Thus, the family had been split into two camps, the previously unthinkable prospect of companies changing hands within the family became a hot issue, and—partly to prevent this—there was furious buying of shares on the stock-market. Family members even began bidding against each other for big blocks of shares held by relatives of the clan, and several Birla share prices sky-rocketed.

The alignments within the family were unexpected too. Despite some mutual aloofness in the past, K.K. Birla got together with his younger brother B.K. Birla (both being net buyers of shares in the overall transaction), while the other three branches of the family—represented by G.P. Birla, M.P. Birla and S.K. Birla—began acting jointly. Given the extent of cross-shareholdings, these alignments could have shaken the control of companies and brought about an upheaval. For, the GP-MP-SK combine controlled more than half the shareholding in two of the group's three most important mother-companies, Pilani Investments and Jiyajeerao Cotton Mills. Both of them have very large investments in other companies controlled by the rival BK-KK combine. In fact, there was, at one stage, some talk of B.K. Birla even resigning from the board of Pilani Investments.

Meanwhile, share buying was most furiously done in the case of K.K. Birla's Sutlej Cotton, the third mother-company, which is both cash rich and holds between 8 per cent and 9 per cent of the total share capital of such corporate giants as Grasim, Hindalco and Zuari Agro Industries (turnover: Rs 190 crore). The result was that the Sutlej share price rocketed from Rs 35 in August 1986 to an astronomical Rs 118 a year later. Clearly, K.K. Birla was making sure that no one would challenge his control of Sutlej—which has investments in *The Hindustan Times* too, and recently bought into the control of Guest Keen Williams.

K.K.Birla also used his own influence to buy up a part of the General Insurance Corporation (GIC) shareholding in Sutlej Cotton. A member of the Birla family said, though, that GIC sold the shares because it found it was getting a good price.

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K.K. Birla

B.K. Birla

Aditya Birla

Three of the Birlas are expected to pay a colossal sum as part of the division plan. The net payment could be anywhere between Rs 100 crore and Rs 200 crore.

Jiyajeerao Cotton Mills saw some buying too, especially in July, when the company's share shot up from Rs 18 to Rs 34 in one week. And through the last year, Aditya Birla was shoring up his own position in Grasim and Hindalco. Grasim shares rose from Rs 76 to Rs 100 and Hindalco from Rs 74 to Rs 117. Aditya also swung the support of the financial institutions (who are important shareholders). After that, the rest of the Birlas knew that Aditya held the upper hand in these two prize units, and they finally agreed to sell their shareholdings to him.

MEANWHILE, Upper Ganges Sugar and a couple of other sugar companies became a bone of contention between G.P. Birla and K.K. Birla. The latter runs the units, but G.P. Birla's father had started them and he wanted them back. The result was some hectic share buying of Upper Ganges, and the Calcutta stock exchange had to step in to regulate trading at one stage. G.P. Birla controls over 30 per cent of the company's stock, and it remains to be seen whether he will have to resort to using this shareholding power.

Most of this activity took place in the first half of this year, once it became clear that the initial proposal for a package approach to the separation question was not going to work. Clearly, a point had been reached when the members of the business clan had fallen apart and were resorting to plain financial muscle in an effort to assert their respective positions.

At some point, however, wiser counsel prevailed and the family went back to the negotiating table. Significantly, several Birla company shares dipped dramatically on the stock-market the minute it became known that the family members had arrived at a settlement and would now be sorting out the details of their agreement. Sutlej, for instance, dropped back from Rs 118 to Rs 70 almost overnight.

Perhaps the most embarrassing incident of them all occurred in Bombay, when S.K. Birla went to a Maheshwari family which is linked to the Birlas by marriage and which held between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of the shares in some key Birla firms, including the vital Pilani Investments. Birla bought the shares from the Maheshwaris, apparently telling them that he was buying the shares for a 'pool' family account. Though S.K. Birla explained that he was merely carrying out a family commitment that had been given earlier, because the Maheshwaris had said they wanted to sell, his cousin Aditya did try to buy the shares himself. But he moved too late and failed to get the prize despite a higher bid.

Meanwhile, a basic decision which had been taken, that shares of publicly quoted companies would be bought and sold at the market price in August 1986, also came into question. One member of the Birla clan told INDIA TODAY at one stage that the seller of a big chunk of shares would naturally expect to get more than the market price. "This is normal in the world of business," he argued.

Most of the disputes and problems in valuing shares will eventually be sorted out. Perhaps the thorniest issue still outstanding relates to the question of who will get the sugar companies. But if knottier issues have been handled till now without a falling apart, a solution should be found for this as well.

If the Birlas are ratty about anything at all, it is what they call misreporting in the media. C.K. Birla, for instance, stoutly denied that he had ever been interested in taking *The Hindustan Times* away from his uncle K.K. Birla: "I would like to state categorically that I have no desire to get into the media business, because it needs a lot of personal attention and creates too many problems," he told INDIA TODAY last fortnight.

Another point of difference in the R.D. Birla branch of the family appears to be the distribution of R.D. Birla's assets, since his son M.P. Birla maintains that this was all given to his nephew Ashok Birla, while Ashok has claimed that he has not received any of these assets. The position is somewhat complicated by there being four children of Ashok's father Gajanan Birla by his second marriage. All four are legally entitled to a share in these assets, but have remained silent till now. When contacted, Gajanan's daughter Anjali Sawhney declined comment, other than to state that "my father's assets have been given to Ashok Birla".

M.P. Birla

S.K. Birla

G.P. Birla

To avoid capital gains tax, the recipients of the money might invest with the Unit Trust of India and the Industrial Development Bank of India.

While such relatively minor issues remain to be sorted out, most of the Birlas gave a picture of being relaxed last fortnight. Said one: "If you want to sort out a problem, you will always find a way of doing it." Numerous individual details still remain to be sorted out, and the nitty-gritty could well pose unexpected problems. But there was little doubt last fortnight that the business clan had begun successfully to untie its own Gordian knot.

—T.N. NINAN

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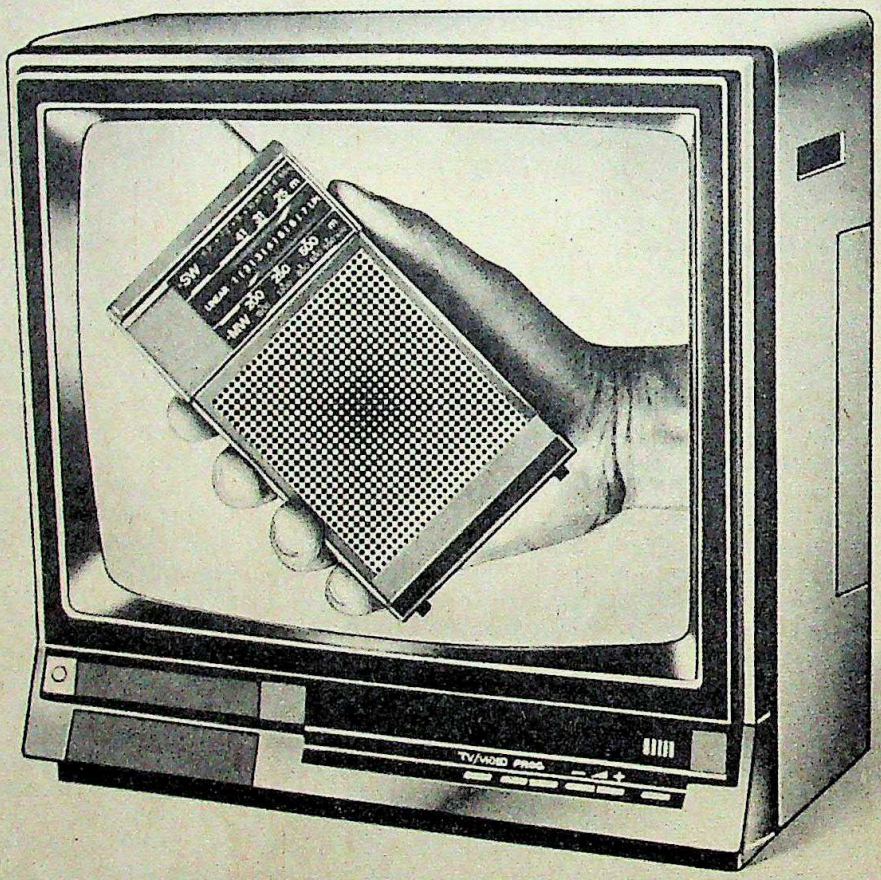

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PHARMACEUTICALS

Partial Cure

New order presents problems

EIGHT years ago, the Government tried to contain drug prices with a detailed price control order. What resulted was price stability of a sort, but along with the baby came the bathwater.

The prices were unattractive for the producers, so that fresh investment in the industry plummeted to half the earlier levels. Drug companies moved away into more profitable areas. And since many companies cut production of essential drugs, demand was met by fly-by-night operators and spurious products. As an official committee report wryly noted last month, every fourth or fifth drug administered to patients may be substandard.

Consumers will now have to pay a lot more for drugs as a result of the new drug price control orders of the Government.

Last fortnight, the Government finally announced its long-awaited prescription for the industry's malaise. It knocked off more than 4,000 drugs from the price control list (the new list contains just 166 drugs). Even on controlled items, the permitted mark-ups (to cover promotional costs, trade margins and profits) were virtually doubled.

Inevitably, consumers will now have to fork out more for drugs. The Government says prices will rise 11 per cent, the industry feels it will be a more daunting 45 per cent.

Whatever happens, the new drug price control order is the most important official pronouncement to have hit drug manufacturers since 1979, when prices—and the rules of the game—were last changed on such a scale. And the drug companies felt that while it was a well-intentioned prescription, the nitty-gritty could present knotty operational problems. Said Homi R. Khusrokhan, senior vice-president of Glindia (formerly Glaxo): "The new policy will be valuable if it is indicative of a change in the Government's attitude towards the drug industry."

Government officials maintain that this is indeed the case, underscoring the slimmer list of price-controlled drugs and the relatively simpler procedures. Says Chemicals and Petrochemicals Secretary H.K. Khan: "There is complete simplicity in this order. I've assured the industry that if they give us all the details, we will dispose of price revision applications within two months."

But the director of a drug firm in the capital forecast more red tapeism because companies are required to submit data to the Government even on decontrolled drug prices. And the Government has got off to a poor start: it has had to step in with explanations because its price order is worded ambiguously.

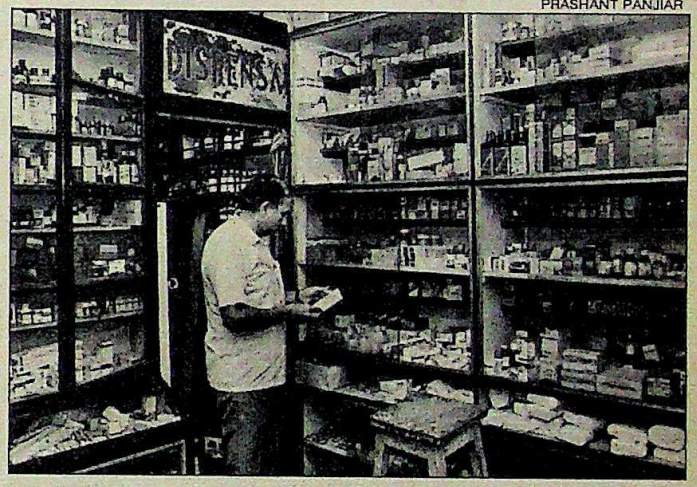
The drug companies had to be told that prices of "combinations" (or drugs made by mixing other drugs) were not controlled earlier, while they will be now if a significant part of the ingredients come under price control. Then, the Government has classified price-controlled drugs into two categories, spelling out the mark-up on each. But some drugs (for instance, Chloroquin, used to treat malaria) are listed in both categories. And Acetazolamide, used to treat epilepsy, heart failure and glaucoma, comes under price control when it is used to treat the last disease—but not in the other two cases.

Such examples abound, prompting Harish Chawla, Cipla's director for corporate affairs, to complain: "What is the purpose of introducing an order which is full of anomalies?"

Industry men have other complaints too. For one, the selection of drugs for price control is viewed as arbitrary. Said an official of the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India, which mainly speaks for the foreign-controlled drug companies: "The main criterion should have been the 'essentiality' of the drug. But other considerations also influenced the decision to put certain drugs in the first and second categories." Certainly, while Minister of State for Health Saroj Khaparde listed nearly 13 such major diseases to the Rajya Sabha last April, the order covers only six diseases and the drugs for them.

To some extent, criticism is only to be expected in an industry riven with conflicting interests. But the new pricing structure will exact a toll on wholly Indian-owned companies. Examples: Rifampicin, the anti-tuberculosis and leprosy drug, now gets a lower mark-up. And of the country's total production of about 80 tonnes of Rifampicin a year, more than half is accounted for by Lupin Laboratories and another 10 tonnes by Ranbaxy. Lupin may lose revenue worth roughly Rs 2 crore a year. The company has also been badly hit by another tuberculosis drug, Ethambutol, suffering a similar fate, while Ranbaxy could lose a few crore rupees because the tranquiliser Diazepam has been roped into the price control basket.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



A chemist's shop: costlier drugs

Realising that there could be problems, the Government has kept alive the committee headed by Vijay Kelkar, chairman of the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices, whose recommendations largely formed the basis of the latest price changes. Secretary Khan says that companies can appeal to the Kelkar Committee. A small committee has also been set up in Khan's department to deal with anomalies. Clearly, the success of the new pricing system will be largely judged on its implementation, which will also determine whether the country's troubled pharmaceuticals industry has swallowed a sugar coated pill or a bitter one.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
and M. RAHMAN

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ICE CREAM INDUSTRY

Scoops of Success

New entrants, new connections; the market still grows

IN the beginning there was vanilla. Then along came strawberry, chocolate, tutti-frutti. And then in 1978, the Indian ice cream industry began to slowly go nuts, churning out such iced exotica as chocolate ripple, mango tango, bon bons, fresh orange crunch. Whatever the ice cream maker conjured was being quickly lapped up.

They were almost fashionable, these new-fangled ice creams, in their bubblegum pinks, pista greens and apricot oranges. Vanilla became French Vanilla, old-fashioned ice cream became the new rage. Roasted nuts, chocolate chips oozing with calories, dropped in to stay. These were not ice creams. These were fantasies. Before long, the ice cream makers went fresh. Peaches, plums, lichees, mangoes, whatever they could find, went in, while anything synthetic went out. As Deepankar Bharat, marketing manager of Milkfood, says: "It's sensuous, creamy. Ice cream's got all the right vibes."

Now the industry has gone completely crazy—and no one's complaining. Everywhere there is ice cream and ice cream everywhere is doing booming business. Two months ago, Milkfood descended on Delhi like a cloudburst—and was welcomed like the rains—and next month, Uncle Bob will arrive with his Premium ice creams. From a humble Rs 15-crore industry a decade ago, ice creams are expected to hit a high of between Rs 70 crore and Rs 75 crore this year. This summer saw Indians licking over 17.5 lakh ice creams every day, an appetite that shows every sign of growing still further. "Earlier, ice creams were a luxury," said Geeta Agarwal, marketing controller of Nirula's which has grown by a hefty 35 per cent every year. "Now they have almost become like soft drinks."

Delicious madness. Summer, winter, there's no stopping it. "We've got a response that leading industries get only after 40 years," said an excited Bharat. "We are going to be one of the big biggies." Haryana Milkfood—the ghee whiz-kid—is getting ready to launch its Uncle Bob's ice creams with an informal Italian tie-up. "They are going to be gourmet ice creams, like wine and cheese," said Berjesh Goyal, the director, who expects his first year's sales to hit a crore. "There is room for everybody here. Competition will make the market grow."

For many years, though, there was only Kwality—controlled by a medley of cousins and brothers, the Ghais and the Lambas, who came to be known as "a mini-mafia in ice creams". But the established firm was lazy. Like an old woman, it sat plying its wares, fat, content, unthreatened by competition. It was only after a quarter century of complacency that the youngsters—Gaylord, Nirula's and Vadilal—arrived and invited the public to step into their parlours.

It was a scoop d'etat. Nirula's opened its first parlour in Connaught Place, Delhi, in 1979, an enchanting soda fountain with soft music that served 21 magical flavours. Now you could see the ice cream.

Crowds at Nirulas: growing demand

PRASHANT PANJIAR

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smell it, point to it. You could ask for a little extra on the scoop. "The day after we opened our parlour, our boys were making ice cream round-the-clock," said Chairman L.C. Nirula. "We just couldn't meet the demand."

In Bombay, Yankee Doodle went to town under the aegis of the Kwality Bombay group and, as Managing Director Ravi Ghai observed: "Today there are over 30 parlours here. Consumers have realised that nutritionally, ice cream is a good value for money." In Ahmedabad, a small ice cream maker had begun to make big news. Vadilal's divine experiments with fruits and nuts and cream turned Ahmedabad into the city with the highest per capita consumption of ice cream in India. From a Rs 5 crore turnover three years ago, the company is expected to touch an all-time high of Rs 15 crore this year. "The middle class is eating a lot of ice cream. It's cheap, it's good," said Managing Director Shailesh Gandhi, who controls over 100 parlours and 2,000 stalls in Gujarat. "They eat ice cream for fun. I know of no other reason."

An ice cream mood was created. From a small sector business, ice cream became an industry. For the consumer, strawberry and chocolate were not enough anymore and the sleeping beauty Kwality was forced out of its slumber. "Competition awakened us," confessed P.L. Lamba, the grand-old man behind Kwality, Delhi. "After three years of stiff competition, we geared up with more advertising, better packaging, more flavours." And recently, it gave birth to Mr Frost, the maker of dream desserts.

Clearly, competition was the best thing that happened to the industry. The ice cream men began cranking new fantasies out of their freezers every day. Nirula's came out with a new flavour every month. Vadilal seduced the public through its oomph advertising. Kwality announced drink sticks and packaged sundaes. Joy moved into flavoured yoghurts and Uncle Bob will specially design his ice cream for different segments of society. "There will be pistas for the *marwaris* and a cognac and raisin flavour for the rich elite," says Goyal. "It will be signatured ice cream." Milkfood, meanwhile, claims to have the best equipment in the world and daily air freights its strawberries from Mahabaleshwar and its alphonsos from Bombay. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," says Bharat.

THE funny thing is that this industry loves competition. "It makes the market grow," says Sunil Lamba of Kwality, Delhi. And Agarwal of Nirula's says: "The more the competition, the better the flavours." Ice cream is being designed and marketed as a right-after-anything food. And there is plenty of customer feedback—they keep returning for more. "If you go down the middle class ladder, you'll find they are coughing up that extra penny," says Bharat, who feels that all indulgence products are showing a steep growth graph. "It's that little extra that you love to do either for yourself or your family."

Yet, despite the boom, the Indian industry is only the cherry on the ice creamberg. As against the US, which gorges an amazing Rs 5,500 crore worth of ice cream every year, India is only a Rs 70 crore drop in the ocean. "We still have a long way to go," says Lamba. Power cuts, non-availability of good freezers, homogenisers, are all problems that need to be licked. "Once ice cream softens, it is not the same when it hardens," says Deepak Nirula. And Vadilal's Gandhi says: "Till it reaches the consumer it should be properly maintained. It's a big headache."

Still, it's a food that can't fail. Indians are a milk-based people with a sweet tooth and Lalit Nirula put it simply: "It's a good product. It's a hot country." Clearly, the humble vanilla bean will continue to weave its magic, as it seduces people into the parlour where all those inviting pastel colours lie in frosty glass cases, and the magician behind the counter makes up the ultimate indulgence: a mountain of vanilla ice cream with a rich, hot fudge sauce and that ripe, red cherry sitting on top, waiting.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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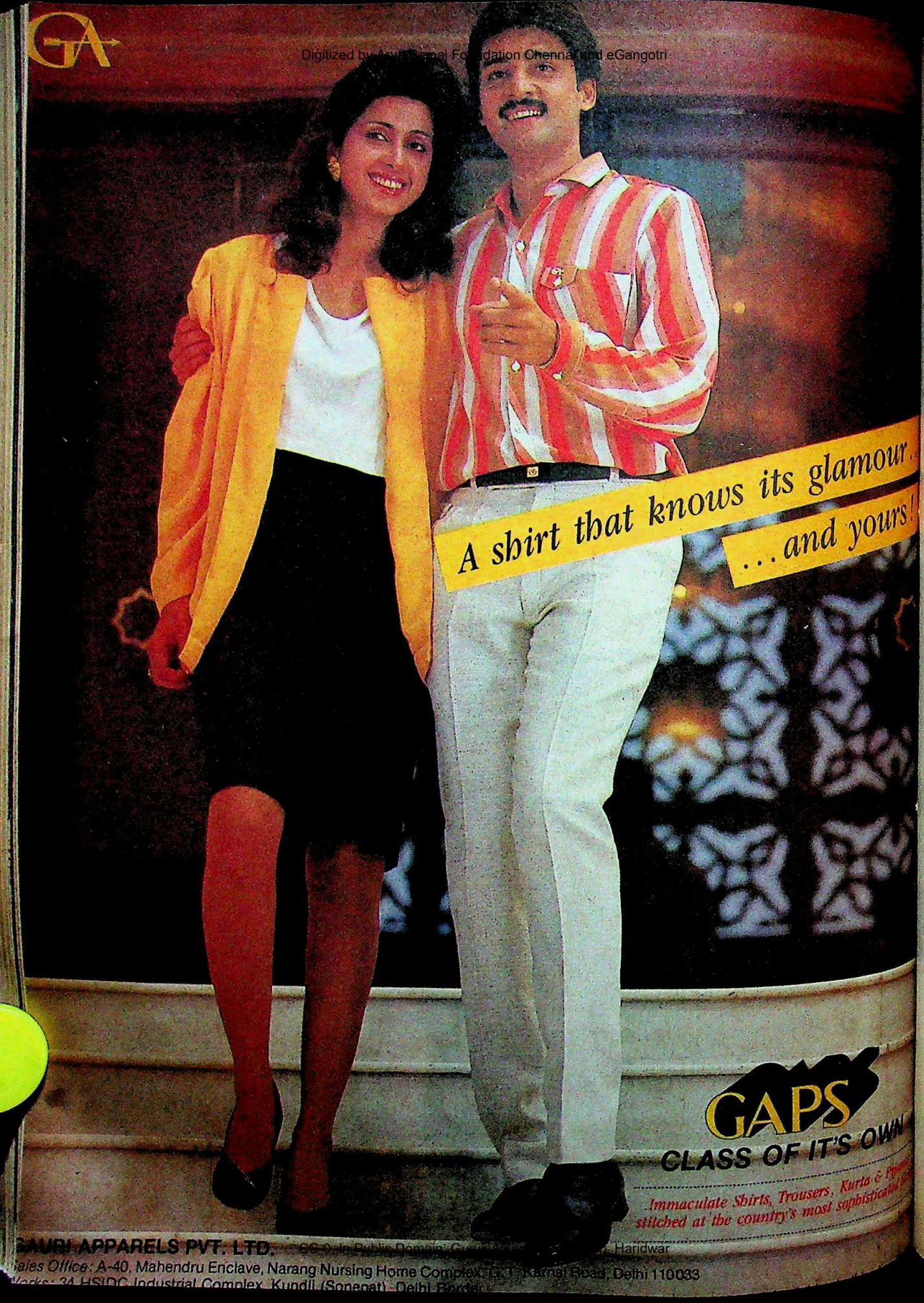

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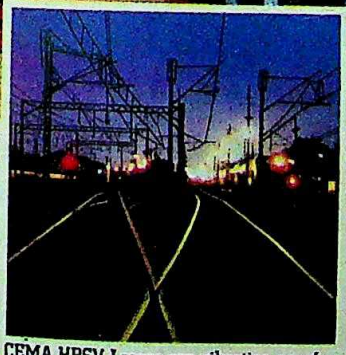

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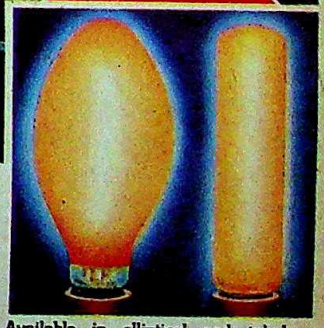

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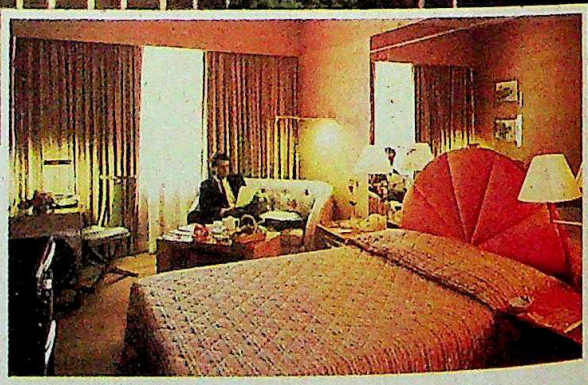

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FINANCE MINISTRY

Changed Strategy

Are economic offenders getting off lightly now?

SURPRISE, surprise. The Finance Ministry's Enforcement Directorate is alive and still kicking. Bhure Lal's former fiefdom is doing very well without him, at least in a manner of speaking. And the directorate even claims to have organised itself better; only, it is doing its work more quietly. But even that is by design.

Never mind, of course, that the headline-hitting cases which Bhure Lal acted upon are quietly gathering dust. And that businessmen think the 'raid raj' is over. Because the new, authorised biography of the directorate's performance under Bhure Lal says that the work was being done in a haphazard fashion; the directorate's 600-strong work-force was so busy raiding everyone that the rest of its work (adjudication and prosecution) piled up. Three special directors whose business was to adjudicate cases were also concentrating on raids.

Partly because of this, the backlog of pending cases shot up from 2,600 before Bhure Lal to 21,876 when he left. But this also indicates the amount of activity under him.

The backlog is being cleared, says his successor Anil Kumar. The three vacant posts of special directors have been filled, and the number of show cause notices issued so far this year (4,363) is 25 per cent higher than last year. Adjudication too is quicker.

The new attitude of secrecy in the directorate is also symbolised by the installation of a paper shredder in Anil Kumar's office. The days when raids on and arrests of well-known businessmen got extensive publicity and of 'trial by the press' are well and truly over.

For good measure, a senior Finance Ministry official explains that the directorate has tried to re-focus its functioning, by stipulating that foreign exchange violations of less than Rs 25,000 should be ignored, that cases should, as far as possible, be adjudicated instead of taken to court and—more important—that no minimum targets will be set for each zone of the directorate. He said these measures would cut down unproductive work and help the directorate concentrate on the major cases.

Yet, the truth remains that many of Bhure Lal's celebrated cases have not made much progress. Among them:

► Investment in Reliance Industries through non-resident Indian (NRI) companies in the Isle of Man; Reliance's alleged under-invoicing of purchases of machinery from Du Pont and Chemtech of the US; action on a Rs 114-crore customs duty case has also been slow.

► The suspected siphoning of funds by the Tata-owned Indian Hotels Ltd to a Hong Kong-based associate. The directorate does not even know the exact amount involved.

► The Thapar group's cases that have been pending adjudication. Thirty-one show-cause notices for FERA violations involving Rs 14 crore have been issued. Bhure Lal extracted a letter of apology from Thapar. Subsequently, the business house produced evidence to claim that only Rs 5.44 crore was to be repatriated, of which Rs 1.58 crore has already been brought back. Thapar's letter of apology pertains to only Rs 77 lakh. The rest of the dues are yet to be ascertained. Officials argue privately that this most-publicised case was weak from the start and that the apology was a face-saving measure.

► Havala (illegal foreign exchange) transactions in the US, by organisations inviting clients through advertisements. Bhure Lal had visited the US in this connection, but the subsequent investigations have made little headway.

► Investigations initiated by Bhure Lal into the dealings of some African NRI firms which were laundering black money. The directorate is at sea here because these investigations, at a preliminary stage, were not committed to files for reasons of secrecy.

Progress has also been slow on vital cases that have come to light after Bhure Lal's departure. Among them:

► Ajitabh Bachchan's business activities in Switzerland. In response to the directorate's letter asking for details of his foreign holdings, Ajitabh has only referred to his flat in Montreux. Claiming that his employers paid for it although it was registered in his name, Ajitabh is silent about his shareholding in the pharmaceutical firm Arcolab. The directorate is 'thinking of' issuing him summons, but says it can't do very much because Bach-

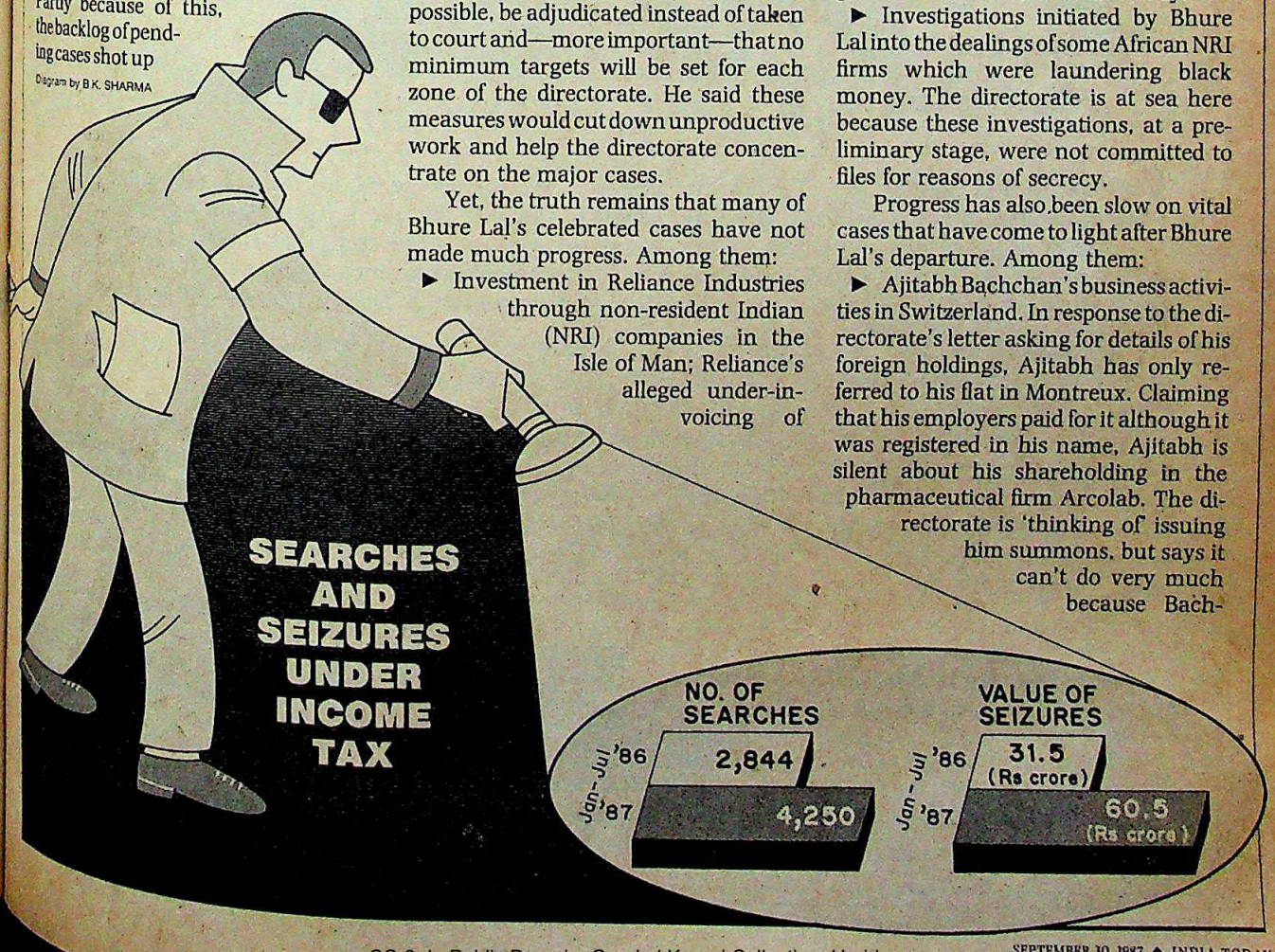

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA

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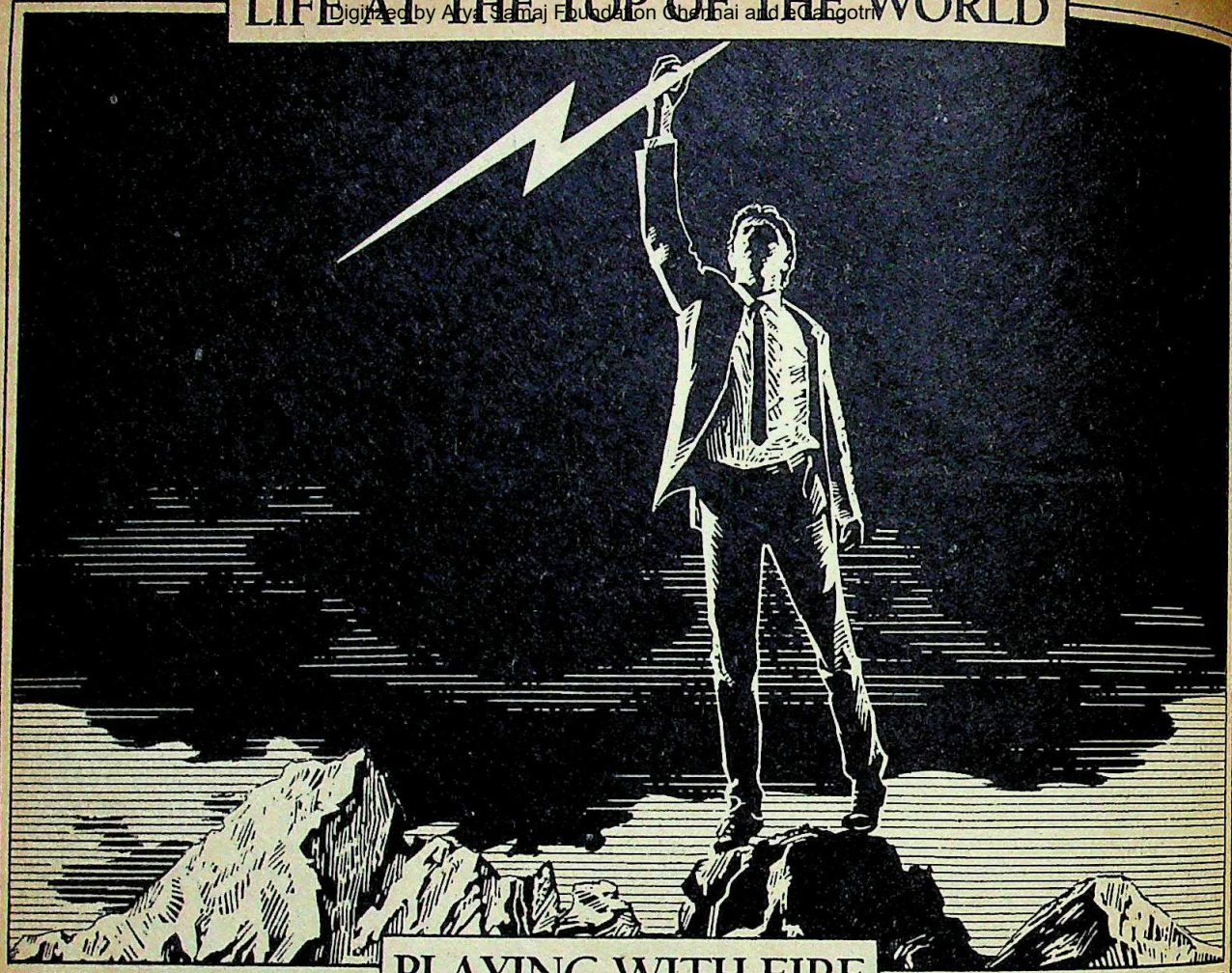
LIFE AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD



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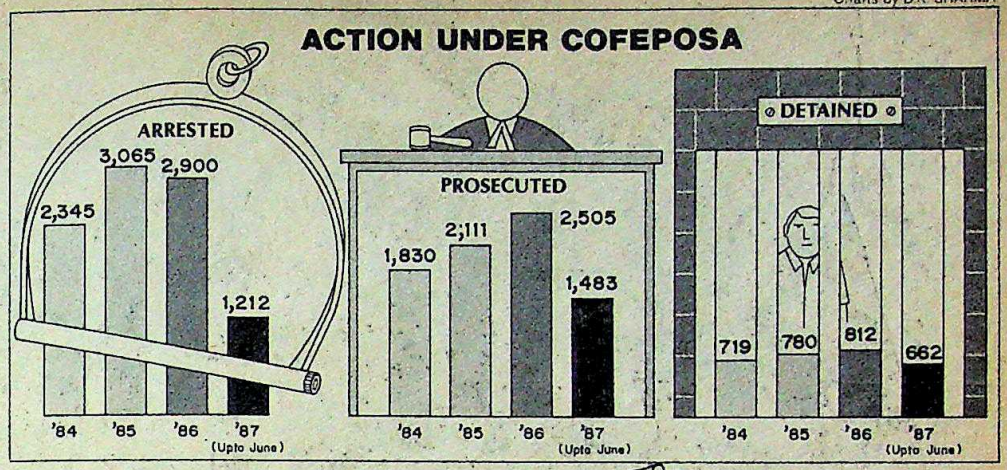

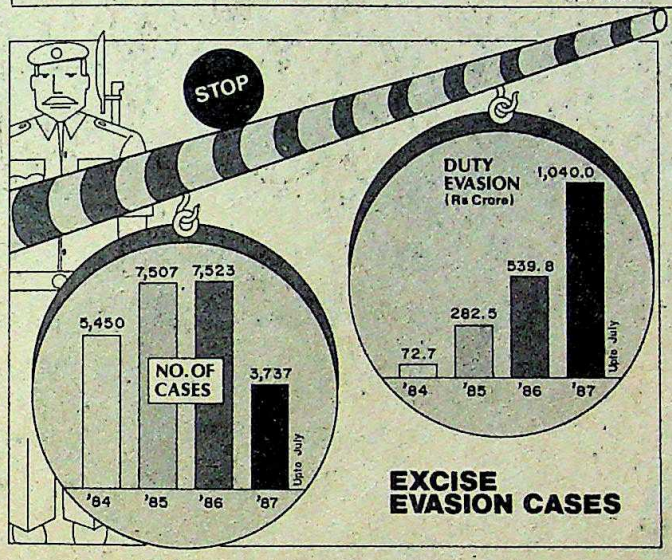

chan is abroad.

▶ The routing of arms deals kickbacks to Indian agents, through Swiss bank accounts. The Finance Ministry team which visited Switzerland has suggested a lengthy procedure of entering into a memorandum of understanding with the Swiss, and of an Indo-Swiss treaty as a long-term measure. But the memorandum is yet to be drafted and no talks have taken place with the Swiss authorities yet.

▶ Details of a 7 per cent commission on the German submarine deal. The directorate has told the defence ministry that it is helpless to check out the case which was referred to it by V.P. Singh when he looked after defence.

Also, none of the businessmen under question in these cases has opted for voluntary disclosure, highlighting the weakness of the much-publicised FERA amnesty scheme launched in September 1986, in the wake of the Thapar case. Only 475 individuals had made disclosures amounting to Rs 63 crore when the scheme ended on March 31, 1987. Officials say the scheme had been worked out hastily, and offered no real incentive except for the waiving of criminal proceedings.

Despite the evident lack of progress, Anil Kumar insists that "we have not slackened our drive", and claims success in the crackdown on havala operators. In the first four months of this year, the Bombay zone alone has detected havala rackets involving a staggering Rs 81 crore. So firmly entrenched and pervasive is this system of parallel banking that M.L. Wadhavan, director of the Economic Intelligence Bureau, says that individual racketeers in Bombay make transactions averaging about Rs 1 crore daily.

The question of overseas surveillance is also being considered, including deputing officials to Indian embassies and consulates specifically to keep an eye on the business dealings of Indians abroad. Singapore, Hong Kong, Switzerland, UK and the US are likely to be covered immediately. The proposal has been sent to the Ministry of External Affairs, and the prime minister's office is also being involved to expedite the paperwork. Clearly, Bhure Lal had a point when he told the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission inquiring into the hiring of Fairfax, that Indian embassies abroad are not of much use in FERA cases. Indeed, officials say little progress has been made in the well-known cases precisely because there is no overseas surveillance network.

MEANWHILE, unable to grapple successfully with the problem of flight of capital, the Finance Ministry is trying to highlight its success in other areas to establish that it has not been lenient with economic offenders.

For instance, between January and July this year, the Income Tax Department conducted 50 per cent more raids than during the same period last year, and seized assets worth more than Rs 60 crore—nearly double the 1986 figure. Similarly, say officials, excise evasion of Rs 1,040 crore has been detected this year, as against just Rs 539 crore in the whole of 1986. And although fewer people are being arrested under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act (COFEPOSA), the number of prosecutions is increasing.

Ministry officials, upset over the allegation that small crooks are being hauled over the coals while the big fish are being let off, reel off the names of ITC, Godrej and Boyce, Lohia Machines, Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company, Tata Iron and Steel Company, Godfrey Phillips and Kelvinator. All these companies stand charged with excise evasion, and ITC tops the list with a whopping Rs 800 crore against its name. Including penalties, the total could be around Rs 1,000 crore.

"Our work is going on like before. The only change is that high voltage publicity has gone and so have the dramatic arrests of big businessmen," says Revenue Secretary Devvrat Bandhopadhyay. Asked for a comment on the claims of improved performance, former finance minister V.P. Singh said: "Good, it's welcome." But he immediately had second thoughts and said it would be premature to comment on the subject. Bhure Lal also declined to comment.

There is little doubt though, that in spite of his bull-in-a-china-shop attitude, Singh had infused new blood into the Finance Ministry's revenue gathering agencies and investigative arms. The Government's current drive is also influenced by the fact that—politically—it cannot afford to be seen slackening in its stand against offenders. This could perhaps, in the long run, lead to a healthier interface between business and the Government.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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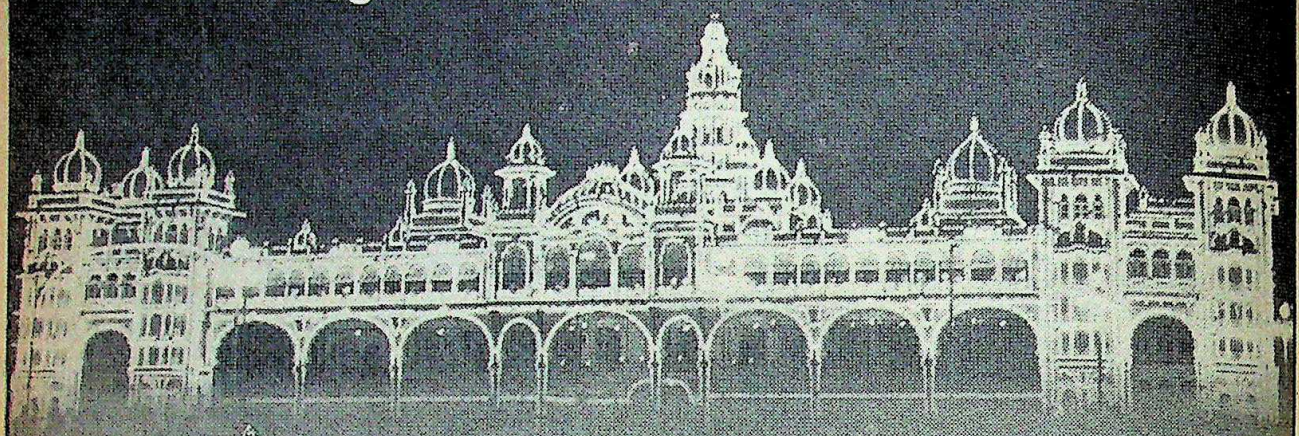
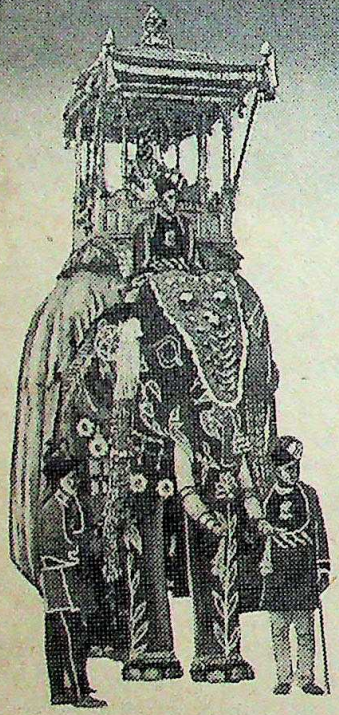
When a thousand lights fill the night ...





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KARNATAKA

Dead Loss

Controversy over state units

THEY were once Karnataka's pride. Some of them are among the best known government companies in India, especially Mysore Paper Mills and Karnataka Soaps and Detergents, which make the famed sandalwood soap.

But pride has given way to dismay. The state's public sector units are now in the dumps. Nearly half of the 56 units are in the red, with losses mounting to Rs 416 crore. And 20 of them have nearly wiped out their paid-up capital.

Signalling its dissatisfaction, the Karnataka Government recently hawked a sugar mill (total losses: Rs 12 crore) to the Bangalore-based Khoday group, and is negotiating to sell another. The state Government also decided to auction three more sugar mills.

Early this year, the Cabinet decided to rope in private companies to run the state's paper and soap companies—suggesting Karnataka was heading for an unprecedented privatisation spree. Expectedly, the decision sparked off a furore and the Government quickly backed off. Last fortnight, Industry Minister J.H. Patel insisted that the Cabinet discussion had been only "theoretical", adding: "There is no question of privatising units. Only a few sugar mills which are sick beyond redemption will be sold."

Nevertheless, a raging debate has ensued on whether the state sector should continue to maintain a presence in consumer products. The state Government faces a Hobson's choice: it is damned if it peddles its losing companies to the private sector, and damned if it doesn't. Of its 18 cooperative sugar factories, 15 are losing money badly. Visweswaraya Iron and Steel Ltd is losing more than Rs 2.5 crore a month. Obviously, the Government can't subsidise the losses forever.

The villains can be seen plainly enough—poor planning, rampant corruption, high overheads and overstaffing, to name just a few. A classic example of the first is Mysore Paper Mills, which the state Government took over from the Calcutta-based Jalans in the late '70s. A report by Karnataka's Committee on Public Undertakings noted "the project is suffering today from yearly losses from 1983-84 due to overcapitalisation"—which meant heavy interest burdens. The net result: a total loss of Rs 52 crore.

The Hegde Government blames most present problems on its predecessors and the Centre, but malpractice has gone largely unchecked even today. One example: a damaging auditors' report stated that, of the 3,000 tonnes of fatty acid Karnataka Soaps and Detergents imported through the State Trading Corporation, company officials diverted 2,000 tonnes to Hindustan Lever and Godrej. Even worse, crucial files disappear, aiding guilty officials in getting away scot-free. Key files of Karnataka Soaps were allegedly whisked away in the early hours of January 31, 1987, in the car boot of a senior company official.

The state's units are also highly plagued by the public sector syndrome—peripatetic chief executives and chairmen (in Karnataka, there were 43 overseas jaunts between 1981 and 1985, and prior government permission was not obtained in 24 cases), and quick shuffling of company heads. Mysore Sugar Company has had a different managing director every year for 10 years, Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation has had three managing directors in four years. "As the chief executives have neither a financial nor a career stake in their jobs, they don't bother to put in their best," notes Indian Institute of Management Professor B.K. Chandrasekhar.

Compounding the problem is a bloated labour force and high inventory levels. The predictable result: high-cost production. Not surprisingly, the Karnataka State Construction Corporation bought mild steel from sources other than Visweswaraya Iron and Steel, which charges Rs 600 a tonne more for it.

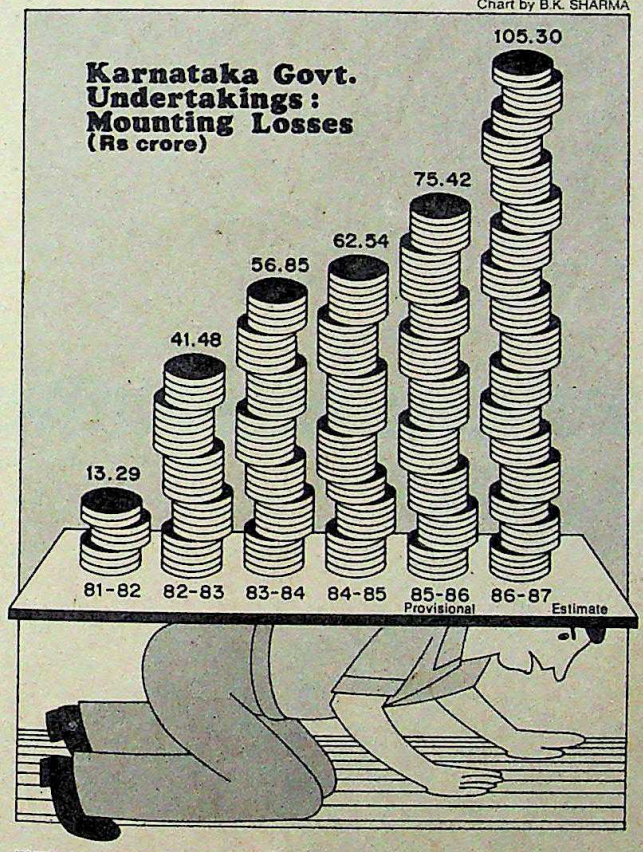
Even the Government shops elsewhere for its requirements. Incredibly, it bought Rs 65 lakh worth of bulbs and tubes from Peico for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit last November, instead of from Mysore Lamps which then had stocks worth Rs 4 crore.

"None of these problems that account for the losses is exclusive to Karnataka," says a defensive K.S. Krishnaswamy, member of the Economic and Planning Council, Hegde's think-tank. He is right. What highlights them is the ongoing debate on the public sector's role. Some, like Krishnaswamy, believe state units should pull out of the competitive consumer markets, remaining in the public utility arena. Others, like former home secretary S.N. Ghosal, who recently took over as the head of Karnataka Soaps, argue just the opposite.

Which school of thought carries the day may well determine whether Karnataka will go the Maggie Thatcher way in privatising its lumbering companies.

—ANITA PRATAP

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The state Government faces charges of privatisation in attempts to deal with its losing public sector units.

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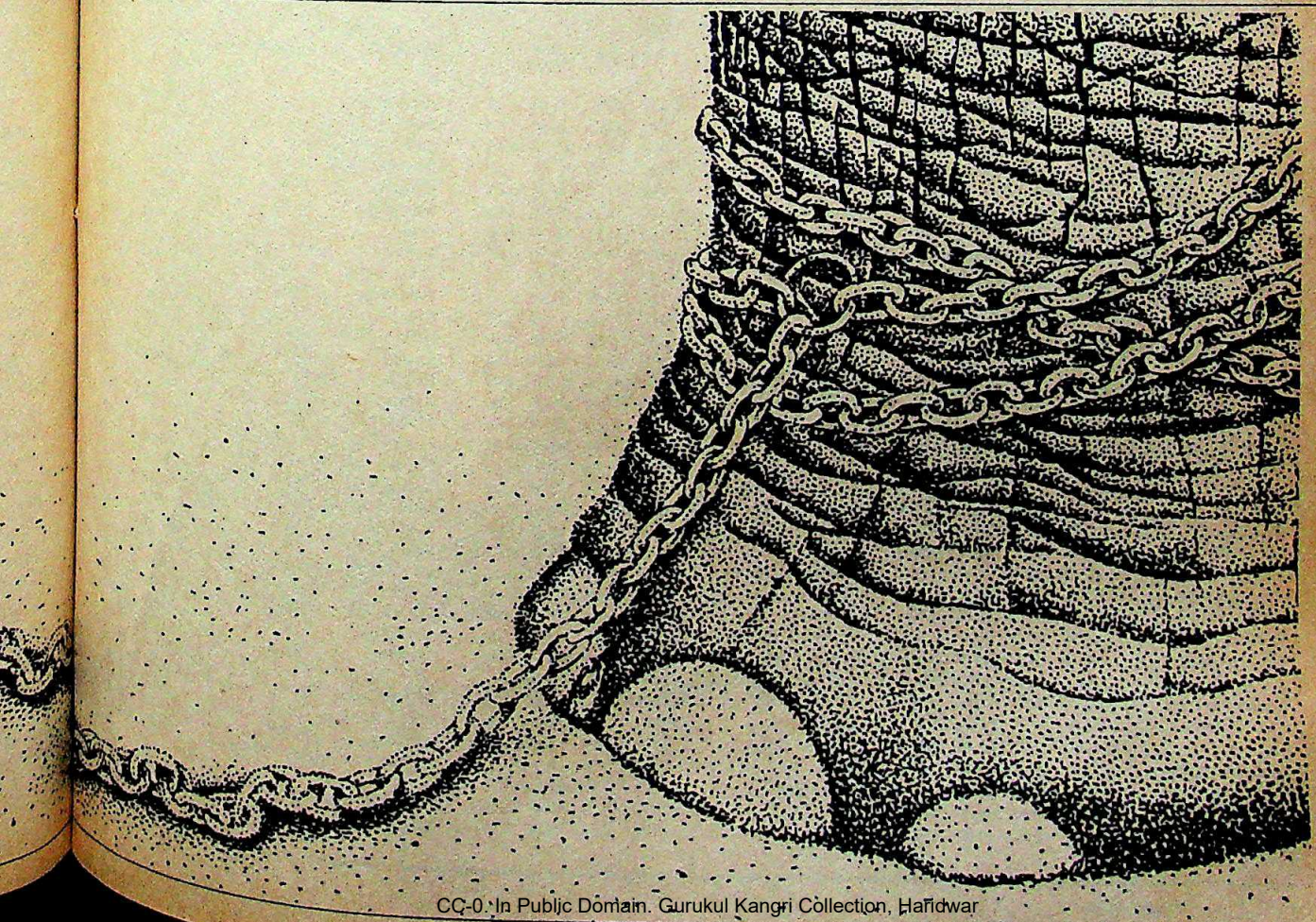

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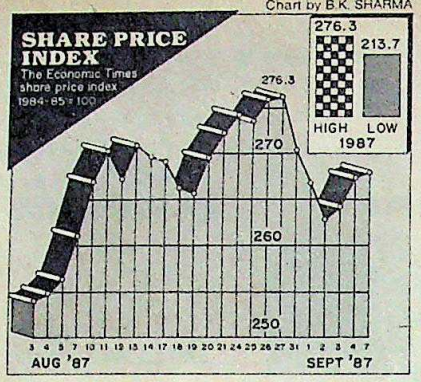
THE MARKETS

Down Swing

Uncertain prospects ahead

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



WIS it a case of going up the down staircase, or down the up staircase? Nobody was sure on the stock-markets last fortnight. Perhaps it was a 'technical correction', or perhaps the markets were waking up belatedly to the bad news on the economic front. And, just perhaps, share prices are not crashing through the floor only as the market authorities continue to put pressure on the bears.

Certainly, there was plenty of bad news: the prospect of a drought levy that would net anything between Rs 500 crore and Rs 1,200 crore; disappointing half-yearly results by both Tata Tea and Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation; approval at a high premium of Rs 350 per share for the Tata Iron and Steel rights issue, which then dampened enthusiasm for the scrip; the dumping of Bombay Dyeing and other scrips by the financial institutions; and a decline in several Birla shares following reports of a settlement on separating share ownerships within the group's firms. Pharmaceutical shares lost their glamour as the drug pricing issue began to look complicated, and industries like cement and steel continued to face pricing problems.

The result of all these and other factors, like a technical correction after a bullish spurt upward, was a slide back in *The Economic Times* index from 276.3 at the end of August, the high point of the year, to 262.9 in early September. There was a recovery after that, to 268.1, at the end of the first week of September, and the big question was which way share prices would now move.

One key factor influencing the answer to this will be the authorities' determination to shore up share prices. Already, the recovery of the past few weeks has been engineered by the suspension of forward trading, which encouraged investors to buy. While sections of the market were sure that the ban would continue, there is little doubt that the market will turn bearish if forward trading is reallowed. The economy and most sections of industry are simply not doing well enough to sustain a bullish market for long—which even the financial institutions must be aware of.

But, as always on the stock-market, the vital issue is one of timing, of knowing when exactly the market will dip. Several industries are in fact feeding on demand induced by the drought (the trucking business has picked up due to grain movement, pump-sets are selling like hot cakes, and electric fans are in demand due to the extended summer), but this will lessen in the months ahead. Then, the drought will begin to squeeze the economy dry. Before that, the wise investor must pick his investments carefully, then pull out in time.

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	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 7.9.87	Change in Fortnight
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Associated Cement	241.50	138.00	179.00	11.00 –
Atlas Copco	152.00	60.00	66.00	1.00 –
Associated Bearings	1410.00	500.00	1140.00	65.00 –
Bajaj Auto	5860.00	3950.00	5425.00	50.00 –
Baroda Rayon	270.00	172.50	192.50	7.50 –
Bata India	160.00	64.00	72.00	2.50 –
Bayer	785.00	375.00	400.00	10.00 +
Bharat Forge	136.00	63.00	128.00	6.00 –
Birla Jute	58.00	43.00	44.00	3.00 –
Blow Plast	178.00	92.50	165.00	2.50 –
Bombay Dyeing	143.00	40.50	93.00	34.50 –
Britannia Ind.	190.00	101.00	115.00	8.00 –
Brooke Bond	109.00	77.00	103.00	nil
Ceat Tyres	72.00	45.00	70.00	9.00 +
Century Enka	1175.00	815.00	980.00	140.00 –
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	83.00	2.50 –
Citurgia	75.00	53.00	65.00	3.00 –
Colgate	415.00	215.00	232.50	2.50 –
DCM	47.00	23.00	31.50	0.50 +
Dunlop	84.00	71.25	84.00	7.00 +
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	50.00	1.00 –
Escorts	84.00	39.25	40.00	nil
Finolex Cables	377.50	114.00	350.00	27.50 –
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	165.00	1.50 +
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.50	24.00	1.50 –
G.E. Shipping	35.50	16.00	31.75	1.75 –
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	183.50	90.00	92.00	5.00 –
Grasim Ind.	118.00	80.00	108.00	6.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	123.00	4.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	235.00	10.00 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	82.00	85.00	nil
Hindustan Motors	35.35	19.60	20.30	1.30 –*
Hind. Dorr	407.50	202.50	220.00	5.00 –
IEL	64.75	45.00	49.00	1.00 –
Indian Organic	78.00	37.50	37.50	1.50 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	63.00	3.00 +
Indrol	510.00	160.00	257.50	20.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	360.00	265.00	345.00	nil
ITC	78.00	40.00	54.50	3.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	55.00	2.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	255.00	5.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	53.75	1.25 –
KSB Pumps	412.50	220.00	390.00	7.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	100.00	67.00	97.00	6.50 +
Lipton	79.50	57.00	69.50	1.50 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	12.00	13.00	3.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	54.00	4.00 +
McDowell	108.50	41.50	102.00	3.00 –
Motor Industries	595.00	317.50	580.00	5.00 +
Mukand Iron	89.50	62.00	82.00	nil
National Organic	577.50	382.50	442.50	17.50 –
Nirlon	26.00	7.25	8.50	1.50 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	29.50	35.00	nil
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	215.00	5.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	36.00	43.00	3.00 +
Ponds	405.00	222.50	357.50	17.50 –
Premier Auto	33.00	17.00	30.25	1.25 +
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	100.00	15.00 –
Raymond	109.00	48.00	104.00	2.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	225.50	143.00	209.00	11.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	110.00	118.50	2.00 –
Richardson Hind.	350.00	210.00	305.00	25.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	32.00	1.75 –
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	100.00	7.50 +
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	95.00	1.00 +
SPIC	53.50	30.50	34.00	3.50 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	607.50	660.00	40.00 –
Telco	665.00	350.00	395.00	55.00 –
Wimco	56.50	26.00	27.00	4.50 –

*Ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.4847	9.3831
Austria	Schilling	100	103.4352	102.3214
Bahrain	Dinar	1	35.3310	35.2220
Bangladesh	Taka	100	44.3118	44.2550
Canada	Dollar	1	9.9045	9.8019
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8845	1.8644
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3800	9.3200
France	Franc	1	2.2026	2.1482
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6694	1.6515
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0820	0.8000
Iran	Rial	100	18.2300	18.2000
Italy	Lira	100	0.9800	0.9600
Japan	Yen	100	9.30	9.05
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8010	0.7800
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.75	46.61
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1954	5.1405
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0000	0.9800
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6300	0.5990
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.4515	6.3840
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7810	0.7600
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.2528	6.1745
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1050	0.01000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4600	0.4490
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0548	2.0327
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.7684	8.6730
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2010	0.1900
Thailand	Baht	100	50.0000	49.0000
UK	Pound	1	21.5225	21.3925
USA	Dollar	1	13.0225	12.8925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.6500	3.6000
USSR	Rouble	1	20.9000	20.7500
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.3500	7.1500

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 9.9.87.

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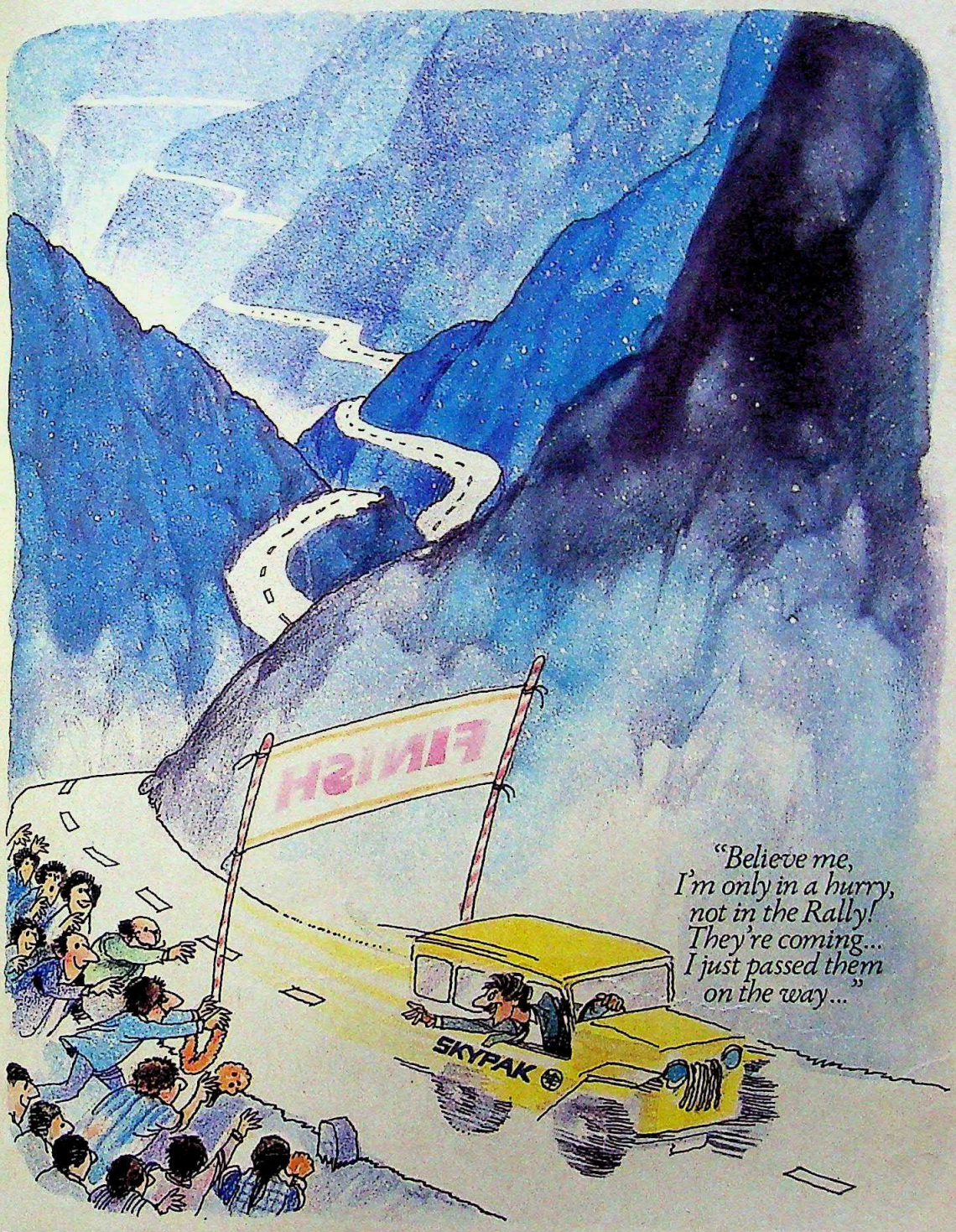

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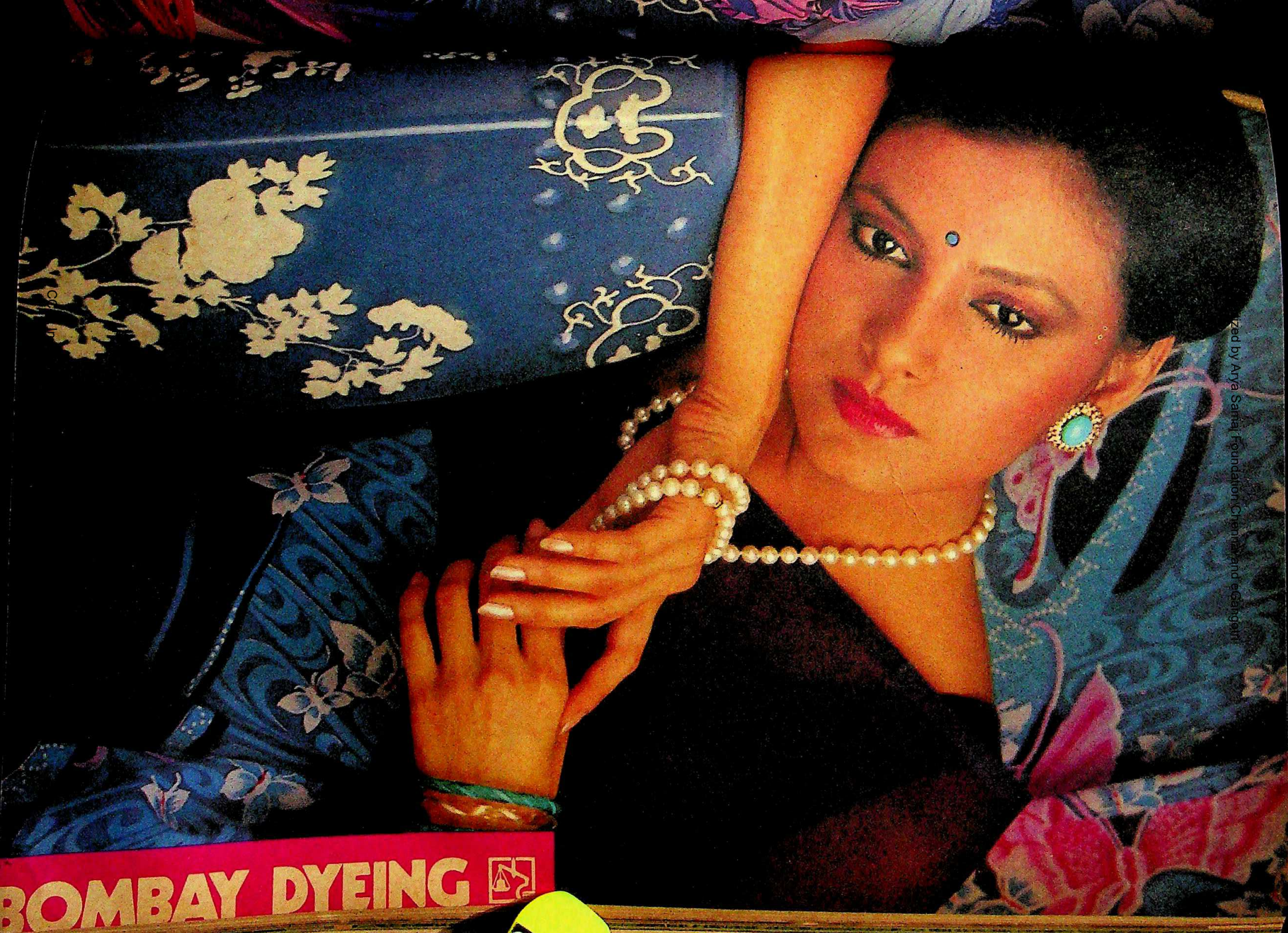

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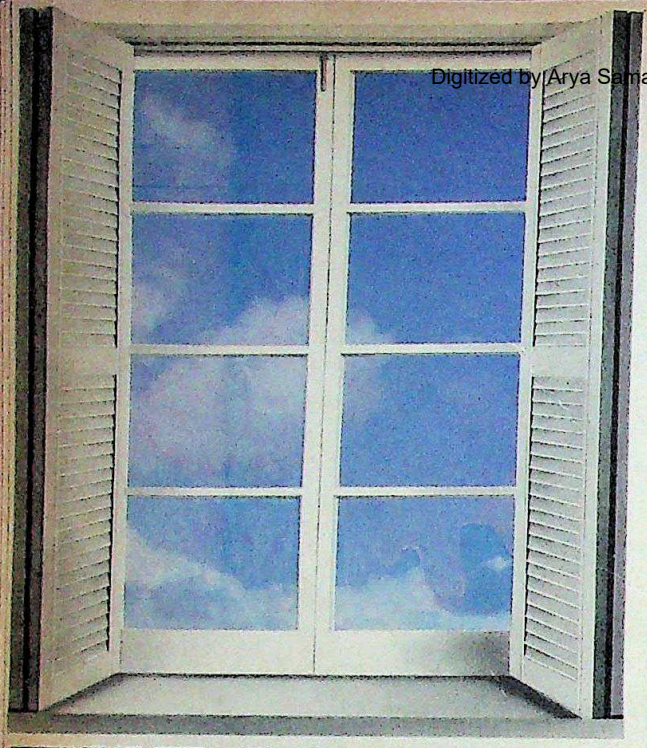

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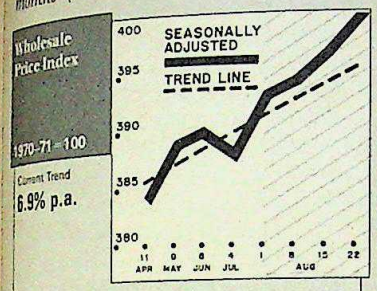
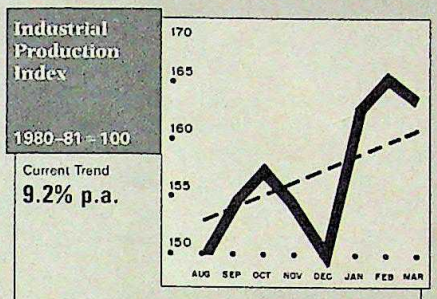
PRICES are continuing to accelerate as the drought is taking inflation into double digits. The only option that the Government now has is to substantially reduce its stocks of foodgrains by auctioning wheat in the open market. And although the industrial sector looks healthy, yet there is little doubt that a recession is just round the corner.

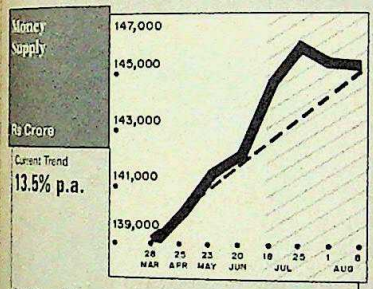
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.



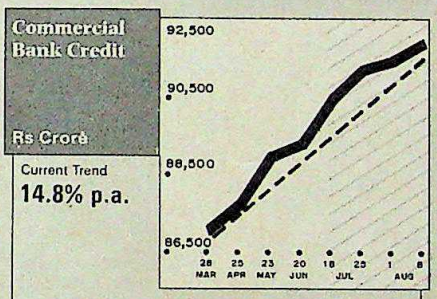
Prices, as anticipated, have begun to accelerate sharply. Over the last fortnight the WPI has increased at an annual rate of over 20 per cent.



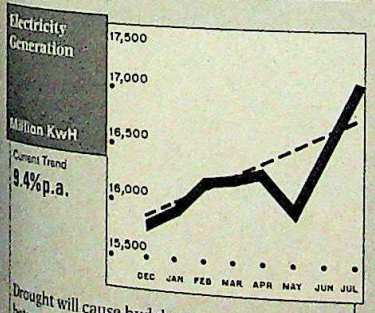
The excellent growth in industry is, unfortunately, not likely to last long. Every previous drought has been followed by recession.



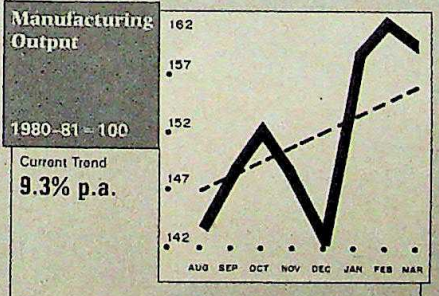
Last fortnight, money supply contracted marginally. With a negative growth in agriculture, money supply needs to be kept in tight control.



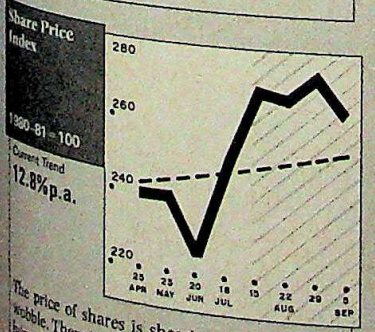
Credit to the commercial sector is maintaining a steady and reasonable growth. The RBI is to be congratulated on a sound credit policy so far.



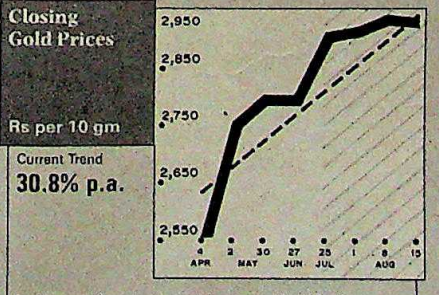
Drought will cause hydel generation to drop by between 3 per cent and 5 per cent. But thermal generation is making good the shortfall.



Contrary to expectations, including the Government's, the final figures now show that manufacturing output accelerated in 1986-87.



The price of shares is showing a tendency to wobble. There is, however, a perceptible underlying upward trend.



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WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in September 1987

	% Growth
Pig Iron	22.09
Chillies	17.61
Oranges	17.46
Cotton Raw	14.46
Turmeric	11.39
Linseed	9.81
Groundnut Seeds	9.33
Bananas	9.19
Bajra	8.57
Barley	8.00
Urad	7.74
Gingelly Seed	7.43
Solvent Extracted Oil	7.27
Maize	7.06
Gingelly Oil	6.56
Linseed Oil	5.66
Hindes Raw	5.24
Moong	5.12
Fish	5.03
Groundnut Oilcake	4.85
Ragi	4.54
Masoor	4.17
Rape and Mustard Seed	3.95
Mustard Oil	3.91
Cotton Yarn	3.77
Gram	3.61
Groundnut Oil	3.08
Silk Raw	2.92
Electricity	2.84
Cotton Seed	2.74
Eggs	2.40
Arhar	2.16
Wheat	2.14
Coir Fibre	2.03
Rice	2.01
Rubber	1.69
Logs Timber Bamboo	1.55
Milk	1.55
Khandsari	1.54
Copper and Alloys	1.47
Pet Crude & Natural Gas	1.44
Meat	1.34
Coal	1.24
Mining Machinery	1.17
Bolts and Nuts	.98
Handloom & Powerloom Products	.89

Of the 139 series considered, 108 of them with a total weight of 68.855 had a positive growth and 31 of them with a total weight of 17.77 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Petroleum Crude Thousand Tonnes, August	2567	2514
Petroleum Refinery Products Thousand Tonnes, August	4313	3786
Letters of Intent Issued Numbers, August	84	70
Industrial Licences Issued Numbers, August	48	47
Call Money Rates Per cent, July	9.66	9.97

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KARNATAKA

A Murderous Feud

Bitter rivalry leads to a lawyer's death

CLUTCHING his lungi high, M.A. Rasheed, a small-time Malayalee advocate, rushed into the Renukacharya college, Bangalore. It was August 16, shortly after 8.00 a.m. Desperately, he urged the cluster of NCC cadets there in broken English for help. Gesticulating, he managed to convey that his life was in terrible danger from *goondas*.

Pitying the trembling man, college watchman Ramanujam, 59, offered to escort him to the Highgrounds Police Station. Describing the auto ride, Ramanujam later told INDIA TODAY: "He was almost insane with fear. Throughout he kept looking back to see if he was being followed." Rasheed told Ramanujam he would be beaten to death by *nammade party* (my party). At the station, Rasheed said he was pursued by *goondas* of his client, P. Sadasivan.

At 5.30 p.m., the police took Rasheed to a nearby lodge as he was too terrified to return to the one where he had been staying. According to lodge staff, Rasheed came to the reception three hours later "trembling with fear" to say he was going back to Kerala.

Two days later, his body was discovered near the tracks about 5 km from Dhanushpet railway station in Tamil Nadu. Lodge receipts and a small pocket telephone diary were recovered from the body. CID sources think the victim was killed first and then placed on the tracks—his nasal bridge was completely smashed and two fingers chopped off.

The public and agitating lawyers of Bangalore suspect that Rasheed was a victim of police torture, indirectly engineered by state Home Minister R.L. Jalappa. The key to this is the bitter rivalry between Jalappa and Rasheed's client P. Sadasivan, also from Pathanamthitta in Kerala.

Sadasivan runs a private capitation fee B.Ed. college in Bangalore. Realising capitation fee colleges were gold-mines, Sadasivan decided to promote a medical college in Kolar as well. But at the eleventh hour, Jalappa highjacked Sadasivan's idea. Sadasivan's acquaintances say he hated Jalappa for stealing his golden goose. This year, he even lost control of the B.Ed. college following a coup by trustees, who Sadasivan suspected were Jalappa's stooges.

The rival faction controlled admissions this year and none of Sadasivan's candidates got in. Rasheed, who was apparently Sadasivan's principal procuring agent, came to Bangalore to ascertain whether students from whom he had collected capitation fees on behalf of Sadasivan had been admitted.

It seems that when he tried to do this on August 14, he was physically manhandled and thrown out, arrested for trespass and assault, and taken to the Highgrounds Police Station. But local advocates got him released on bail.

The next day, he submitted a complaint to the President of the bar association, A.J. Sadasiva, accusing Jalappa of instigating the police to "harass" him in a bid to wreak vengeance on Sadasivan.

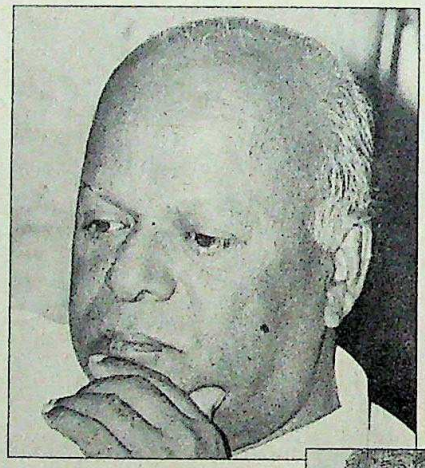
Rasheed's murder was blown up and politicised through an agitation launched by the bar association on August 29. Treating his complaint against the police as a dying declaration, the advocates demanded removal of Jalappa and concerned police officials. Hegde's decision to hand over the investigation to the CBI on September 7 has failed to pacify them since they feel the home minister could still tamper with records.

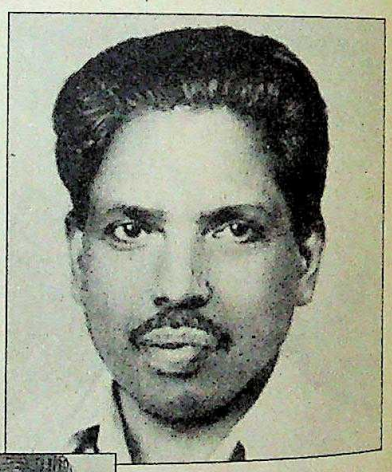
However, there are flaws in the argument which lays the blame at Jalappa. If the police killed him, they would not have left the body with tell tale signs of identification.

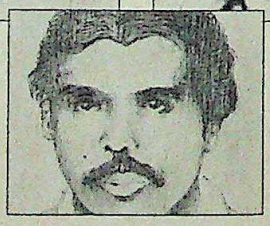
Indeed the case is far from simple. Rasheed checked into Akshaya for seven hours on August 11, while still retaining his room at Sandhya lodge. And all he did was make 35 phone calls. Maybe he was afraid to call from Sandhya lodge, as Sadasivan is a regular guest.

It is also strange that Rasheed accused the police of seizing his brief-case in his complaint when he had actually handed it over to the watchman of TVS electronics, Prasad Babu, before entering the B.Ed college on August 14. He collected it from TVS on August 16.

Also, Rasheed could not possibly have drafted the verbose complaint or the telegrams to Central ministers and officials, which he dashed off on August 15. His English was not good enough. Detectives are examining the possibility of Sadasivan having had a hand.







(Clockwise from top) Jalappa, Sadasivan and Rasheed : rivals

As for Rasheed's allegation of police harassment, it is possible that to hide his involvement with the shady business, he decided to attribute his torn shirt and loosened teeth to "police harassment". Had Rasheed been genuinely assaulted by the Highgrounds police on August 14, he would not have gone back to them for protection two days later. Indeed, the events of August 16 raise the distinct possibility of a classic frame-up.

The motives, exact sequence and executors of the bizarre crime will hopefully be exposed by the CBI investigation. At this juncture all that can be said is that on August 16, the day he was last seen alive, Rasheed was a terrified man.

—ANITA PRATAP

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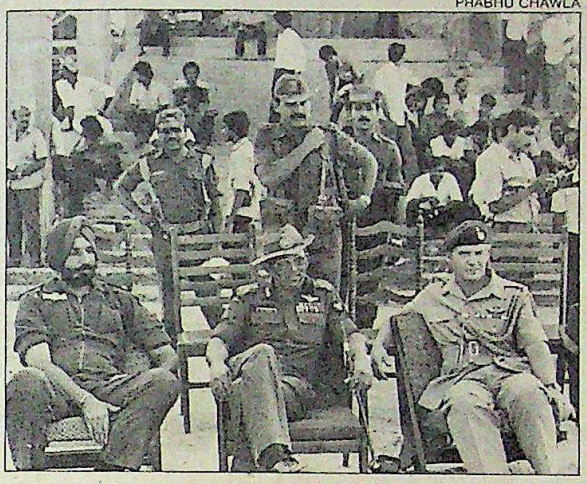
Peace Problems

THE large Tamil population in Britain has been carefully monitoring the effects of the peace accord signed between Sri Lanka and India. Last fortnight, the British home office was reviewing the cases of some of the 150 Tamils who had sought political asylum in the country. The Tamils had stated that they were fleeing persecution in Sri Lanka. The home office, however, now maintains that following the peace accord, the situation has changed and that it is absolutely safe for them to go back. A formidable array of lawyers are representing the Government of Britain for the judicial review of these cases that is due to come up shortly.

PRABHU CHAWLA



British military attache at Jaffna meeting

In addition, the well-coordinated Tamil groups in Britain, who have been in the forefront of a campaign to focus attention on the role of British mercenaries in Sri Lanka, were aghast to see the British military attache's presence in Jaffna at a meeting addressed by Pirabhakaran.

Many Tamils have also voiced concern at the "disturbing tenor" of recent newspaper articles in a section of the British press portraying the Indian Army as an "occupation force". One startling piece in *The Guardian Third World Review*, which was written by an anonymous special correspondent, read like a pamphlet of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—an extremist Sinhala group.

The controversial article argued that India had played the part of Adolf Hitler's Germany in foisting a Sudetenland accord on Sri Lanka. It added that, in effect, India had "reduced Sri Lanka to the status of Sikkim and Bhutan whose external relations are controlled by New Delhi" and concluded saying: "Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic coup is even more spectacular than Hitler's at Munich." The article, which astonished and offended both Sri Lankan Tamils and Indians here, provoked a strong rejoinder from the Indian High Commission in the form of a letter to the editor.

Indian Impressions

THE annual ritual of guessing the short-lists for the most prestigious literary award in Britain—the Booker prize—is scheduled to begin in earnest shortly as publishers begin to submit their choices. In recent years, Indian-born authors and Indian themes have established an outstanding record.

Sara Banerji

The lists for this year, however, figure no Indian authors so far. But one work with an Indian theme and set in Calcutta, is the official entry of Victor Gollancz publishers—*The wedding of Jayanthi Mandel*, by Sara Banerji.

Married to an Indian economist, the author lived in south India for the first 17 years of her marriage. During this period, Sara Banerji also held successful exhibitions of her paintings in New Delhi and Madras.

Now based with her family in Sussex, her second novel has been nominated by her publishers for the literary prize. The novel is set in Calcutta. And is a sprawling kaleidoscopic work that describes the extraordinary events surrounding the arranged marriage of the youngest child of the Mandel clan.

Capturing Cricket

ON the occasion of the forthcoming World Cup, Grindlays Bank is releasing a video documentary titled *Great Moments of Indian Cricket*. The video features reminiscences with Jahangir Khan, who is the sole survivor of India's first-ever test team and Leslie Ames, who was in the opposing English side. Also portrayed are most contemporary Indian test cricketers who have participated in Indian cricket's best moments between 1932 and 1986, such as the first ever test win, the first ever series win over Pakistan, Australia and England, and the World Cup and one-day international triumphs. The video, presented by Ashis Ray, London correspondent of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, is to be released in India next month.

Film Fare

ASIANS in Britain are in for a treat. Next fortnight, Channel-4 will present a new series of 20 programmes focusing on Indian stars and film music, called *Movie Mahal*. Film excerpts of song and dance sequences from over 80 titles will be inter-linked with comments from leading personalities like Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan. The programme *Star Portraits* features Manmohan Desai, Shammi Kapoor, and Naushad amongst others, while *Specials* features Pakistani stars. The most intriguing segment are the four programmes *Between the Lines* that highlights Hindi music from the 1950s. Produced and directed by Nasreen Munni Kabir, Channel-4's Indian film consultant and Poonam Sharma, the poster campaign heralding the series proclaims: "That is entertainment, Bombay style."

PETER CHAPPELL

Dilip Kumar with Kabir in *Movie Mahal*

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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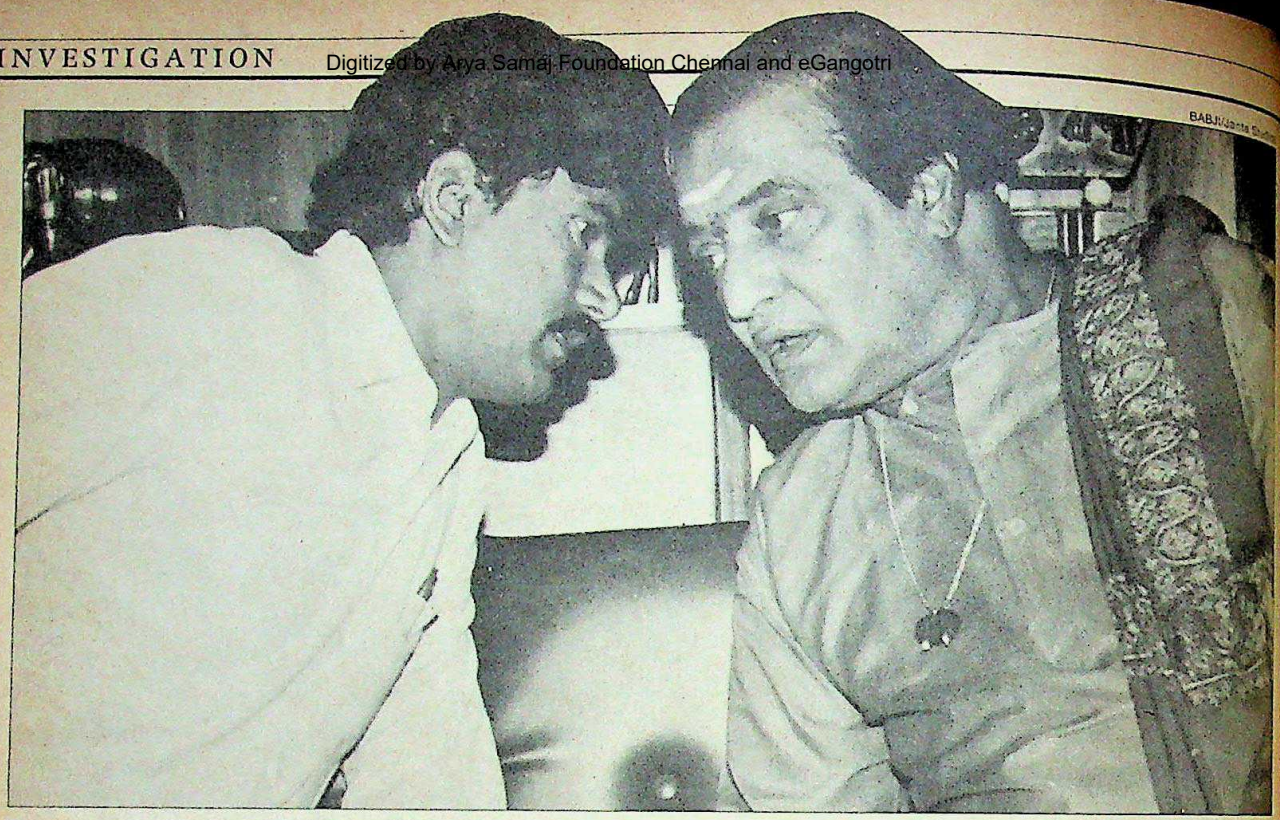


ANDHRA PRADESH

A Family Concern

Corruption charges against the Rama Rao clan mount

EVERYTHING about N.T. Rama Rao attracts attention—his film background, his manner of dress, his very style of politics. So far the 64-year-old matinee idol has ridden all the political waves with aplomb. But the tide is gradually turning. Senior Correspondent AMARNATH K. MENON *and Senior Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *report on the charges that have piled up against Rama Rao.*

IN the demanding art of political theatre, he has no equal. The eyes roll and the teeth are ground together in anger. The clenched fist of the left hand is raised high while the other slices through the air like a karate chop. And the resonant voice intones: "I will see the end of corruption."

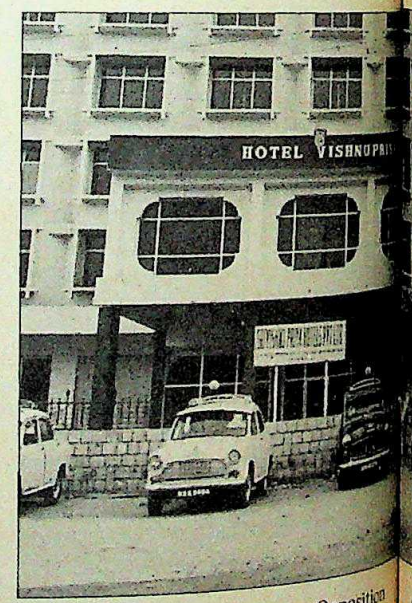
It is a scene with which the people of Andhra Pradesh are familiar. But there is a bitter irony now as chief minister and master showman N.T. Rama Rao rails against corruption. There are as many as four writ petitions against his alleged corruption and misrule being filed by the Congress(I)'s Dronamraju Satyanarayana before the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

The petitions seek the issue of a writ against Rama Rao for dereliction of constitutional duty, and directions to the Central Government to punish him for violation of various laws—including those relating to foreign exchange violation, income tax, wealth tax and anti-corruption. Also demanded is the appointment of a commission under the Public Inquiries Act to probe the "misdeeds, corruption and abuse of authority" by Rama Rao since 1983.

Though the petition is still to be admitted, the court has already served show cause notices to half a dozen parties, including the chief minister and the Central Government. It has also ordered that the petition should be heard for admission by the full bench of seven judges on September 25.

A division bench consisting of Chief Justice K. Bhaskaran and Justice Syed Shah Mohammed Quadri sat through 20 hours of arguments spread over five days over the admissibility of the writ. The case for Satyanarayana was presented by his lawyer, S. Ramachandra Rao. So crucial are the questions of law involved that the court has also asked the Attorney General of India to appear and assist the court.

The legal issue has resurrected allegations in the past—by the Opposition and by civil servants—that Rama Rao has deliberately sidelined honest officials and has gone out of his way to favour his family members. Says the Congress(I)'s K. Rosaiah, a former home minister: "In the four years of Rama Rao's rule, every department of the Government has begun to stink. But what is dangerous is that rules are being twisted for the welfare of the chief minister's family."



In the face of available evidence, the coming legal battle promises to be rivetting. Among other things, Rama Rao has been charged with:

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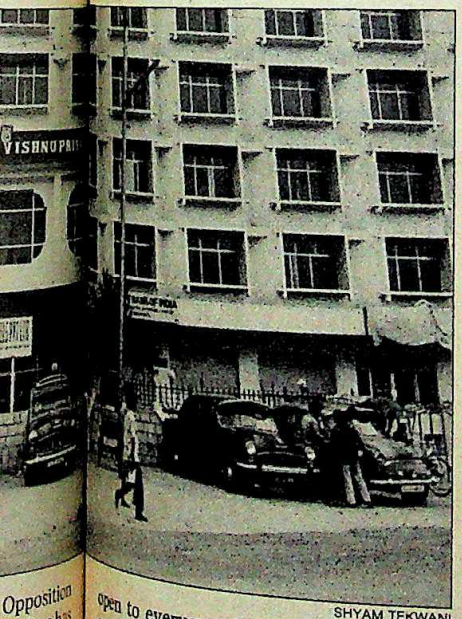
▸ granting exemptions under the Urban Land Ceiling Act (ULCA) for his film studio and property owned by his brother and friends in Hyderabad and elsewhere.

▸ helping his sons-in-law procure industrial licences and in the building and disposal of a hotel.

▸ acquisition of properties by his sons in the state.

Rama Rao dismisses the allegations as being politically motivated, saying that "I am in politics to serve six crore people of the state. Since the Congress(I) can't tolerate our criticism of defence deals, it is raking up these charges to divert attention." And he adds: "I have no time for my sons and sons-in law. My government has not favoured them in any way." Says his son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu: "We don't have foreign accounts from where we can draw money away from the eyes of the people. Our accounts books are

Rama Rao with son-in-law Naidu; (below) hotel that Naidu owned: favouritism



SHYAM TEKWANI

open to everyone. Let there be a public scrutiny of any government decision that has favoured any one of us."

But official records seem to indicate a situation to the contrary. In one of the most glaring cases of official support, the state Government granted land ceiling exemption to Rama Rao's Ramakrishna Studios, situated on more than 11 acres of land. Interestingly, Aedla Narayan Reddy, who had originally sold more than four acres to Ramakrishna Studios in March 1983, was also favoured with an exemption order for his land which was also in excess of ceiling limits.

The Government conceded the requests from Rama Rao's sons and Reddy for exemption from the ULCA because the land was to be used for the development of a horticulture garden for film shooting. The Government order, dated March 3, 1983, stated that the exemption to Reddy "would add to the infrastructure of the film industry which is quite inadequate in the state and would contribute in its development".

THOUGH the Government ordered, in July 1983, that Reddy should surrender the balance land immediately, this was not enforced. Apart from exemption from acquisition, Reddy was later permitted to keep this balance land—just under an acre—left over after his sale to the studio.

But Rama Rao could not develop his horticulture garden in Nacharam without officially merging his seven-acre plot with his new land. In March 1984, Rama Rao's son Jayakrishna applied for exemption of the entire land—more than 11 acres—from land ceiling laws.

The list of specific charges of corruption against the chief minister's family members has grown in length over the years. Many of the cases relate to the blatant violation of urban land ceiling laws to favour a few. Worse, there are few convincing answers to the allegations.

Meanwhile, however, the land had been marked as a residential area under the extended Master Plan of Hyderabad. As the file moved from one office to another for necessary notings, it ran into trouble. The exemption was opposed by the then commissioner for land reforms and urban land ceiling. In his letter dated Febuary 20, 1985, the officer asserted that the horticulture garden did not come under the head of agriculture and the request for exemption could not therefore be accepted.

He was not the only one to have the courage to stand up to the chief minister. Earlier, N.K.P. Naidu, the then special officer and competent authority for urban land ceiling cases had felt: "There was no agricultural activity in the land and a few ornamental plantations do not suggest horticulture for the purposes of exempting the land from urban ceilings." After he wrote this in October 1984, Naidu was replaced by Y. Rajagopal Singh who promptly granted the exemption.

But the Commissioner of Land Reforms and Urban Land Ceilings R. Kuppa Rao put another spoke in the wheel by sending the file to the Revenue Department stating that exemption need not be granted. But Rama Rao still had an ace up his saffron sleeve. He had a *kuteeram* built and moved house to Nacharam. While asking for exemption, Jayakrishna told the officials the *kuteeram* may be treated as a farmhouse. The chief minister's office finally cleared the application.

N. Trivikrama Rao, the chief minister's brother, was similarly favoured. Like his other family members, Triviki Rao also had surplus land in Vijayawada which was susceptible for acquisition under the ULCA. But on October 18, 1983, a government order was issued exempting an area of 2,849 sq metres from the ULCA because, "it was absolutely essential to run the above industry engaged in the construction of a cinema complex called Kalyana Chakravarthy Galaxy Picture House". Oddly, the order did not specify what industry it referred to. According to local laws, no cinema house can be constructed if the size of the plot is less than an acre—or 3,700 sq metres—and yet the exemption was granted.

In Tirupati, Rama Rao's son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu, and his partners bought a prime piece of land during 1981-82 for the construction of a hotel, Vishnu Priya. State financial institutions and banks gave liberal loans and the local civic authorities cleared the plans within a few weeks of their submission. But what was clearly irregular was the re-sale—in 1985—of the company by Chandrababu to another group of people. The transaction took place without the prior approval of the financial institutions which had a mortgage on the property. Chandrababu claims that he sold the hotel complex of 140 rooms for the paltry sum of Rs 30 lakh. But the market value at the point of sale of the property was over Rs 3 crore. What is more, the hotel was allowed to function without satisfying municipal laws.

Rama Rao's youngest son-in-law,

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N.T. RAMA RAO

"I have nothing to hide"

Though N.T. Rama Rao is trying to counter charges against him by attacking the prime minister for his role in defence deals, this fails to conceal the chief minister's concern about his fading popularity. He recently spoke to Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *and Senior Correspondent* AMARNATH K. MENON. *Excerpts:*

Q. *How will you counter the allegations of corruption?*

A. I have appointed judicial commissions to look into all the allegations. Let those who have raised these issues give evidence there. We will not spare anybody. I was king of filmdom. I have entered politics only to serve the people, not to make money.

Q. *But you and your relations have been accused of misusing the government machinery.*

A. Only people with no status are indulging in this kind of useless talk. They will not stand by their allegations. I have nothing to hide.

Q. *But your sons-in-law have benefited from government decisions.*

A. None of my sons-in-law depends on me for favours. I have no time for them. Everybody else is favouring his relations. Isn't that an insult?

Q. *But your sons-in-law became active in business and politics only after you became chief minister.*

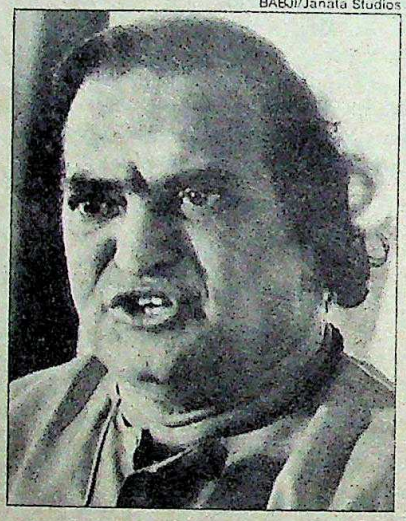
A. NTR will never do this kind of thing. Do you know it was Union Industry Minister J. Vengala Rao who offered me 20 acres of government land for the development of a studio? But I didn't take it. I built the studio on my own. The same person is now making allegations against us. It is all politically motivated.

Q. *But your brother was exempted under the Urban Land Ceiling Act* (ULCA) *on the plea that the land was for industrial use.*

A. I challenge anyone to prove this. I will resign or Baga Reddy who made this allegation first should resign. They want to hide the Fairfax and Bofors scandals and can't tolerate our criticism of Rajiv Gandhi.

> "I have appointed judicial commissions to look into all the allegations. Let those who have raised these issues give evidence there. We will not spare anybody."

BABJI/Janata Studios

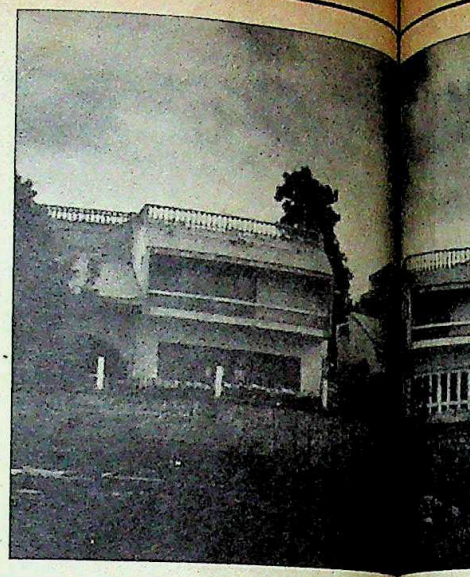


Q. *Your record in implementing the* ULCA *is dismal.*

A. Our record is better than that of many other states. Ours is the first government to decide to auction the surplus land to promote house construction. If some irregular exemptions have been made, the commission will inquire.

Q. *What good work has been done?*

A. I am dedicated to the development of the tribal areas. We have already done a lot by supplying cheap rice to the poor and by fixing responsibility on corrupt officials. But for development we need more money. And the Central Government is not giving enough even for immediate drought relief. Rajiv doesn't have time for us.



Naren Rajen, a US-educated electronics engineer, is yet another beneficiary of the Government's munificence. He was selected to be a partner by the state Government in a Rs 4.5-crore project for the manufacture of push button telephone instruments. Rajen insists that he was chosen by the Government purely on merit. But the state Government did not, as is usually the case, insist on a minimum performance guarantee—in the form of a bank guarantee—from Rajen for the project.

The Rama Rao Government has also favoured a group of industrialists from Vijayawada by sparing their land from being acquired. What is more, the land use was changed in March 1985 from residential to commercial, greatly profiting the businessmen. In April 1987, the entire 60 acres was exempted from the ULCA to construct a business complex. Significantly, the two orders were issued after the assembly elections in 1985 and at the time of the mandal elections in 1987.

Even Telugu Desam members have accused the state Government of involvement in dubious land deals. The most well-known case is the curious one involving the fixation of compensation—Rs 3.5 crore—at a high rate to A.S. Krishna and Co of Guntur for 29.15 acres of land acquired by the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (HUDA). By a strange turn of circumstances, the Hyderabad Agricultural and Marketing Committee (HAMC), was forced to purchase the plot although it actually wanted less expensive land. The allegation is that Rama Rao compelled HAMC to buy it to favour the Guntur company.

The story began in 1979 when HUDA issued a notification for land acquisition

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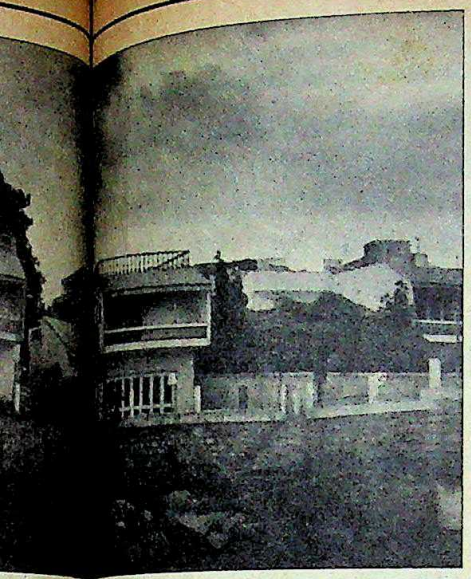

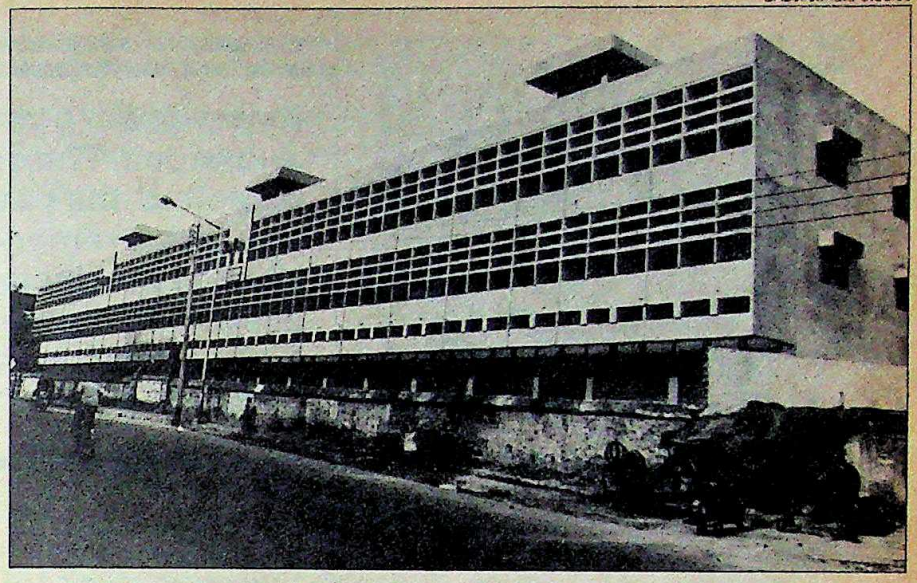

(Left) House of Rama Rao's son and Ramakrishna Studios: new property

from A.S. Krishna and Co. Two years later, in mid-1981, the company arrived at an agreement to sell the entire land to the Tirumala Cooperative Housing Society for Rs 90 lakh. The covenant clearly stated that it would be the society's responsibility to see that the land acquisition order was withdrawn and that it would not be covered under the ULCA. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the company entered into transactions for the land with another cooperative and then entered into a fresh deal with the Tirumala Cooperative Housing Society. But the point is that the company did not expect more than Rs 90 lakh for its land.

IN1983—the year that Rama Rao came to power—A.S. Krishna and Co went to court challenging HUDA's rate of compensation of Rs 42,000 per acre. The company approached the Andhra Pradesh High Court which quashed the HUDA award. And when HUDA referred the case to the first additional judge, city civil court, Hyderabad, the judge enhanced compensation from Rs 42,000 per acre to an astronomical Rs 7.74 lakh per acre in August 1985.

The logical step for HUDA then would have been to appeal to a higher court against the compensation decided. But instead of that, less than a fortnight later, Rama Rao hurriedly called a meeting to discuss the shifting of the fruit market in Hyderabad. He wanted it moved from the Moazam Jahi area in Hyderabad to Gaddianaram—where the company had succeeded in getting an order for dramatically higher compensation. In effect, he wanted HAMC to buy the land at the rate of Rs 15 lakh per acre, something the organisation wasn't interested in. Said HAMC Chairman Mohan Reddy, a former Telugu Desam fund raiser, who has now fallen out with Rama Rao: "Though the market committee had asked for cheaper government land, the chief minister asked me to buy this land by putting in Rs 2 crore of HAMC. He assured me that a Rs 1.50-crore loan to make up for the deficit would be released. The chief minister has done this to benefit A.S. Krishna and Co."

A few crucial question relating to the land deal continue to go unanswered:

► When the lower court in Hyderabad had decided on a compensation rate that was extraordinarily high, why didn't HUDA go in appeal against it? Does this indicate that the Government was not interested in getting the rate reduced?

► When there was evidence that A.S. Krishna and Co had been willing to sell the land for Rs 90 lakh, why wasn't this vital evidence presented in court? It could have affected the figure of compensation that the court decided on.

► Did the Government deliberately ignore the long-term implications of quietly paying the compensation without further appeal? It could result in the Government having to pay enormously high compensation in the A.S. Krishna and similar Hyderabad cases which are lying in court.

As if the land deals were not enough, the Rama Rao family is also under a cloud for not having filed income tax and wealth tax returns in time and for making voluntary disclosures under the various amnesty schemes offered by the Central Government. During the Emergency, he made a voluntary disclosure of his concealed income and avoided penal action. Last year, six of the 20 assessees of the Rama Rao clan again made voluntary disclosures of their income under another scheme. While the chief minister himself disclosed a Rs 7.50-lakh income, his other family members revealed an amount of over Rs 51.50 lakh. As a result of these disclosures, the total income tax and wealth tax arrears have gone up to Rs 45 lakh. But tax officials feel that the concealed income may be much greater, considering the large number of assessees in the family.

The ruling family has filed income tax returns under 20 different names and categories, including "minor" and "bigger" Hindu Undivided Family. But according to the income tax investigation, the number of properties acquired by family members during the last four years is truly stunning. These include agricultural land in Hyderabad, four houses in Hyderabad and Madras. But their returns state that none of the houses cost them more than Rs 4 lakh to construct. This is extraordinary, considering that two family houses in the state capital have 10 rooms, all of them expensively done up. Says a senior income tax official: "Whatever be their assets and income, one must say that the family members are all very cooperative when it comes to voluntary disclosure."

Whatever the outcome of the legal investigation into the myriad charges against him, the most immediate effect is likely to be a dilution of his attack on Rajiv Gandhi's Government at the Centre. If the Congress(I) goes on an all-out offensive which reveals more skeletons in the chief minister's cupboard, it will only prove yet again that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

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Jaiprakash Gaur
Chairman-cum-Managing Director

"Hydro power potential in the country is enormous. The day its full potential is exploited the power scenario would undergo a remarkable change... What is needed is a decisive approach and a push to implement all the hydroelectric projects that have been conceived." — On Construction Industry

Friends:

It is with great pleasure and happiness that I welcome you all to this Annual General Meeting of Jaiprakash Industries Limited, which is the first after the public issue was made in November 1986.

THE YEAR 1986

Amalgamation

During the year, Jaiprakash Associates Private Limited, a leading civil engineering construction company, was amalgamated into your company and the name was changed to Jaiprakash Industries Limited. This was a deliberate decision, in view of the advantages that would flow both to the Cement Division and the Engineering Division. Being capital intensive, financial results of a million tonne capacity cement plant cannot be bright in the initial years. With the merger, the picture would undergo a distinct change. Further, with the enhancement of the capital base, the construction division will get more opportunities to participate in larger tenders in the field of construction both in India and abroad.

Operations

The year 1986 had been a year of trials and tribulations for your company. Major contracts which we indicated to you as being in the pipeline, did not fructify due to various reasons. Special attention and efforts were the need of the hour to commission your one million tonne capacity cement plant.

In 1986, your company completed the World Bank aided Karjan Dam 6 months ahead of schedule. Construction of blocks 1 to 20 in Sardar Sarovar Dam and two adit tunnels of Indira Sarovar (Bodhghat) Hydroelectric Project got completed. The progress of work on rockfill dams and link channels of Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Project and at Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was satisfactory. Your company obtained the Rs. 100 crore Chamera Dam and allied jobs in Himachal Pradesh during the year. Abroad, your company completed the works of contract No. 123/124 in Baghdad. The work on Rs. 251 crore Basra Sewerage Project Stage III in Iraq had to be suspended due to war conditions and it will be resumed shortly. As you are aware, the cement plant was commissioned in November 1986 and commercial production started in December, 1986. **It is to the credit of the devoted team your company has in the cement plant,that they commissioned this plant in 27 months. This is the first time that a million tonne capacity cement plant has been commissioned in such a short period.**

Financial results

The Accounts, Directors' Report and Auditors' Report for the year 1986 are already with you and you would have noted the successful performance and growth achieved by the Company in the year 1986. **You would have also noted that the accounts for the year 1986 show a net profit of Rs. 14.26 crores (after transfer to Investment Allowance Reserve and after making provision for taxation).** However, no dividend has been proposed. I would like to share my thoughts with you on this matter. **Your Directors have taken into account the fact that the allotment for the Public Issue was made on 30th December, 1986 and, therefore, any declaration of dividend for 1986 would not have been worthwhile for the shareholders who have subscribed to the said Public Issue.** Since the Cement Plant is a highly capital intensive project, the depreciation and interest charges in the initial period are bound to be heavy. I am glad to say that your Cement Plant was not only commissioned in a record period of 27 months but will also reach optimum production level in a comparatively shorter period than normally required in such plants. Until then, it needs support. Major projects in the Engineering Division got completed in 1986 but new projects for which tenders were submitted and your company had qualified long ago, took considerable time to be awarded. It is only recently that these new jobs were awarded. By the very nature of such projects, these have a long mobilisation period before they start generating surplus. Because of the satisfactory working of the Cement Plant and an excellent position of new contracts already awarded, your company is in a confident position for the future.

THE YEAR 1987

Engineering Division

The year 1987 started on an extremely positive note. Rs. 520 crores worth of new jobs, namely the World Bank aided Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Dam. The World Bank aided Underground River Bed Power House of the same project and the Lakhwar and Vyasi Dams were awarded to your company. This was between April and July, 1987. Thus, today your Engineering Division has secured orders worth Rs. 943 crores which will take at least 6/7 years for completion.

With the thrust in development projects, your company can expect a reasonable share from them in the coming years. Your company is seriously considering technological tie-ups in advanced and sophisticated technologies of construction with a view to enlarge the scope of activity and to maintain its prime position in the field of Civil Engineering.

Cement Division

The cement plant has been in production since December, 1986. In the last three months, the cement plant

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"The country cannot easily forget the cement scarcity phase it underwent. It should remain as a bad dream and should not be allowed to recur." — On Cement Industry

Speech of Shri Jaiprakash Gaur, Chairman – cum – Managing Director, at the 4th Annual General Meeting held on 31.8.87.

has achieved 72% of capacity. It is with great satisfaction I announce that the cement plant will in August achieve a capacity utilisation of 95%, in cement. I congratulate the team of the Cement Division for the excellent job they are doing. The quality of **SUPERPLUS JAYPEE CEMENT** is very good and has been received well. It is one of the top brands in the market.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Construction Industry

In view of your company's specialisation in hydro electric and river valley projects I want to share with you some of my thoughts on the future of this facet of Indian construction industry. The advantages of hydropower are too well known to be recounted. Its potential in the country is enormous. The day its full potential is exploited the power scenario would undergo a remarkable change. Necessary investigations have been carried out and the potential hydropower projects have been identified. Today, with the improved knowledge of geology and modern methods of construction, implementation can be faster and hence investment can be lower. What is needed is a decisive approach and a push to implement all the hydro-electric projects that have been conceived. This would pay for itself in the long run and the country would benefit immensely.

Cement Industry

Contrary to the firm belief that 100 million tonnes of cement would be needed by the turn of the century there are lurking doubts in the minds of entrepreneurs to invest further in the cement industry. This arises from the marginal surplus situation prevailing today and the lack of 12% post tax return promised to the cement industry in September 1977. Thrust in the development projects would obviously increase the demand for cement. Concerted effort to reach self-sufficiency in housing would also trigger the cement demand but here the Government has to take a conscious decision to adopt system housing technologies like low cost prefab structures. Simultaneously Urban Land Ceiling Act and the Rent Control Act would need to be given a second look to ensure adequate incentive to entrepreneurs and professional house builders to go in for massive housing programmes, and at the same time without sacrificing the spirit with which these enactments were made. Coming to the reasonable return on investment in cement industry, a number of representations have been made by the Cement Manufacturers' Association and it is hoped that the Government will take cognisance of the same and take the much needed corrective measures to ensure continued and unabated investment in the industry. The country cannot easily forget the cement scarcity phase it underwent. It should remain as a bad dream and should not be allowed to recur.

COMMITMENT

On this momentous occasion and in the 40th year of independence, I assure every one of you that your company will, at every given opportunity, true to its motto, 'Commitment to Nation Building' contribute its mite towards nation building. Fortunately, your company, by virtue of its activities, has more such opportunities. This will be the guiding spirit of your company in the years to come and its way of paying homage to the millions of our countrymen who sacrificed everything for the country's political and economic independence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I conclude, on behalf of the Directors on the Board and myself, I express my grateful thanks for the cooperation and assistance extended to us by all the concerned agencies of the Governments of India, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, Financial Institutions, Banks, National Hydroelectric Power Corporation and Visakhapatnam Steel Project but for which, our achievement would not have been possible. I also acknowledge the enormous contribution made by equipment suppliers, consultants and other agencies who rose to the occasion in commissioning the cement plant. Thanks are also due to the investing public for the confidence reposed in us. The company's performance is totally dependent upon the team of executives and workmen the company possesses. Your company has been very fortunate to have a committed and devoted team in both the divisions. I compliment them for the very good job being done by them. Finally, my special thanks to all of you who have made this meeting meaningful by your presence. In conclusion, I extend to every member of the Jaiprakash Industries family my very best wishes for a happy and prosperous future.

Lucknow
31st August,1987

JAIPRAKASH INDUSTRIES LIMITED

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the 4th Annual General Meeting.

LINTAS (DELHI) JIL 44

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KANCHI MATH

The Swami Returns

Former head receives a tumultuous welcome

IT was not the return of the prodigal, but this home-coming caused as much joy. On September 9, lakhs of devotees welcomed the return of Jayendra Saraswathi to the Kanchi Kamakoti Math in Tamil Nadu, over which he had presided for three decades before his mysterious disappearance 17 days earlier. The 54-year-old leader's dedicated social involvement as Sankaracharya of the math earned him immense popularity, if also his share of controversy.

In fact by all accounts, that is precisely why he had to renounce his position. Compared with earlier Sankaracharyas of the Kanchi Math, Jayendra Saraswathi kept a much higher profile. His predecessor, 94-year-old Parmacharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, for instance, had a retiring style.

Jayendra Saraswathi had plunged headlong into the rough and tumble of everyday life, strongly pleading for better temple administration in the face of the Dravidian movement against Brahminism. Describing Sanskrit as his father tongue and Tamil as his mother tongue, he took on DMK President M. Karunanidhi in a heated war of words. And it was such activism that reportedly led to the tension between him and the Parmacharya, culminating in his sudden and unannounced departure on August 23.

Three days later, the Sankaracharya emerged in Talacauvery, the source of the river Cauvery, in the Kodagu district of Karnataka. But the anxiety of his devotees and his attachment to the Parmacharya, were too strong to ignore and before long, the rotund but brisk swami returned. Meanwhile, since the seat of the math could not remain unoccupied, his chosen successor, 18-year-old Swami Vijayendra Saraswathi had been anointed as the 70th Sankaracharya and 'Peetathipathi'.

The first thing the swami did on reaching Kanchi was to meet the Parmacharya and explain his leaving the math. The two Sankaracharyas were closeted for two hours. But Jayendra Saraswathi said he would disclose his future plans only on Vijayadasami, October 2. Now, as he is no more the head of the math, he will have a longer rope for his socio-religious activities. The Paramacharya has also apparently blessed his programme—reportedly a nationalist movement which would include a swadeshi campaign, a fight to improve temple administration and to promote Hindu missionary activities catering to all Indians.

That he commands vast public support was evident from the welcome he received. While devotees chanted: "Jaya Jaya Sankara, Hara Hara Sankara" to herald the return of their religious guru, his familiar smiling face and saffron robe-clad figure moved many to tears. S. Kamakshi, a 40-year-old housewife whose family has been devoted to the Kanchi Math for generations, sighed: "We felt orphaned when the news of swamiji's disappearance came. Now that he has come back we feel immensely relieved." Added another: "After Gandhiji's death, this was the first time we wept. It is a tremendous relief to see him back." And the heavy downpour in Kanchi on the day of his return did not dampen the enthusiasm of the crowds milling through the narrow flooded streets. And the police had to wield their lathis only too often.

Said Jayendra Saraswathi in response to this overwhelming reception: "Once a Sankaracharya is always a Sankaracharya. The status of a Sankaracharya can't be taken away from you."

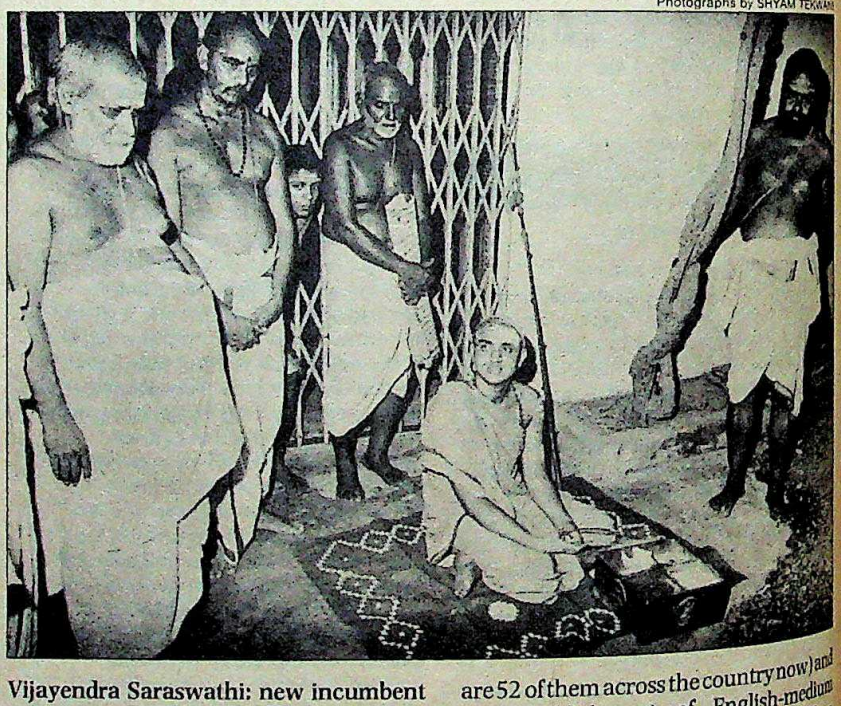
And his popularity was not simply the due of a math head. As he expressed it: "Unlike other religious gurus, I have always mixed with common people. I have listened to all their problems—their family problems, their money problems. When we religious gurus point the way to spiritual salvation, we should also tell people how to solve their economic problems. I also feel that we should inculcate in our people a strong sense of nationality."

Not surprisingly, therefore, among those present was 40-year-old Khader Mohammed, a Kanchi taluk office employee. "I am a Muslim, but I have been a long-time devotee of Swami Jayendra Saraswathi," he explained. Jayendra Saraswathi has been involved in the construction of Hindu mission hospitals (there are 52 of them across the country now) and the establishment of English-medium schools, at which the emphasis is on Indian tradition and culture. He has also put his shoulder to the social reform wheel, throwing his weight behind the fight against untouchability and social inequity.

He is likely to continue along the same road now. While his precise plans are not known, he has ruled out return to Talacauvery, and categorically stated he was not going to north India. He does not intend to do the disappearing act again either: "I have already administered a shock treatment to my devotees and I would not like to repeat it."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Kancheepuram

Photographs by SHYAM TEKKAM



Vijayendra Saraswathi: new incumbent

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JAYENDRA SARASWATHI

Home Coming

SWAMI Jayendra Saraswathi, 54, the 69th Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math in Kancheepuram, has been 'peetathipathi' of the math for three decades. He is a rare religious leader who interacts with the public and involves himself in social reform movements, which has endeared him to millions of his devotees. After his three-week sojourn in Talacauvery, Jayendra Saraswati returned to Kanchi last fortnight. Despite his avowed reticence on his future plans, and having renounced his position as math head, the Sankaracharya spoke to Senior Correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI. Excerpts:

Q. Why did you feel the need to renounce your position as Peetathipathi and disappear to Talacauvery?

A. It is all over now. What more is there to say?

Q. Have you discussed your plans with the Paramacharya?

A. Yes, he knows my programme.

Q. Will social reform be part of your future programme?

A. Some reasons for my leaving were that I wanted to involve myself in social issues like the removal of untouchability and inequality.

Q. Is there any significance to your giving up being Peetathipathi?

A. Once a Peetathipathi is always a Peetathipathi. Positions are important only in politics. Spiritual work can be done in whatever position one is in.

Q. Can you give any indication of the plan of action you propose to announce on Vijayadasami?

A. Everybody who wants to join my movement should read Aditya Hirudayam. It was something Sage Agasthya taught Lord Rama. It will be a programme where all Indians, not only Hindus, can take part.

It involves spirituality, consciousness of our national culture, and economics in terms of the improvement of the poor people.

The first priority is to instil self-confidence. Most Indians live their lives plagued by doubts. They leave their homes, doubtful as to whether they will reach their destinations at all.

Don't our doctors operate on their patients with confidence? In our professional lives we have a lot of confidence which we lack in personal life.

Q. Can you dilate more on the salient features of your programme?

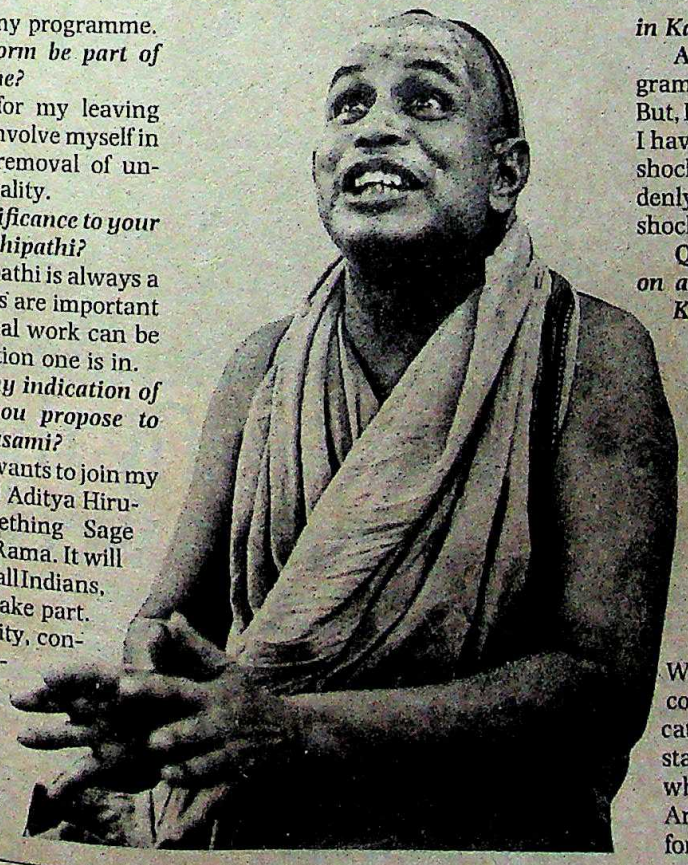
A. In simple terms, I hope to usher in a revolution. I have the confidence it will come about. The programme will emphasise on rural areas. It will be based on Indian culture and tradition.

It is because of the lack of a cultural background that some of our political programmes are failing. JP's (Jayaprakash Narayan) programme did not work as there wasn't any cultural base. V.P. Singh is trying to do something to clean political life now, but that will also not succeed without this cultural underpinning.

Q. What do you think about the administration of temples now?

A. Temples were built by great people who had the noble aim of public prosperity and public health. But in independent India, people have lost respect for temples. The 'sarkar' has destroyed our temples. Temples are being exploited now for commercial and not cultural development. And I am talking not only about Tamil Nadu but the whole country. Temples are getting destroyed due to politics. Our programme, that I will announce, has nothing to do with politics. Its aim will be to generate an awakening among the common people. However, the results of my broad-based programme may affect politics.

"Once a peetathipathi is always a peetathipathi. Positions and status are important only in politics. Spiritual work can always be done in whatever position you are in."



Q. What has been the reaction to your return?

A. People know that if a religious leader makes a sacrifice, renouncing his position as head of a math, he will give something in return. With this faith people are coming to see me now.

Q. Will you be staying on in Kancheepuram in future?

A. I will announce my future programme only on Vijayadasami Day. But, I am not returning to Talacauvery. I have given my people and devotees a shock treatment by going away suddenly. I am not going to give the same shock treatment again.

Q. Is it true that you could not carry on as a religious activist under the Kanchi math's discipline, which is why you went away?

A. There is a difference between other religious leaders and the Kanchi math. Others have not been interacting with people. They have been talking of virtues and sins, rewards and punishments in future births. But in the Kanchi math we say people should lead wholesome lives here and now.

Certainly we are activists. We have started 52 hospitals in the country, Hindu mission hospitals, catering to all Indians. We have also started English medium schools where we teach children that A is for Arjuna and B is for Brahma. And I is for India and not Indira.

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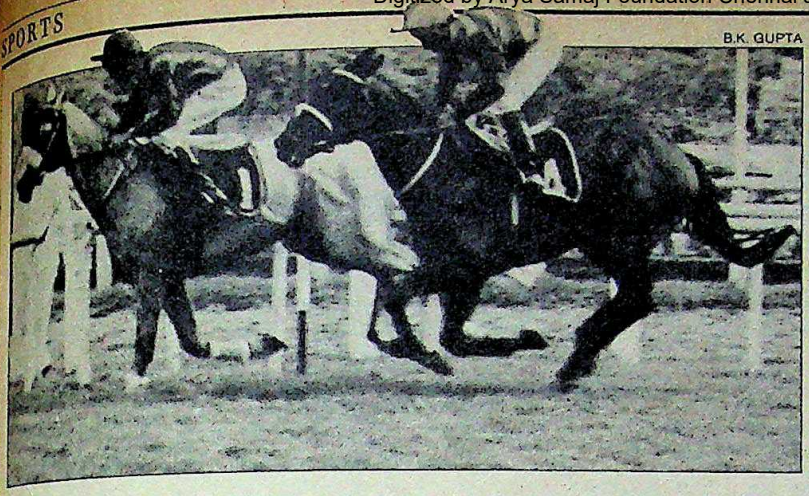

B.K. GUPTA

Disco Prince (right) in his last race

HORSE RACING

Death on the Track

A scandal errupts as a favourite is poisoned

IN a book by Dick Francis, the ex-jockey and now best-selling author of thrillers on the horse-racing world, it would have been a perfectly plausible plot. A heavily-backed favourite loses a race and collapses and dies the next day. The trainer, suspecting foul play, calls in the police who discover that the horse had been poisoned. Three men, including a bookie and the former head syce (groom) of the racing centre are arrested.

In the Indian horse-racing circuit, such extremes have never been reached or even contemplated—till Disco Prince, the 5-year-old bay and favourite in the recently run Stewards Gold Cup in Bangalore lost a race he was heavily-tipped to win. It was not till the next day, after the horse suddenly collapsed and died, that the first hoofbeats of the scandal were heard. The subsequent events, which proved that the horse had been poisoned in his stable before the race, is a scandal that has been rocking the Indian racing world.

Neither the trainer N.A. Ponnappa nor the jockey V. Shinde was uneasy about Disco Prince the day of the 2400-metre race. The bay, the trainer recollected, looked fresh and in fine form, his coat glowing in the afternoon sun. But Disco Prince lost the race to Persepolis on whom the bookmakers had given odds of 8 to 1. Ponnappa still suspected nothing till the next morning when the horse developed high temperature, started vomitting, purging and bleeding from the nose. Before the vet could be called, Disco Prince collapsed and died.

It was only then that Ponnappa smelt foul play. Having taken over the training of the horse just three months earlier, the trainer had put his "life and soul into making it a class-I horse." Owned by former Punjab governor Sardar H.R. Brar, Disco Prince had last won a race in Hyderabad two years ago before developing knee and shoulder problems. But realising the horse's class, Ponnappa tenaciously worked on Disco Prince. It's effortless run in the Chief Justice Cup race last July, where it finished a close third, excited the attention of everybody, not least its jockey Shinde, who opted to ride the horse in the Stewards Cup Race race which he was absolutely confident of winning.

But the events as they unfolded has exposed the biggest scandal in Indian racing history. The symptoms shown by the ill-fated horse prompted Ponnappa to demand a police inquiry. A week later, the police arrested three persons—Noor Mohammad, a private bookmaker, William Hunter ex-jamadar (chief of syces) at the Bangalore Turf Club (BTC) and Gangaram Dhondu Bharge, currently employed syce at the stables the groom in charge of Disco Prince. They were charged under Section 429 of the IPC—maiming animals—which can draw a fine or sentence up to five years if convicted. While Mohammad and Hunter were released on bail, Gangaram is still in judicial custody. A charge-sheet is yet to be filed as the forensic report on the analysis of poison given is awaited.

Gangaram and Hunter have, however, both confessed to the crime. Earlier this year, Hunter, a jamadar to another trainer Padmanabhan, was dismissed for shady activities. According to Hunter's story, he was promised Rs 5,000 by Mohammad, proprietor of Noor Stores in Bangalore's Russel Market, to administer a dose of opium mixed with some chemicals to "slow down" Disco Prince for the race. According to police sources, Noor Mohammad is a race addict who admitted to having lost a lot of money in betting. It is not known how much he staked on Persepolis the winner but at 8 to 1 odds, heavy backers of the horse could have made a fortune. The day before the event, Hunter bribed Gangaram with Rs 200 to mix the chemicals in the horse's morning feed.

The plan, however, went somewhat awry. Gangaram, a heavy drinker who was seen staggering into the stables the night before with two bottles of whisky, forgot to mix the chemicals in the morning feed because of a hangover. But an hour before the race, the groom administered the chemicals orally—there were blisters in the horse's mouth the next morning. Consequently neither trainer nor jockey detected any kind of sluggishness before or during the race.

BTC sources believe that it was possible the chemicals administered were not intended to kill Disco Prince, merely drug it enough to slow it down during the race. Reliable sources revealed that the poison dose was so strong, that even the flies buzzing around the horse's carcass while it was kept in the government veterinary hospital for a post-mortem dropped dead.

Disco Prince's death raises serious questions about the gross lack of security in the Indian turf clubs and the temptation it offers for potential mischief. Said an agitated BTC member: "Security has to be tightened to prevent such crimes in future." But that seems easier said than done. There are 1,100 stables in BTC which are generally full during the Bangalore racing season. And, as BTC Chief Executive Arshad Ali Khan remarked: "We have 1,500 card-holding employees including syces, riding boys and farriers. How is it possible for us to provide security to each horse? The security of each stable should be the concern of the concerned trainers." Trainers in turn say they lack the facilities to arrange for round-the-clock security. Someone will have to take the responsibility or the racing world will continue to be rocked by such scandals.

—ANITA PRATAP

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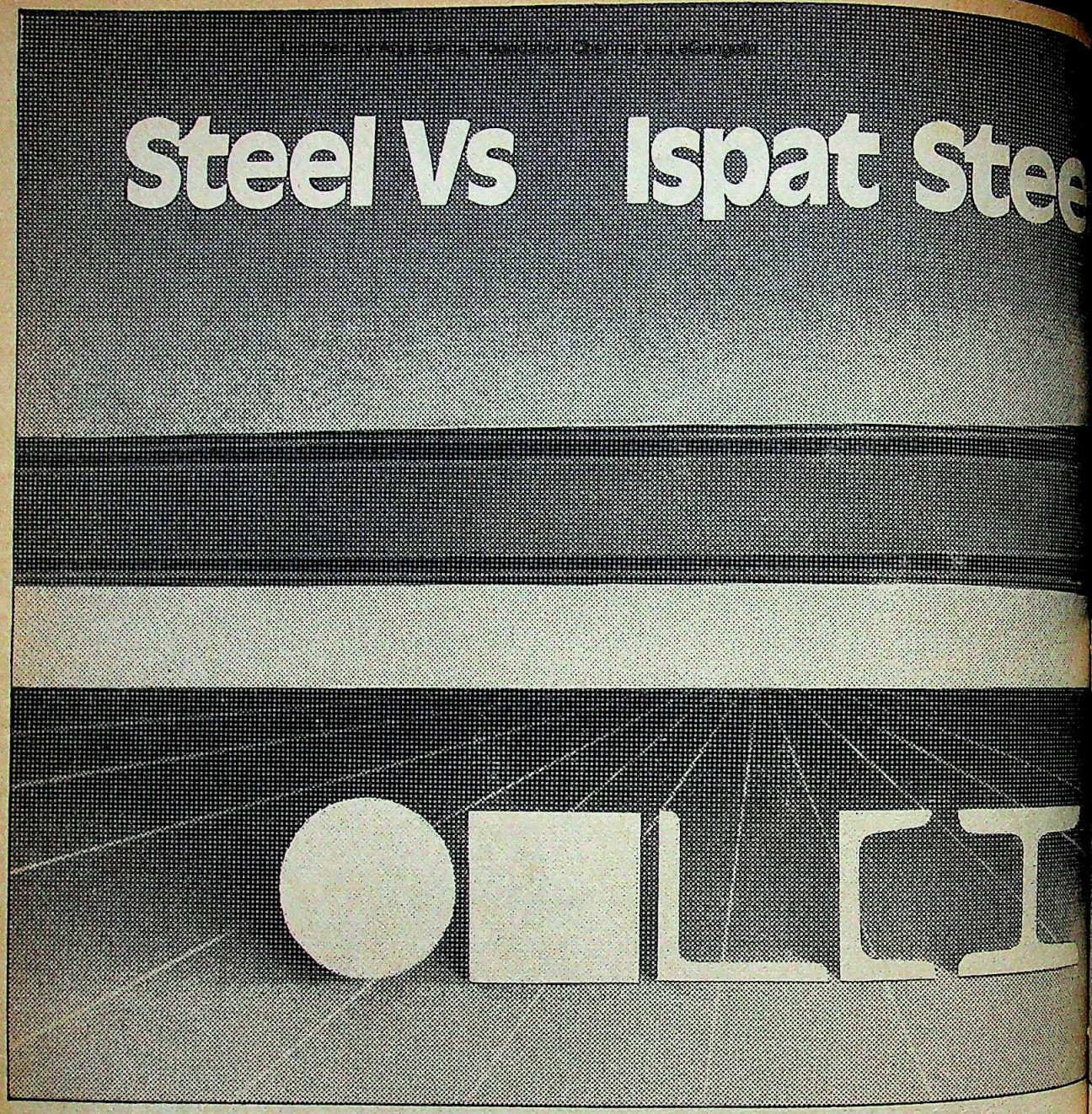
Steel Vs Ispat Stee



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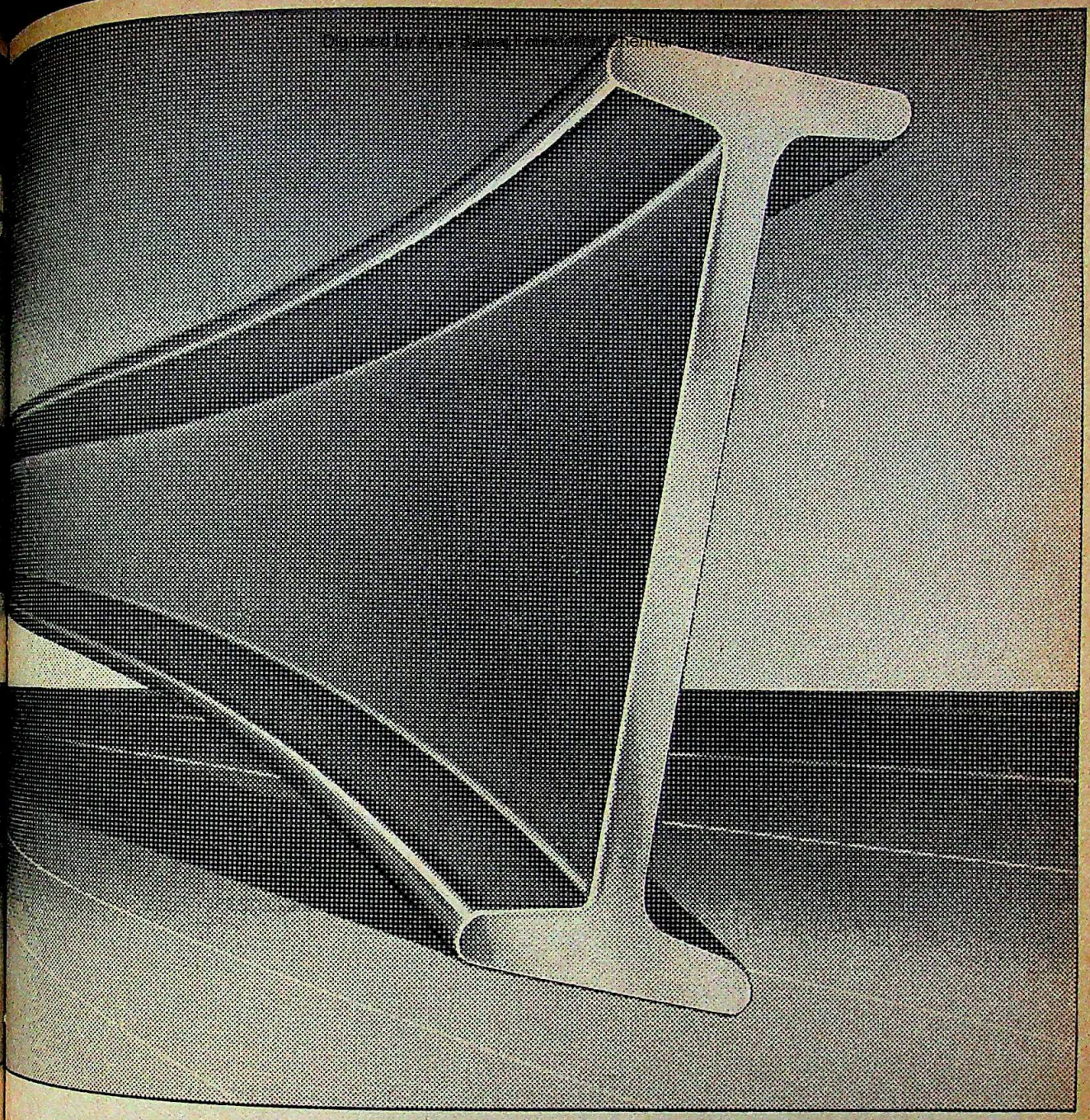

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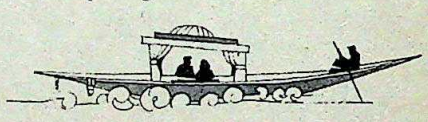

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UTTAR PRADESH

A Dream Hospital

An ambitious project is plagued by problems

SEVENTEEN kilometres from Lucknow, the magnificent complex of the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute (SGPGI) sprawling over 550 acres, is ready. Equipment that will be the envy of Indian hospitals, is on its way from Japan. Over Rs 100 crore has already been spent. But there are just a handful of doctors—and only a few are likely to arrive soon.

This institute for specialised training "is a unique project and the first of its kind in Asia", says a proud Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi. But critics question its very concept and describe the Rs 400-crore project as a grand dream that is sure to fade.

The SGPGI plan to have just the post-graduate level will spell doom, say doctors. Chandigarh's Post Graduate Institute—the organisation closest to it— has post-graduate and post post-graduate levels. All other institutes begin teaching at the undergraduate stage. This means that the SGPGI will go without basic science departments like general surgery and general medicine, the backbone of medical institutes. This could seriously undermine research, as has been demonstrated in Chandigarh.

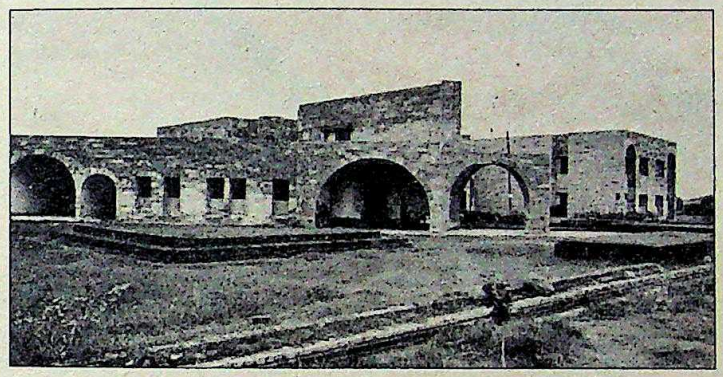
Some 30 sceptical doctors across India refused what would seem attractive jobs. One of them was Dr A.S. Paintal, director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research. Pointing out some basic flaws to SGPGI Director Dr B.B. Sethi, he said: "The institute, as planned, will lack basic facilities and will have low research levels." So abject was the response at home that institute officials had to scour the world in May. They finally identified 24 Indian doctors settled abroad who could be offered jobs.

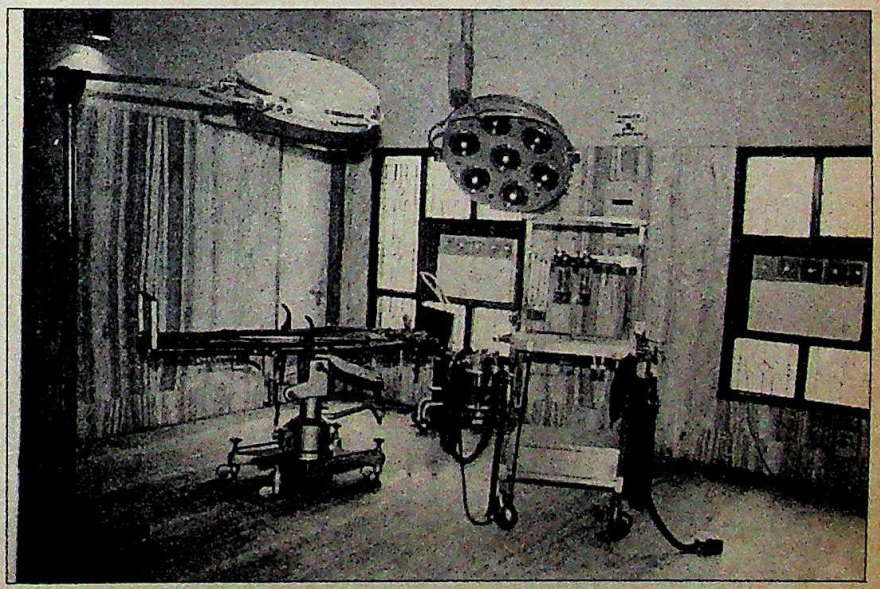
The completion of the first phase with six super specialities—neurosciences, cardiac sciences, renal sciences, gastroenterology, endocrinology, genetics and immunology—and a 600-bed hospital has been postponed from the targeted 1987 to 1990. Last month the SGPGI had to begin preliminary consultancy with professors heading just two super specialities and a 30-bed hospital. Of the planned 250 highly-trained doctors and scientists, there are only 12.

The issue of Uttar Pradesh having a post-graduate institute, was first mooted in 1972 by Kamalapati Tripathi, the then chief minister. It was suggested that Lucknow's King George Medical College (KGMC) be upgraded, as it already had the infrastructure and as setting up a new institute would need far too much money. In 1977 the governor ratified the upgradation of KGMC. A three-member committee under Dr B.N. Sinha, then president of the Medical Council of India, suggested a phased programme for it. In 1980, the D.N. Sharma committee advised the KGMC's conversion into a post-graduate institute on the lines of New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences. The cost: Rs 40 crore. V.P. Singh, who was chief minister, sanctioned the sum and a report was drawn up. On December 14, 1980, the foundation stone was laid on the KGMC premises by the then president, N. Sanjiva Reddy.

Why after all this Lokpati Tripathi—health minister since 1980—turned the project on its head is incomprehensible. He floated the proposal of an independent, exclusive super specialised institute. A team under Lata Singh, then health secretary, was sent to Europe and the US to study such institutes—there are only four worldwide.

Dr R.P. Sahi, a KGMC senior professor of surgery who was also a member, recalls that the chief of the US National Institute of Health commented that even a country as wealthy as theirs couldn't afford another such institute. Lata Singh was in a minority in recommending the institute but the state Government still decided to go ahead with its pipe dream.





The institute (left) and fully equipped operating theatre: mixed up priorities

It is easy to see why specialists oppose the SGPGI so bitterly. In layman's terms, the SGPGI will be able to handle a serious patient in coma but won't be able to tackle minor developments like bed sores or a fracture. "A human body isn't divided according to our specialities," says a KGMC doctor caustically. Though

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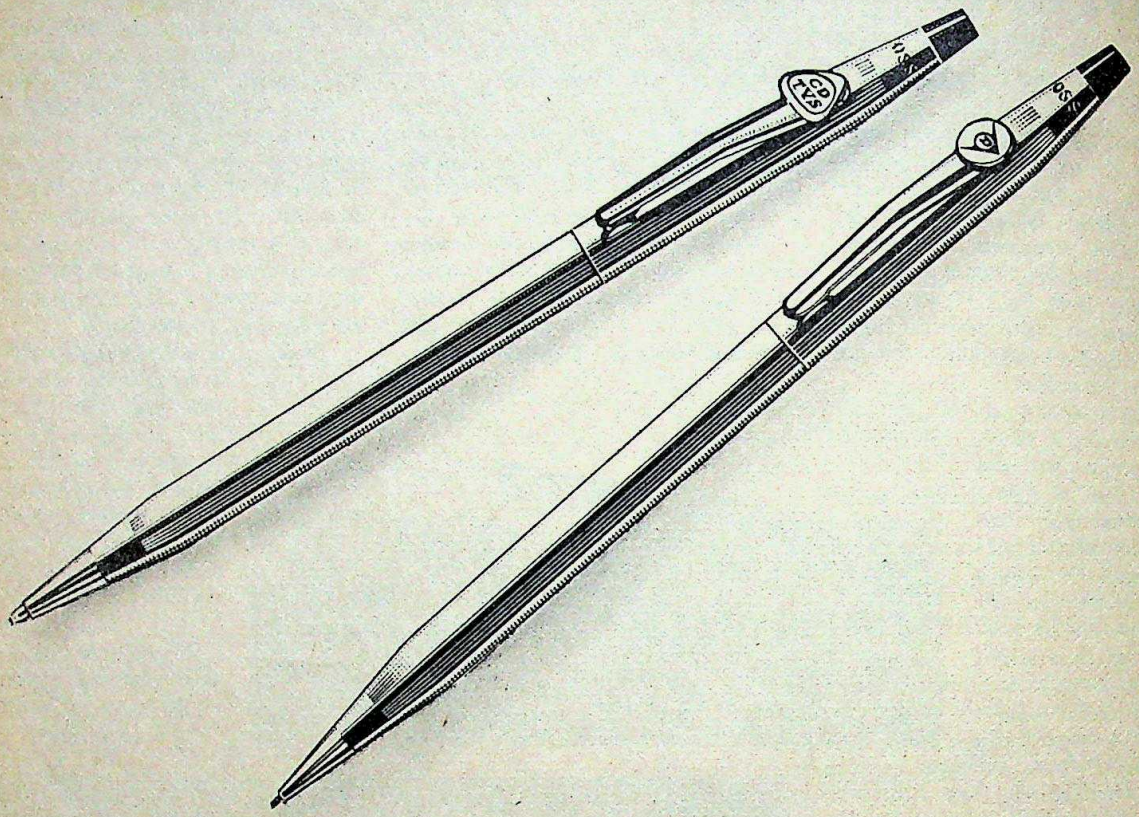

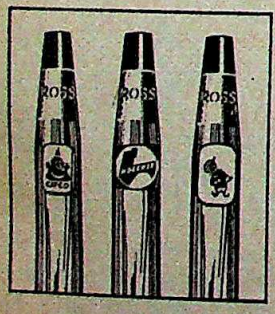

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the health minister dismisses objections to his pet project, Director Sethi, an eminent psychiatrist, himself entertains doubts. He took over in July 1986 only after the chief minister overruled Tripathi and assured Sethi that he could continue to head KGMC's Psychiatry Department as well. But a writ filed against this arrangement forced Sethi to give up his KGMC post. The matter now rests in the Supreme Court where, if he loses, says Sethi, "I will not continue as director but return to KGMC. I feel the institute should be associated with KGMC or we may have difficulty functioning independently."

The staffing pattern could also go awry. The Medical Council of India recommends a minimum of four residents—or junior doctors—per consultant. But the institute will have only one student per teacher in the first phase and, in the absence of post-graduate students, this ratio can at the most double. "It will be impossible to carry out clinical duties with only two residents," says Dr Sandeep Kumar, a KGMC lecturer. Kumar turned down the institute's offer as "the authorities had no convincing answers to this question". But institute authorities insist that in only 10 cases did doctors refuse offers.

Tripathi attacks the KGMC staff's "lack of commitment" and obsession with private practice. He doesn't want the SGPGI to have links with the college: "We will provide poor people with tertiary level care for which they can't afford to go outside the state, let alone abroad."

But at what cost? Upgrading KGMC would have cost just Rs 40 crore as against the SGPGI's cost of Rs 400 crore. Besides, running the institute will mean Rs 25 crore annually—or over 9 per cent of the state's health budget of Rs 270 crore. The SGPGI is under pressure from its employees for Central pay scales, which the specialists are being paid. Already there is talk of the state Government's inability to fork out the money and the need for Central aid. The basic question of whether the same Rs 25 crore could have been better used in treating common diseases like diarrhoea, tuberculosis and polio, also begs an answer. But then, it is only one in a string of unanswered questions that will plague this ambitious project.

—DILIP AWASTHI

RABIES

Rising Toll

HAS man's best friend turned foe in Kerala? With rabies deaths registering an alarming rise, canines are not exactly the most popular animals in Kerala right now. Admits Health Minister A.C. Shanmughadas: "This year the situation is more alarming due to an increase in the number of strays and the shortage of professional dog-catchers."

But the rise in rabies-related deaths is not all that sudden. In 1985, there were 13 fatalities which more than doubled to 31 in 1986. And in the first six months of this year, 26 deaths by rabies have already been registered. Adds a senior doctor in the Health Department: "These figures are the mere tip of the iceberg. This year alone more than 100 people have succumbed to rabies. And as most of the cases occur in villages, they often go unreported."

Ignorance and the lack of medical care both contribute towards the mounting toll. Says Mathew Stephen, the MLA from remote Udambanchola in Idukki district: "The common man goes to the local witch doctor or has an ayurvedic massage after being bitten. These traditional methods fail and only when it is too late is he taken to a distant hospital."

It was lack of an appreciation of the danger that killed Sunil Kumar, 16, in Quilon last month. The boy's stray puppy had playfully scratched him before it "mysteriously" died. Sunil buried it near a coconut tree and neither he nor his parents gave it another thought. Says the weeping father, farmer Sasidharan: "Our ignorance cost us our son's life." Says Dr K.J. Radha, director of the Public Health Laboratory in Trivandrum: "There is no shortage of anti-rabies vaccines in government hospitals. But people should be made aware of the immediate steps they should take."

MADHU MANGAD

Reginald supervising operations

Health officials also point to the huge increase in the number of stray dogs. Attempts at dog breeding by slum dwellers, who abandon female pups, has also swelled their numbers in Trivandrum. Last fortnight—to take just one case—a housewife in the city died of rabies after a stray dog attacked her while she was on her way to the market. Packs of dogs converge on dumping grounds and near animal slaughter houses, scrounging for food. In Kottayam and Idukki districts, again, hundreds of unlicensed beef stalls dump waste by the roadside and this leads to further trouble.

The most appalling aspect of the scenario is that the entire state has just one government-approved dog-catcher. Predictably, V. Reginald, 51, who has been in the business for 30 years, is in great demand all over Kerala. Reginald, who is paid Rs 5 by the Trivandrum Municipal Corporation for every dog that he kills—usually by injecting a drug—reckons that there are 25,000 dogs in the city, of which only 200 are licensed. Disposing the carcasses though has also created problems. It is hard to find land for burial and the municipal corporation now intends to put up an electric crematorium.

The rising toll is only now creating some concern in the Government. Reginald is being appointed to train 50 unemployed youth every month. Moreover, the rate for catching a dog has been raised to Rs 7. The Health Department is also thinking in terms of a mass campaign to educate people on the dangers of dog-bites. But until the results of these steps start showing, Kerala's dog days will carry on.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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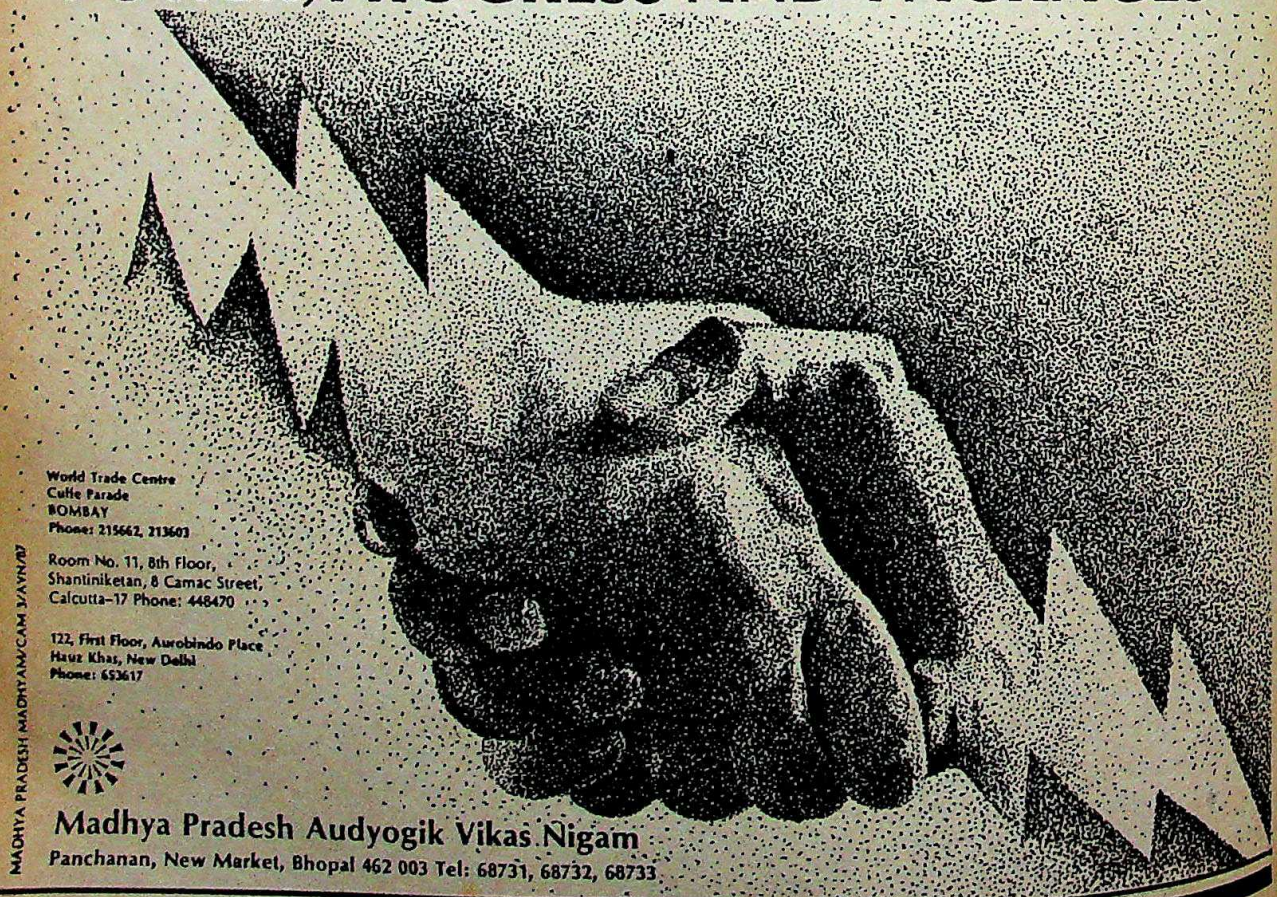

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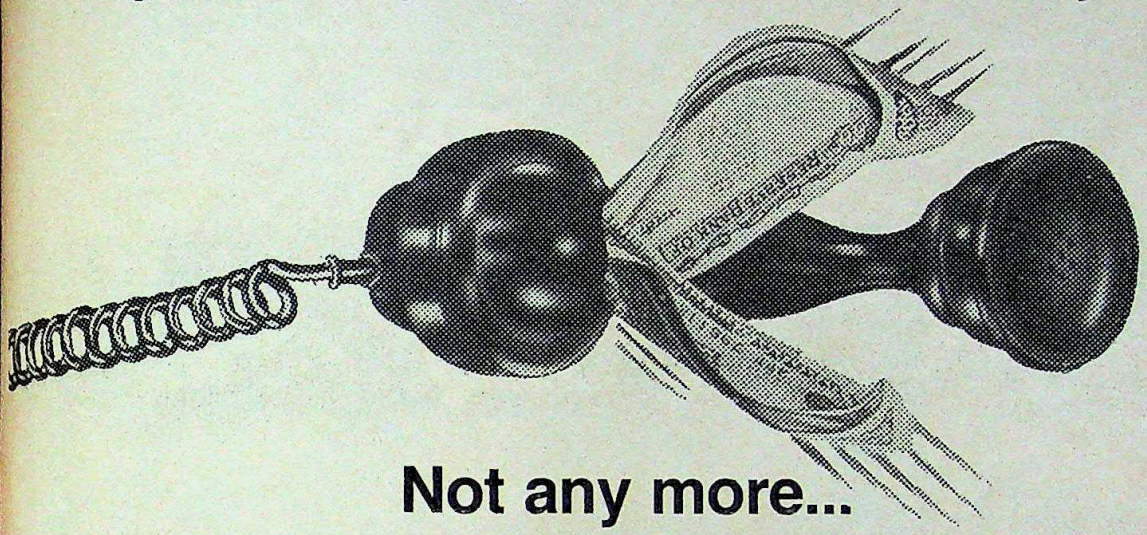

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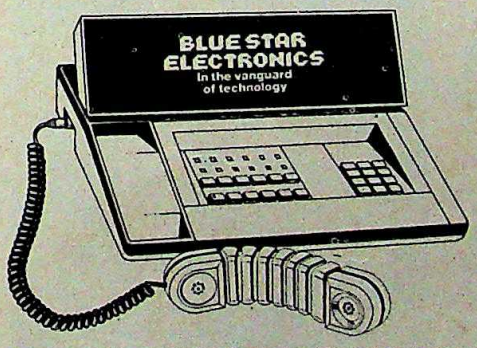

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JATRA

Popular Productions

Traditional folk drama draws crowds and cash

THE 'House Full' board is a familiar sight in Shyambazar, the centre of Calcutta's vibrant show-business. A typical commercial area by day, it is transformed every evening into a black-marketeer's haven as the Bengali intelligentsia, up-country businessmen and rickshaw-pullers jostle for a place in the auditoriums sprinkled all over.

It is time for the Jatra, a folk drama that was once performed in rural Bengal during festivals and village fairs. As played out in traditional Bengal, it was different from conventional theatre in several ways: the stage was in the centre, with the audience all around; the lighting was simple and the diction was high-pitched. An opening concert and dances were essentials, as were the entry to and exit from the stage with a punchy dialogue. It also invariably had a key character called Vivek (conscience)—a style common in Hindi plays—who was a commentator on good and evil.

Today, though, Jatra has gone well beyond being just a traditional folk art form. For around 20,000 people with about 300 opera companies, it spells employment, and for many Bengali newspapers, it means their very survival, dependant as they are on Rs 3 crore in annual advertisements from a Rs 50-crore industry that Jatra has now become.

Why has the popularity of this folk tradition ballooned in recent times? Mohan Chatterji, an actor and proprietor of Mohan Opera feels that it is taking the place of Bengali cinema "which has been unable to provide action, speed or entertainment to audiences who are craving for it". Already, it has overtaken Bengali films in terms of the number of productions, audience response and income. For instance, last year, there were about 300 Jatra productions as compared to 30 Bengali films. Jatra audiences at about 12 crore were treble that of cinema audiences. And Sudhendu Bhowmik, a regular Jatra-goer, highlights the reason that has helped it beat conventional theatre: "Theatre in the city is still experimenting with Brecht, Shakespeare and Kurosawa. It is too high-flown for the common people to understand. People require entertainment, not intellectual stimulation."

What has helped the folk drama attract larger audiences is also its mobility and ability to perform open air with sets that use symbolic props. For instance, a palace may be represented by an empty stage where a single chair symbolises the throne. In fact, a major chunk of the viewers are in remote collieries, tea-gardens, and adivasi villages in not only Bengal but also Bihar and the North-eastern states. In these regions, entertainment of any other kind either does not exist or is extremely limited. "With the growth of industrial complexes and increased agricultural production, a class of people, which has money and the desire to be entertained, has emerged in these areas. This is the new Jatra clientele," says Romen Choudhary, an avid Jatra lover. In rural Bengal, it is not unusual to find up to 10,000 viewers at a single performance.

If opera companies are quick to change their themes to meet the current public mood, it is because productions can be put up within a month—a flexibility unavailable to either film or theatre. For example, Phoolan Devi's rise to fame was followed almost immediately by a production of the same name with astounding success. And the President-prime minister tussle is now being depicted through a classical theme in which Lord Shiva represents the President and the witty Narayan the prime minister.

The tensions in the mother-son rela-

SANGEET NATAK ACADEMY

Sword fight (top) and impersonating Phoolan Devi: current themes

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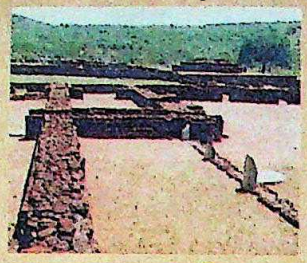

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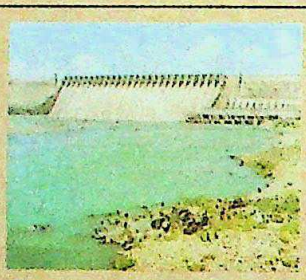

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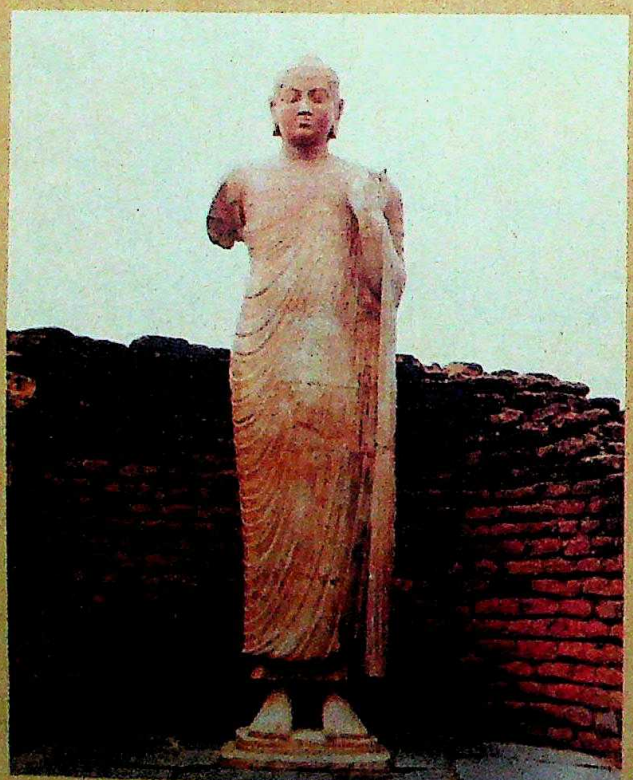

Named after the 2nd century Buddhist scholar Acharya Nagarjuna who propounded the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism. Nagarjunasagar, once called Sriparvata Vijayapuri, was the capital of the Ikshvaku empire and was known throughout the world as a major scholastic centre. Today it is the site of the world's third largest man-made lake.

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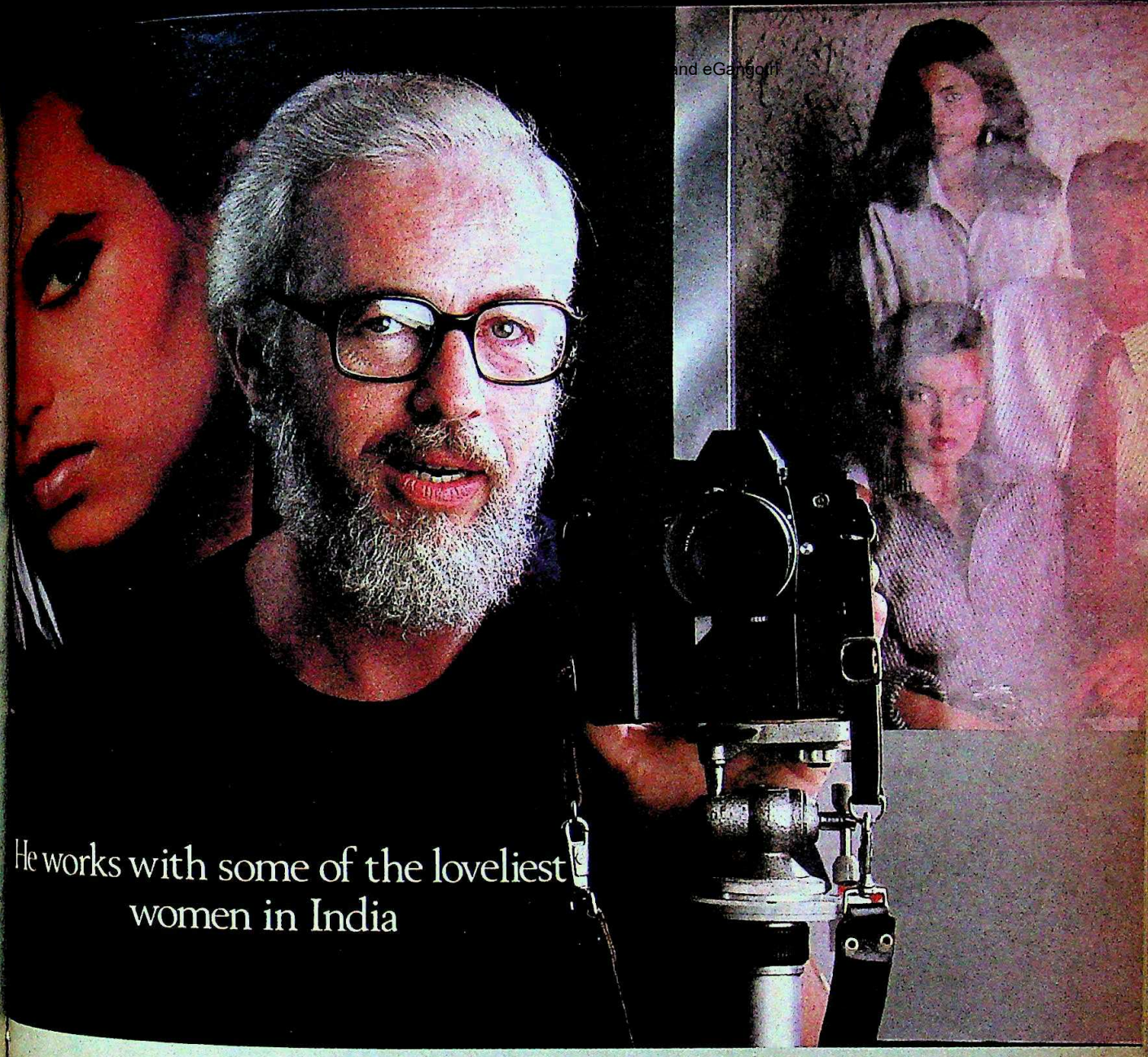

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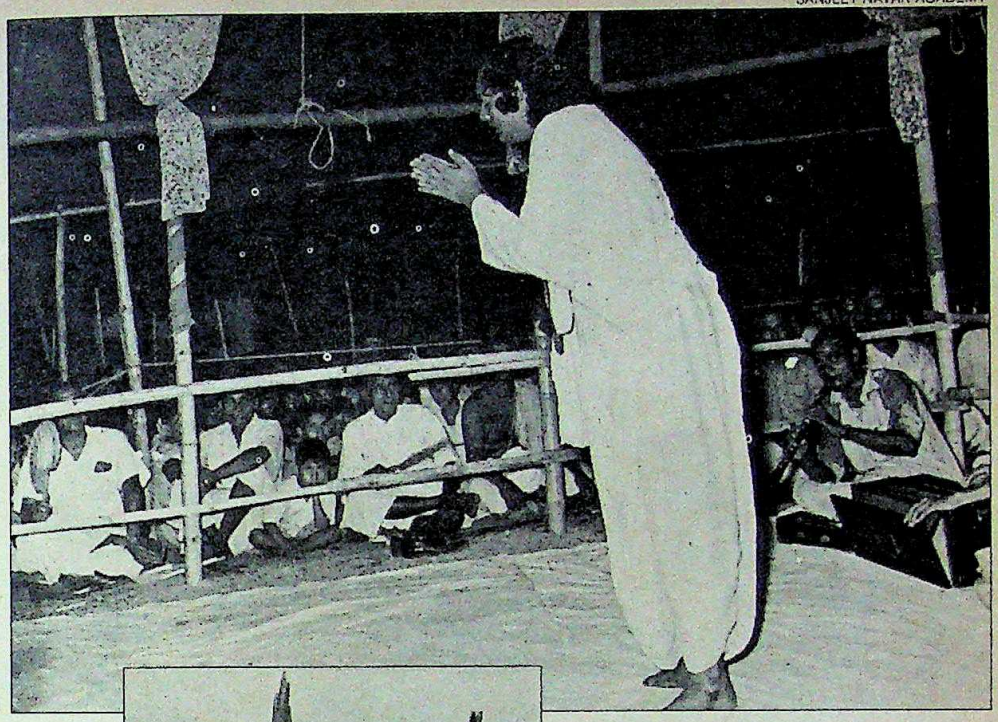
SANJEET NATAK ACADEMY



KALYAN CHAKRAVORTY

Vivek (above) and dancing girl on stage: dramatising folk lore

tionship after the daughter-in-law comes on the scene is the theme of about a dozen operas this year. Says Prabhod Bhandhu Adhikari, a Jatra patron and critic: "This theme is symbolic of the problem most middle class Bengali families face today." Yet, the end is always happy with the mother and son re-united. Adds Adhikari: "This ideal ending is what people want to see."

So popular is the style that even Bengali cine stars—Utpal Dutt, Debashree Roy and Robi Ghosh, among others—faced with a slump in the film industry, are taking to it. Their screen image, of course, helps. Besides monetary rewards, Jatra also provides them with a wide following which isn't limited to urban audiences.

Figures reflect the growth of the medium. For instance, in the early '50s, Phani Bhusan Vidyavinoda, a famous Jatra actor, was paid Rs 100 a month as wages. Today, a top-ranking artiste charges a whopping Rs 6 lakh a month. Brojen De, a playwright, considered himself lucky if he received Rs 300 per play in the '50s. Today, one of the top playwrights—who writes more than 10 plays every year—earns Rs 60,000 per script. And the minimum rate that a middle-rung opera company demands for a performance has soared from Rs 500 in the '60s to as much as Rs 30,000 now.

Financing Jatra—in which tickets range from Rs 5 to Rs 30—has never been a problem. Both Marwari and Bengali money-lenders readily provide loans though at exorbitant interest rates, ranging from 10 per cent to 26 per cent a month. But this expense is absorbed as some opera companies make profits as high as Rs 25 lakh from a single production, the reasonably successful ones running for about six months.

The growing commercialisation and the influx of talent from cinema has induced a technical revolution and seen the exit of slipshod productions. Cellophane-wrapped floodlights have made way for sophisticated electronic lighting devices. The audience now sits dazed through floods, fire and vanishing actors. Shanti Gopal, a well-known actor and proprietor of Tarun Opera, quips: "It lends a certain magical effect to Jatra."

What's more, taking a cue from Hindi films, animals—dogs, monkeys and camels—have also started appearing on stage.

The introduction of the microphone and taped music has not only attracted a larger audience, it has also drastically changed the acting style. Supriya Devi, a rage in Bengali cinema who has now turned to Jatra, points out: "The stress is now on natural acting rather than on gesticulation and voice modulation. These were necessary earlier so that people seated far away could comprehend what was going on."

Taped music has replaced in many cases the traditional orchestra which had a place on one side of the stage and was performed live. The orchestra itself, small and with a limited repertoire until recently, includes a wide variety of instruments and has turned sophisticated. The Vivek is now more or less absent and, in the city, Jatra is even performed on stages used for conventional theatre.

Many aficionados, however, view both the changes and the growing popularity with some alarm. In an article, Rudra Prasad Sen Gupta, the doyen of Bengali theatre, says: "If people think that Jatra is successful because it has found its cultural roots in Bengal, that would be self-deception. It is a well-marketed substitute for cheap commercial films."

Jatra does provide escapist formulas for tension-ridden middle and lower middle class Bengalis, who love it. The degradation is clearly evident in the titles of some recent hits—*Kashmir ki Kali*, *Kala Sher* and *Suura Naari Singhasan*. But opera actors find this tendency inevitable. Argues Shanti Gopal: "If show business has to survive, it has to change with the times and provide what the people want." As more and more people flock to view the countless Jatra productions that are being churned out, voices like that of Rudra Prasad are certain to get drowned in the cheers of appreciation.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Calcutta

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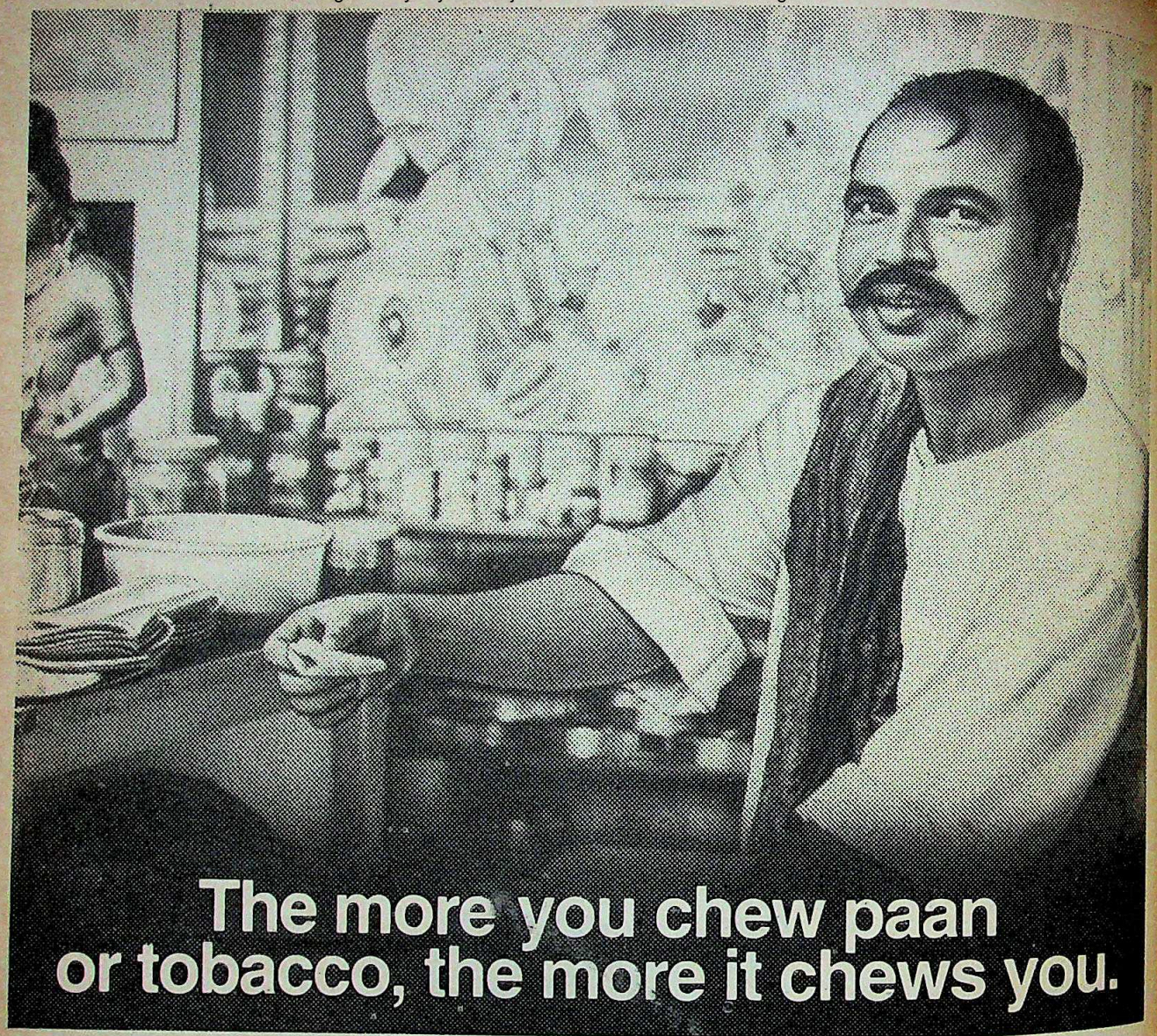

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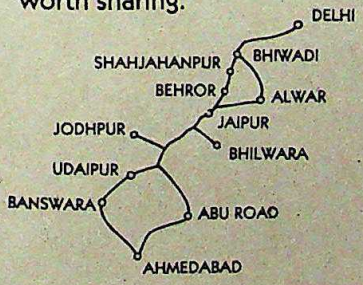

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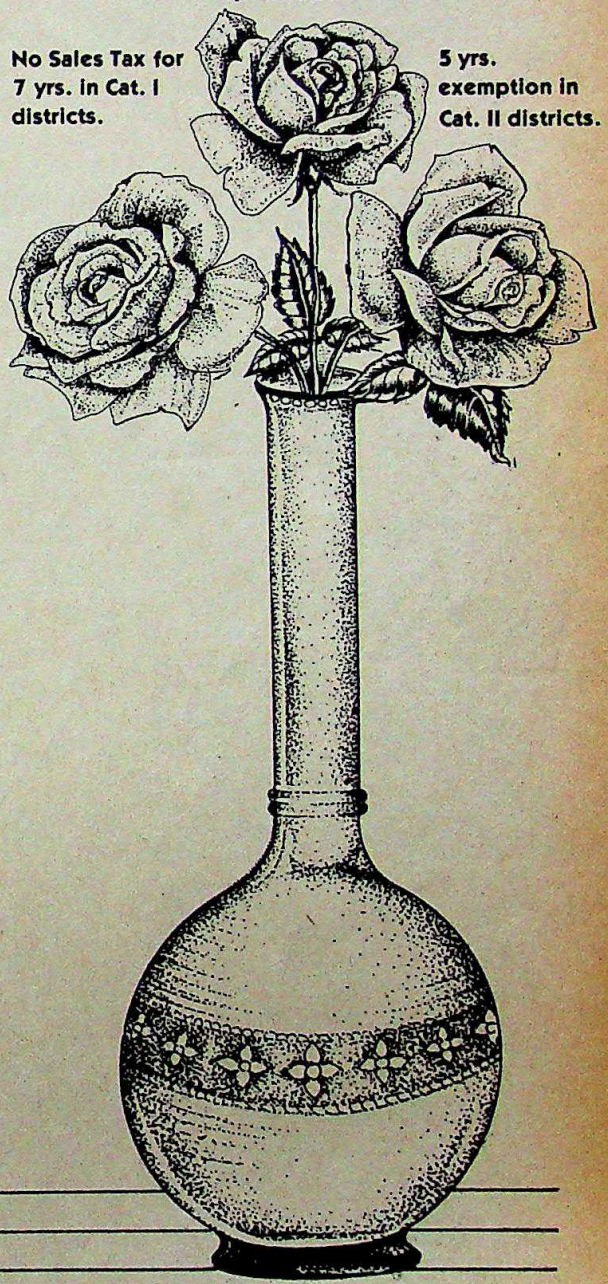

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ANTI-TERRORIST LAW

Draconian Measure

Critics call its extreme provisions 'fascist'

IF a newspaper columnist were to suggest that India settle its border dispute with China by handing over Aksai Chin once and for all, he could well end up behind bars for life. That is just one of the possible consequences of a stringent law passed by Parliament last month to deal with terrorists and "disruptionists".

The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Bill, 1987, provides for an in camera trial, by special courts set up by the Government, over which any Central Government officer may preside. Such courts could order death for acts of terrorism and a life term for disruptive activities, even on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

The law is effective from May 24 this year when the previous anti-terrorist law lapsed. Like its predecessor, this one will be valid for two years. Significant, though, are the new measures which critics have labelled as 'fascist'.

Section 15, for instance, allows a confession recorded by a superintendent of police to be used as evidence—normally, a magistrate records this. The bill's opponents are cynical of the clause which enjoins the officer to ensure that the confession is made voluntarily.

Rajinder Kaur, daughter of Master Tara Singh and president of the Istri Akali Dal, says: "This is worse than the Rowlatt Act. The police in Amritsar can make anyone—even Rajiv Gandhi—say anything." She says that of the hundreds of prisoners she has met in jails, only one had not been tortured—because he readily agreed to confess.

A basic principle of justice is that the accused is presumed innocent until proved guilty. But under Section 21, in a terrorist case, the court must presume the accused guilty if the prosecution produces any of the following evidence: a confession made to anyone other than a police officer, a co-accused's confession, finger prints, or the fact that arms or explosives of the sort used in the crime were found on the accused. Once such evidence is submitted, it's up to the accused to prove his innocence.

Leading solicitor Soli Sorabjee says the law "completely deprives a person accused of any semblance of a fair and just trial". Maintaining that "publicity is the soul of justice", he castigates the secrecy in proceedings. "No discretion is left to the judge. Only if the public prosecutor asks for it to be public," can it be so. He feels the judge should decide whether or not the trial ought to be in camera, and record his reasons.

Justice V.M. Tarkunde, former president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) also disagrees with the absolute secrecy for witnesses. "If a witness' name is not disclosed, you cannot cross-examine him," he says. Describing it as "a savage law which no civilised country would tolerate", he asserts that "the state should not become a terrorist if there is private terrorism in the country".

Punjab police chief J.F. Ribeiro, who says it was his officers who had demanded such a law, seems aware of the dangers. He avers: "I'll ensure that the new act is not misused and I would like to put my own checks." There is no denying the fact that in Punjab the judicial process has virtually collapsed with regard to terrorist cases. Not only witnesses, even judges are running scared. Some are known to go on leave when a terrorist case comes up. But Mubarak Singh, former president of the Punjab unit of the Janata Party, feels that even these draconian provisions will not reassure the judiciary. Senior police officers too privately share this cynicism.

However, even if such measures are defensible in the face of terrorism, the extension of the bill to vaguely defined "disruptive activities" can have few apologists. As Tarkunde points out, just about anyone can now be hauled up for disruptive activities. Anyone who questions India's sovereignty and territorial integrity or who supports a claim to cession of territory is defined as disruptionist. Astrologers should take special note: any prediction about the killing of a public official is now punishable.

A number of commentators have remarked on the dangers of this bill when read along with the amendment to the National Security Act, which now provides for preventive detention up to six months. Tarkunde is not the only one who feels that with such laws, Emergency conditions can be introduced without formally declaring one.

—DAVID DEVADAS

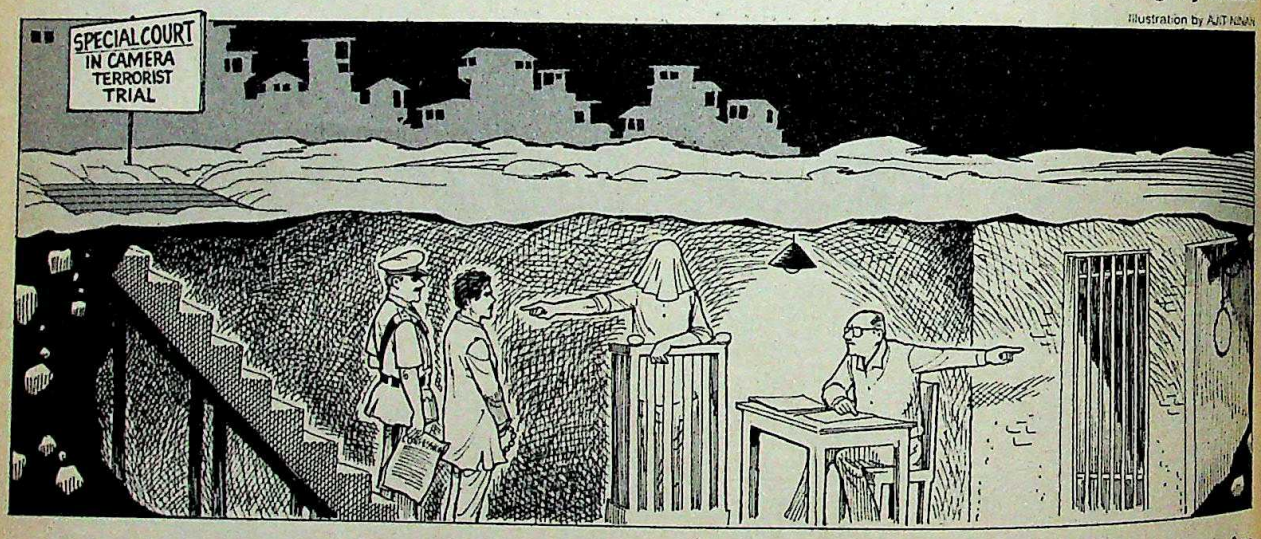

Illustration by AJIT NINAN

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A truly envied TV doesn't happen just by magic. Not even black magic. That's why, when your neighbour envies your pride as an ONIDA owner, don't be too proud to discuss the reasons. You can begin by telling him about ONIDA's world-famous pedigree. And that itself will explain some of the features that you can then show him.

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ONIDA with cordless remote. Neighbours' envy. Owners' pride.

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Photographs by NAMAS BHOJ

CHILD ACTORS

Crowding Tinsel Town

Upmarket aspirants provide producers with a choice

Baby Guddo, the child queen of filmdom, is managed by her ambitious mother

CUTE as buttons and as expressionless. Baby Guddo and her teddy bear have identical eyes. Light-brown and round, nothing disturbs their woodenness. The child queen of filmdom—25 films, 75 advertisements and just seven years old—moves like a robot. Remote-controlled by the even-toned but firm voice of her petite mother.

An hour not yet over and Guddo has changed her dress four times: yellow, peach, lavender, pink—all to do with the changing light and mama's directorial whims. And each time, the fading rouge of her edibly cute cheeks is restored to its original artificiality.

The perfect little Miss Rekha or Mandakini, she lights up only when the photographers begin to click. Interviews don't interest her. Her voice drops, her eyes stray away. She stares at her toes. Who is her best friend? "Makran, the monkey," pat comes the answer. What about school friends? "I don't remember any names," she pouts. Mama intercedes: "What about Kiran?" "I hate her." "But, you like Tina?" "Who is Tina?" And she goes back to staring at her toes and teddy bear in her toy-and-trophy filled room in her parents' new Juhu flat.

Baby Guddo is not unique but hers is probably the best-known face in the world of celluloid children. And she, perhaps, more than the other children now swarming cinema and television like locusts, lives in a movable gilded cage. Carried by parents whose full-time vocation it now is to manage their child's film career.

The dream machine has suddenly become the new El Dorado for children. Hordes of starry-eyed little people, prodded by parents, have moved in. A decade ago the number of child stars could be counted an individual's fingers: the master Bittoos, Rajus and Mahmud juniors who played the younger Amitabh Bachchans and Shashi Kapoors in the countless versions of the missing brothers' tale.

Today, there are hundreds of them—from toddlers to pre-adolescents—crowding tinsel town. The same little faces do not stare out from all the films being churned out. *Hawalaat, Dance, Dance, Parivar, Mard Ka Faisala, Diljala, Mr India* have different crops of child stars.

Now, the producers have a choice: the kiddies market is growing. And the choice has changed over the last few years. The industry has gone upmarket. No longer does the industry scour the browned-out fringes of the film world: children of extras, stunt men, part-time producers and part-time film people. Or send scouts to the slums of Mahim and Andheri.

The kiddies' corner has changed class. "Producers and directors now want children from rich families. Just as Dilip Sahib told us that what he wanted was not just a suited man but a man who knows how to wear a suit, these producers want children who really are from good homes," explains junior artiste supplier Lekh Raj Tandon, in the business for 40 years.

It all started with Jugal Hansraj, who

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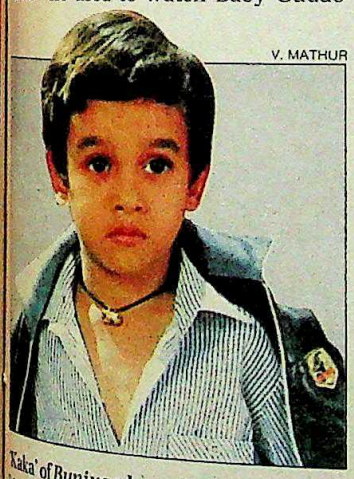
became the darling of the nation after his moving performance as a child torn between quarreling parents in Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom* five years ago. His father was an affluent businessman who didn't need a "bread-earner son".

Jugal became a national obsession: he was invited to England to open shops and inaugurate exhibitions. And in doing so he triggered the invasion of the more affluent little starlings. These children are the *rigueur* fair, chubby, and precocious.

Another catalyst for the sea-change in the kind of children inundating tinsel town, however, is television. It is the new pied paper seducing the middle and upper middle class children. Especially the advertisements with their mesmerising jingles. With them the film world gained respectabilty.

The advertisements not only sold the products to the children but the children to television. Kapur "discovered" Jugal in the Nutramul ads. Antariksk Mathur, 6, best known for the scenes he stole as Kaka in *Buniyaad*, and later as young *Kabeer* on television, wanted to act in TV advertisements. "He used to watch Baby Guddo

V. MATHUR



'Kaka' of *Buniyaad*, caught up with show biz, is all set to conquer the silver screen

and the other children and say that he could do much better," says his father, Vikrant Mathur.

Television ads became a stepping stone to television serials. And from there, the last big hop to the big screen. *Ek Do Teen Char, Kachi Dhoop, Saare Jahan Se Achcha* and a dozen others—Sunday morning's Doordarshan fare—guzzled child stars at fast forward speed.

Children now come from everywhere—not just fringes of outer Bombay like Goregaon and Malad. Master Markand, the closest to being a star amongst the male child actors today, after his meaty role in Mahesh Bhatt's *Kaash*, flies down with his parents from Ahmedabad each time.

Shabista, at 13, is like many other child stars already on the verge of "retirement"

Moreover, after the phenomenal success of *Mr India* this year, lots of Mr Indias were bound to follow. The same gang of children is now in demand. And Juhu's Royal Hotel area was recently awash with them: B. Subash was auditioning scores of children for his new film. His earlier film, *Dance, Dance* had a few kids, but this one about a school being taken over by children has a baker's dozen. More films with children are coming up. Sai Paranjpye has finished *Anguta Chhaap*, a film about children teaching an old man. Vishwa Mitra has completed *Mere Baad* with Raakhee and half a dozen children—the story about a woman about to die looking for parents for her brood of children. Young director Bose's film on a paraplegic child is awaiting release. Coming up as well are *desi* clones of the father-son love themes in which fathers separated from sons go to any lengths to get them back.

THE promised land, then, has opened wide its doors. But only the promise of money is honoured; the dreams soon sour. The competition is keen and hard, the stakes high. And the name of the game is hustling.

Parents piggyback to vicarious fame and easy fortune. Fumes director Sai Paranjpye: "This is a frightening social manifestation. The child-star syndrome breeds child-star parents." Child actors earn anything from Rs 200 to Rs 3,000 a day, depending on their star status. The lucky ones get as much as Rs 10,000 a day. In a flutter of tiny eyelashes they can change the landscape of their parents' lives—allowing them to skip several rungs of the laminated ladder.

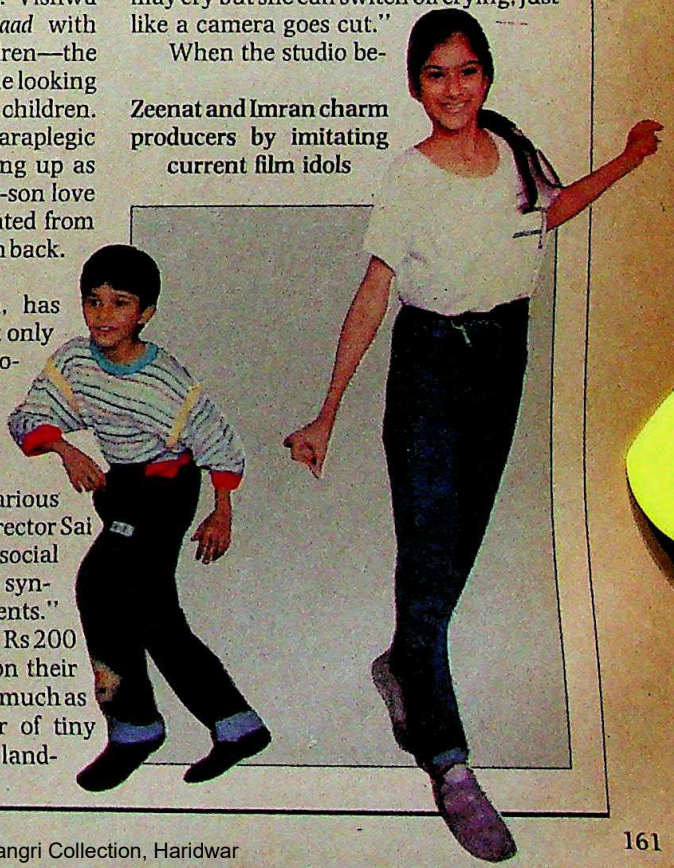
But the child can easily fall off that ladder. There is no safety net for his emotions. Seduced by the dream-world but exploited by it too, these children live in that uneasy twilight world between fiction and fact. Between reality and screen reality.

The dream world extracts its price. And childhood is the first casualty. The chubby cheeks, peaches n' cream complexion and cute smiles that launch emotions on the big screen and products on the little one, are deceptive. Somewhere between flitting from studio to studio, producer to producer, from one screen mother to another—with brief interludes for school and even briefer ones for play—the growing up part of life gets left behind. Former child-star Tabassum comes down heavily on parents who push their children under the arc lights: "To force children to lead an abnormal life is a great sin. As a child-star you are completely robbed of your childhood."

On the surface, a child-star appears quite normal. But within, there is often a turbulent, disturbed world; a realm where illusion has invaded the little mind. Some child-stars transfer the myths of cinema into reality; they even use dialogues from their films in their daily life. Worried about this, a Bombay psychoanalyst says: "The emotions become falsified. The child may cry but she can switch off crying, just like a camera goes cut."

When the studio be-

Zeenat and Imran charm producers by imitating current film idols



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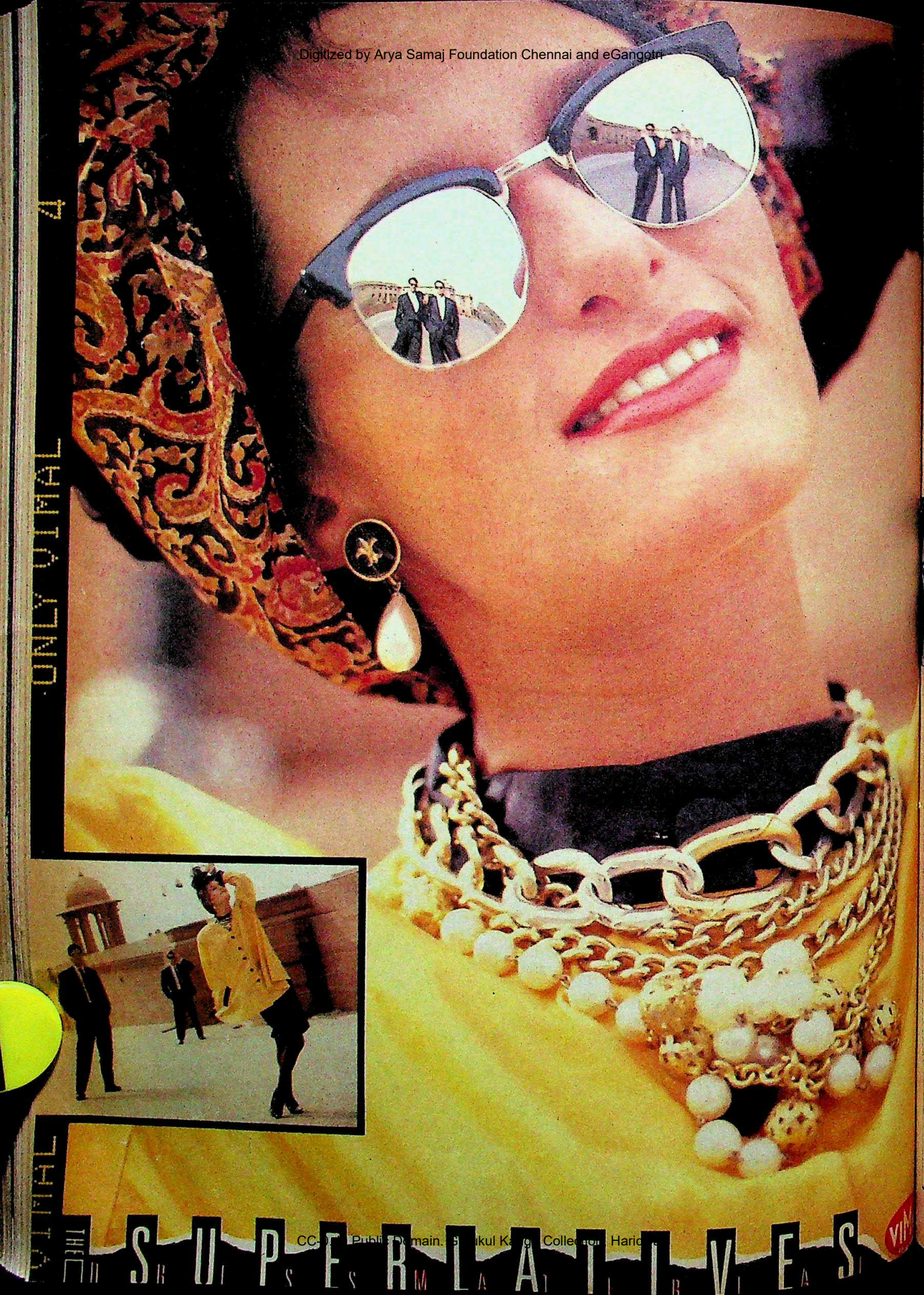

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HONEY IRANI

"I hated it"

The Irani sisters, Daisy and Honey were the apple of all eyes in the late '50s. Today it is with lots of nostalgia but just as much bitterness, that Honey looks back on the days of being a child-star. Excerpts from an interview with Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN:

Q. Did you like being a child-star?

A. I used to hate acting. When I saw the studio gates, I used to cry. My father ran a hotel on Grant Road.But my mother was fond of films. For the crying scenes, she would take us aside and beat us so that the tears would be real—even the stars did.

Q. Do you have any regrets?

A. The drawback for children is education. We were taken out of school—Daisy in the 4th standard and me in the 5th. We couldn't go out in the rain because we could fall sick and miss shooting. We had few friends.

Q. What is wrong with the children in films today?

A. They are all fat kids. They don't look natural, dolled up as they are. Other than *Masoom*, the films don't sound right. We never used to say it right; wrong pronunciation was part of reality. But now they have to be accurate; they speak these huge lines. They are more *banawati* (contrived).

Q. What about at home?

A. In my house, nobody was impressed with our performance. We were badly beaten. In fact, I hated my mother. She was very professional. Even when we had high temperature, we had to work. When we used to travel by car from Bombay to Poona for outdoor shooting we were not allowed to sleep. We had to stand up in the back of the car—our mother said our faces would become puffy.

comes both school and playground, children will not be children. Almost overnight, they metamorphose into little men and little women. Complains Paranjpye: "When I was making *Sikander*, Master Ladoo, all of five years, swaggered in like Rajesh Khanna. Asked his name, he flirtingly countered: '*Aap ka naam kya hai?*' (What is your name?). And then with a sideways glance added: '*Bara pyara naam hai*' (It's a very nice name). It could have been a hero talking to the heroine."

Paranjpye had Master Ladoo in his place within five minutes. But most directors actually look for precocious behaviour. They want the child to fast forward to adulthood. Zeenat is just 13. Her face is innocent, the smile sweet and expression dreamlike. When she talks about her roles (55 films), she is still childlike. But the moment she is asked to dance or do something for the camera, she is transformed into a little vamp.

And Vinod Khanna and Govinda have become the role-models of the industry's fledging males. Imran, 7, who has done 32 films since age two, gets irritated with his cousin Zeenat being interviewed. To attract attention, he break dances like his hero Govinda.

The children are only following directions. As Kapur puts it angrily: "The more adult the child is in the way he acts, dances or spouts dialogue, the more the unit applauds. So, the kids just imitate the older stars."

A different kind of schooling is also taking place—in the ways of the world. The younger brothers and sisters of the child actors often do little numbers on the side to charm the director into using them in his film. Children, prompted by back-seat directions from parents, realise that celluloid gods don't always serve those who stand and wait. "On the sets of *Mr India*, a few children complained that they were given no dialogue. Some of them are trained, just like a dog, to do tricks to please to us," says Kapur.

Children and their parents now as demanding as the stars. Says Babu Guddo's father: "We accept only the main roles. We see the script, who the stars are and the directors. Only then do we decide. In *Aulaad*, Guddo has the title role."

It is not the colour of money alone that is making parents forcibly push their children into acting. For some of them, it is the fulfilment of their own dreams. Interestingly, many parents of these babes in the starry woods are either failed actors themselves or are languishing on the fringes of the film world. Vikrant Mathur is a Film Institute-trained actor who never made it in front of the camera. But his son has. Balram Negi came all the way from Himachal Pradesh to become an actor. His son Bunty, 6, has worked in a few films and has signed a dozen more. And Baby Guddo's father, M.M. Baig, works as an associate director with Dada Kondke.

Jugal Hansraj's success in *Masoom* has enticed rich kids to films

There are only sad endings to this story. The saddest of all: the "retired star" of 13. These are the nowhere children, caught in that no-man's land between childhood and adulthood. Zeenat, Shabistan and many of the "masters" are clever enough to realise that they must fade out. Baby Naaz, the reigning child-star of yesteryear lives in fretful oblivion. She now dubs for today's numbero uno, Sri Devi; the irony could not be more bitter sweet. Like Naaz, there are many who find the doors of tinsel town firmly shut in their faces.

Yet, the children still follow the pied piper, queuing up at the doors of dreamland. And the piper himself serenades higher and higher up the social ladder.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay

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GIR FOREST

A Stricken Sanctuary

A strike exposes the reserve to plunderers

NINETEEN eighty seven has spelt bad news for Gujarat's Gir sanctuary, the last bastion of the Asiatic lion. A prolonged strike for higher wages by the forest staff—now called off—coupled with a severe drought has ravaged this famed 1,412 sq km reserve.

Forest officials have little knowledge of how many animals were killed during the strike, but they confirm reports that the meat of spotted deer and sambhar was sold in villages neighbouring the forest. While the 400-odd forest staff—up to the rank of ranger—struck work, their duties were entrusted to 130 jawans of the state reserve police and home guards. But untrained for the new work, the temporary guardians simply watched while herds of cattle descended on the sanctuary.

Indeed, the Government was blind to the damage being caused until environmentalists protested. Startled by the vehement criticism, the wage dispute was then settled and the foresters rejoined duty on September 7.

Their return revealed the magnitude of the disaster. "The plunder of forest wealth in the last month has set the clock back by quite a few years," said A.K. Sharma, 34, a divisional forest officer. So minimal was security during the strike that smugglers felled at least 80 timber trees at one place in the 258-sq km national park, which forms the core area in the heart of the sanctuary. Forest officials believe that trucks transporting some 400 truckloads of fodder which pass through the forest daily were used to smuggle out wood.

The animals were not spared either. "It will be almost impossible to ascertain the exact number of killings," said a senior forest officer. There is evidence of at least one of Gir's 239 lions having been killed by poachers. Even less is known about the poaching of other animals. Men of the Dafers, a Muslim tribe living on the periphery of the forest—hunters by tradition—armed with country-made guns, poached fearlessly. Apart from the meat of spotted deer, sambhar and the four-horned antelope—there are some 12,000 in the Gir forest—lion nails also fetch a high price.

What made the situation more poignant was that since the monsoon is the breeding season in the wild, poaching may have resulted in double deaths. To give but one example, forest guards found the carcass of a female sambhar carrying two foetuses.

The presence of cattle continues to pose a problem. As Sharma said: "It is very difficult to drive out the 2.5 lakh cattle which have entered the forest from various districts of Saurashtra." Foresters in fact fear that they stand the risk of being attacked by herders if they try to drive out the cattle. Remarked a senior official: "Our staff may ultimately find that their strike has boomeranged."

Commented B.K. Sinha, collector of Junagadh district, in which the sanctuary lies: "In times of drought, the Maldharis and Bharwads (nomadic tribes) of Saurashtra normally go to south Gujarat. But in Gir last month they saw an unguarded pasture and so their cattle flocked there." Some of the herders have come from as far as Kutch. Said Parbat Kana, 42, one of the men whose cattle has encroached: "We have come to Gir in the hope that it will rain in our village sometime later. If it doesn't, we will leave our cattle here at the mercy of the lions."

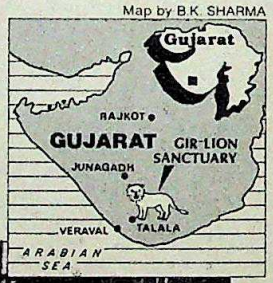
Gir is itself under the shadow of drought, and all the major rivers and streams are drying up. Last month's 10-inch rainfall provided little relief as the number of animals has multiplied at the watering holes because of the cattle. According to forest officials, even a lion would not dare attack a herd of cattle. The permanent residents of Gir are therefore forced to find alternative drinking places. Plans are now afoot to deepen the 400-odd water holes and ensure regular supply through tankers when the water dries up.

Grazing by illicit cattle also means that Gir, which had supplied 7,000 tonnes of grass as fodder for cattle in the past, can spare no more than 10 tonnes this year. Officials are also concerned that since the cattle are using the water holes, wildlife could be exposed to foot and mouth diseases. The Forest Department has now had to launch an inoculation drive to prevent an outbreak.

There is little doubt that the damage could have been contained if the Government had acted sooner to end the strike. For as Jamal Khan, 22, a research fellow of the Wildlife Institute of India, currently working on the Gir lions, put it: "Once the forest and its animals are destroyed, can they be brought back?"

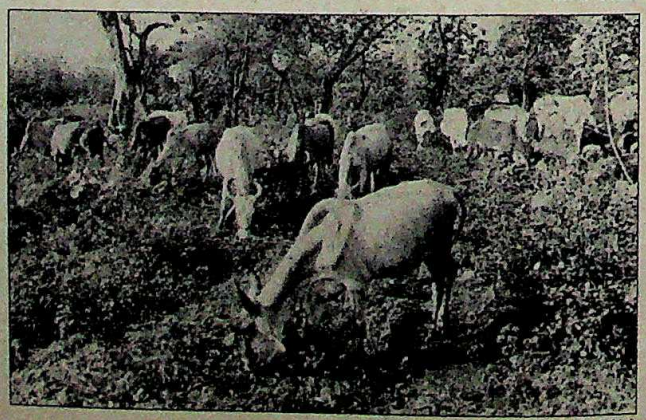
—UDAY MAHURKAR

Map by B.K. SHARMA



Lion killed by poachers (below); and cattle grazing in Gir's core area

YASIN BALOCH



DEENDAYAL PALA

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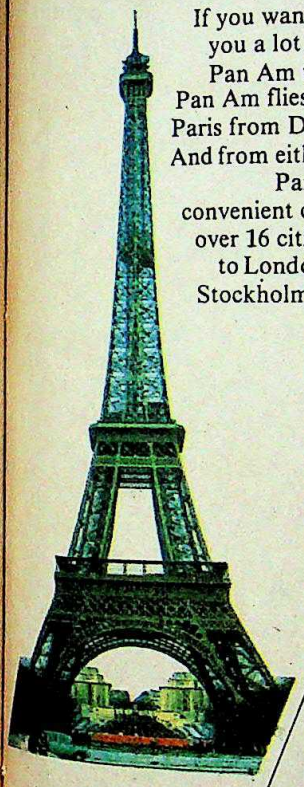

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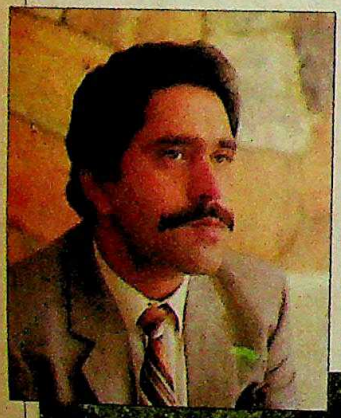
Dutt with Richa and Sunjay

◆ It was an unexpected setback—and an unexpected bonus. **Sunjay Dutt**, hospitalised for a sudden 'lung collapse' in New York last month, had a lady-in-waiting ready to nurse him to health—and happiness, forever after. After courting **Richa Sharma** for a year and a half, he finally decided to tie the knot. D-day: October 12, in the Big Apple.

The reason, explained the lanky, dopey-eyed actor, was the right timing: "I am 29 and it is high time I settled down." To make sure he does, his bride-to-be has already quit films. Papa Sunil Dutt's reaction was along similar lines: "It is nice. The boy will finally settle down in life."

◆ His penchant for driving in the fast lane is as well-known as his stable of souped-up cars. So when liquor baron **Vijay Mallya** sat behind the wheel of his sedate 1933 Pierce Arrow it was hardly vintage Mallya. But liquor, as they say, is quicker. With a little help from brother-in-law navigator Mohinder Lalwani, the high-living United Breweries boss won the 400 km-long Singapore-Malaysia Annual Vintage Car Rally last fortnight in the teeth of competition from 50-odd international drivers. But the real star was his American-made vintage car. "Our car was in excellent condition and we honestly felt we would win," said Lalwani, in post-exhilaration. "Besides", he added, "we want to popularise vintage Indian car rallies abroad." Next pit stop, Monte Carlo?



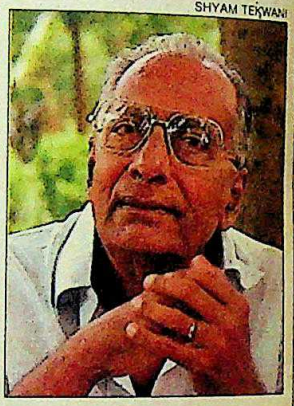
Mallya and his Pierce Arrow

◆ A gold lotus, a shawl and Rs 1 lakh in cash. But for **Bommi Nagi Reddi**, 75, and 35-films-old, the money hardly matters—and neither does the honour. Rumoured to be the richest of the rich Reddis of Andhra Pradesh, the veteran film producer dismissed the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke Award for 1986 he was recently given, as of little consequence. "In our days, a film production unit was a happy family. Today, they sound like fairy-tale-days," he reminisced adding: "today's films are all masala and no meat. We have to redefine their morality."

◆ Twinkle, twinkle little star. **Rema Lahiri**, all of nine-years-old, bounced out of the classroom and into an HMV sound studio, to record a disco music cassette called, obviously, *Little Star*. There is music in those jeans, or rather, genes. The backstage manager for the debut was her doting papa, music director Bappi Lahiri.

Lahiri: disco kid

SHYAM TEKWANI



Nagi Reddi: nostalgic

The eight songs, sung to attract the chubby fifth-grader's peers at the Maneckji Cooper School in Bombay, are "all about teachers, school friends, and holidays". She has learnt her lyrics well. "When I grow up, I want to be a very big singer," said the disco kid.

SIGNPOST

■ **Awarded:** to writer Dr **Satchidananda** (Sachi) Rautroy, 70, the prestigious Bharatiya Jnanpith Award for 1986. Popularly known as the 'people's poet', the versatile septuagenarian—who penned his first poem when he was 10 and has produced over 38 works in Oriya and English—sees the honour as "a good incentive for more creative writing". A master of imagery, his outpourings are a defiant condemnation of decadence in society.

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P. Singh: Floa
ndhra Prades
unjab: Locked
Karnataka: Can
Orissa: Falling
ujarat: Local
erala: Volte Fa
Karnataka: Clos
Last Word: A
Assam: Failed
Uttar Pradesh:
ATENOTES.....

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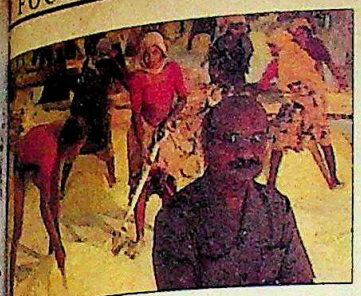
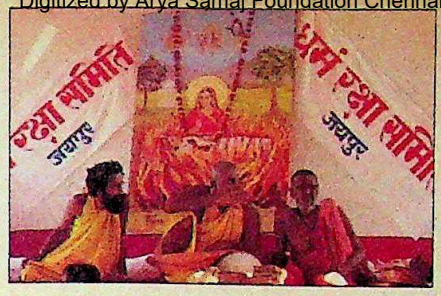


The New Millionaires

Over the last dozen years, people without family money or business backgrounds have grown into leaders of industry. Rising out of nowhere and surmounting enormous odds, these men have become symbols of Indian enterprise.

COVER STORY 78



Militant Defiance

The new ordinance against the practice and glorification of sati, introduced by the Rajasthan Government, has failed to cow down the state's Rajputs. It has instead succeeded in galvanising them into bolder action than ever before.

CURRENT EVENTS 38

Tiger by the Tail

With the Indian force in Sri Lanka now engaged in battle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the situation has taken a dangerous turn. More troops and tanks have been flown in, indicating that the offensive could be bloody—and costly.

SPECIAL REPORT 30

Upsetting the Odds

Cricket fever peaked last fortnight as the Reliance Cup got under way. A write-up on not only the tournament but also on the rash of new books on cricket, and on the money that cricket stars are raking in. Plus an exclusive column by Kapil Dev.

SPECIAL FEATURE 92

Starvation or Sickness?

Over the last several months, large numbers of people have died in Orissa's Kalahandi and Koraput districts. A close look at the two districts to determine just how much truth there is in the repeated allegations that starvation led to the deaths.

SPECIAL REPORT 116

The Tibetan Tangle

The recent riots in Lhasa were the worst in nearly 30 years of Beijing's rule in Tibet. Though New Delhi has managed to restrict the protest by Tibetans in India including the Dalai Lama, a major crisis seems to be looming ahead.

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"Life is just a dream"

"Once in a while, we manage to get away from the cares of the world and enjoy a much-needed holiday. Sometimes we're on a lake, cruising along gently in a 'shikara'. And inevitably, I remember that beautiful old rhyme – 'Row, row, row your boat, Gently down the stream, Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, Life is just a dream.'

Guess what makes the dream complete? My favourite Gwalior Suiting. With its soft textures and weaves, it makes me feel really comfortable. Gwalior Suiting is just ideal for the holiday mood."

M.A.K. PATAUDI

GWALIOR SUITING

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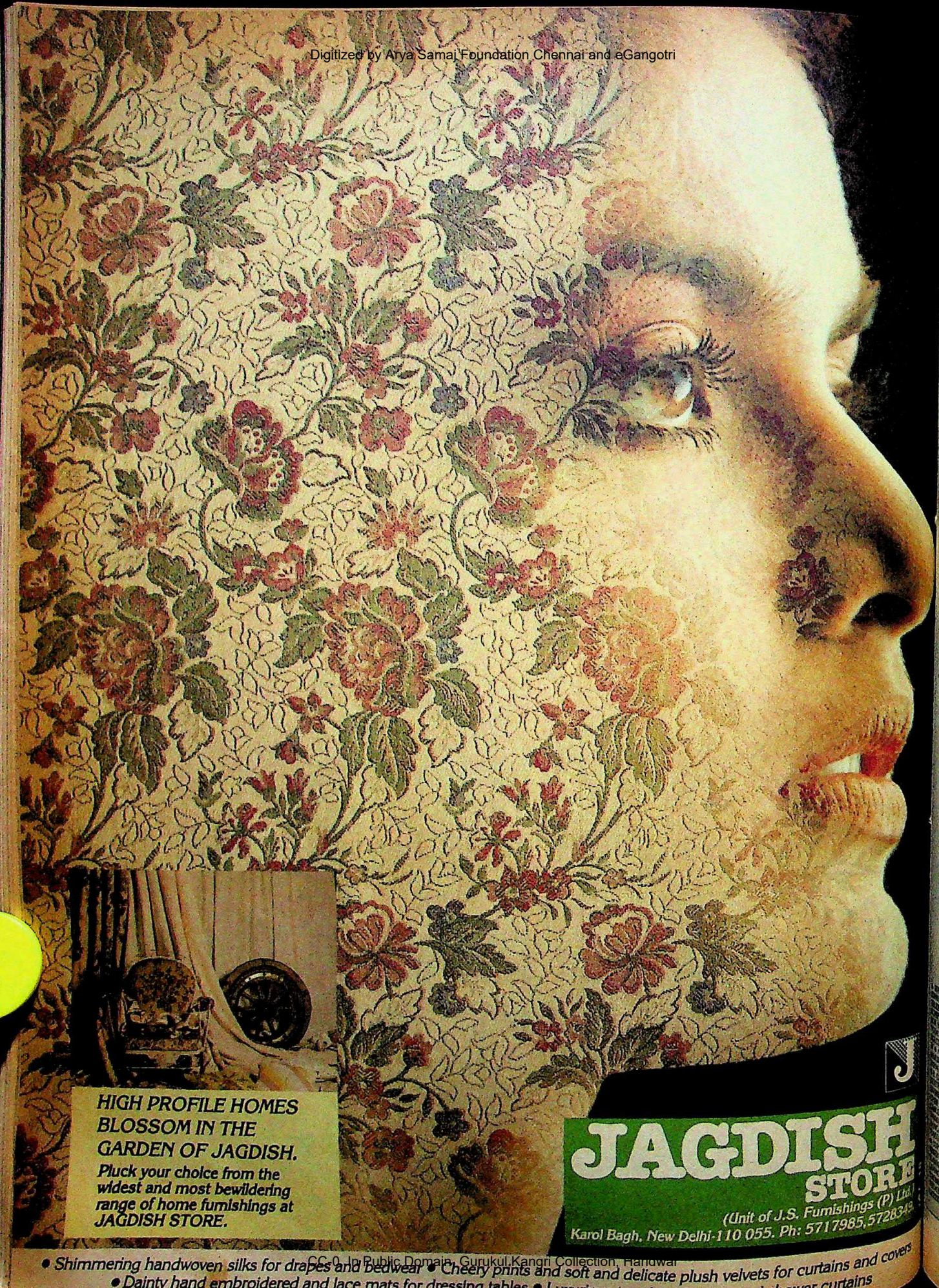

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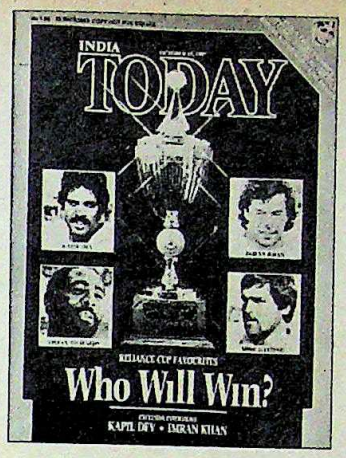

CUP CHALLENGE

Your cover story ("Who will Win?", October 15) was well-written. Defending champions India will find the going tough this time. While most people are hoping that the fight for the cup will be between India, Pakistan and the West Indies, it would be wrong to underestimate both England and Australia.

Bangalore — SASHI BHUSAN

■ There is no doubt that after India's dramatic win against Pakistan in the inaugural Reliance Cup match, Indian cricket lovers have gained a new confidence in Kapil Dev and his team. We have a strong batting order and our spinners, especially Maninder Singh and Ravi Shastri, are bowling very well. To top it all, the West Indies team is no longer as strong as it used to be. The only team which will pose a challenge to India is its traditional rival—Pakistan.

Delhi — SUMAN SHARMA

■ It is unfortunate that many of the world's foremost cricketers will not be seen in action in the Reliance Cup. Undoubtedly, the cup will be devoid of a lot of glamour. Yet one hopes that it will create new heroes in place of the old.

Bombay — RAMESH METRE

BARBARIC CUSTOM

The Deorala sati incident ("A Pagan Sacrifice", October 15), reveals the barbaric beliefs and senseless superstitions still being practised in India. If Lord Bentinck could stamp out sati with a smaller force and poor administrative backing, why has the better-equipped Rajasthan Government failed?

Lucknow — S.K. MUSHRAN

■ It is tragic that Roop Kanwar became a sati. However, even if the Government had managed to stop her, what kind of life would she be leading today? Our society still shuns widows and the Government has hardly any scheme to support them financially.

Kasaragod — K. VITTAL SHETTY

■ It is unfortunate that the Government is indifferent to such an inhuman act. Will the Government turn a blind eye towards the incident just because it wants to win elections?

Calcutta — NIRJHAR DAS GUPTA

CULTURE OF SLOTH

Your comment ("Exploiting Corruption", October 15) rightly points out that the main problem today is the culture of incompetence and sloth that pervades government departments. The press has failed to enlighten the populace about the gravity of the situation.

Ahmedabad — SAMIR SINGH

INFLATION WOES

Your article ("Galloping Away", October 15) depicting the despair amongst housewives due to rise in prices was revealing. Prices are rising, but incomes are not increasing as much. And it is the prices of essential commodities which rise first. The Government should take immediate steps to combat inflation.

Jamshedpur — B.N. BOSE

MINORITY RIGHTS

Your story ("Stormy Sale", October 15) was very interesting. Many companies change hands but it is the minority shareholder who is left in the lurch. Genelec's should be a test case for the rights of minority shareholders.

Delhi — KAMAL G. TOOLSIDASS

SENSITIVE PORTRAYAL

Kudos for highlighting the plight of countless sufferers of mental diseases ("Prisoners of the Mind", October 15) in the country. It is tragic that most people do not have even the slightest idea about the causes of schizophrenia.

Delhi — DAYAL SARAN

DIVIDED STAND

It is tragic that when the country is facing the worst drought of the century, the Opposition is happy criticising the Government and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ("Talking Tall", October 15).

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The Opposition's attempt to forge another alliance has failed miserably. Neither have these parties agreed on who should be their leader nor do they have any alternative plan for the upliftment of the poor of the country.

Delhi — KAMLESH PRASAD

CONTESTED CHARGE

I refer to the article ("Changed Strategy", September 30), in which mention is made of "the suspected siphoning of funds by the Tata-owned Indian Hotels Ltd to a Hong Kong-based associate".

A similar allegation which had appeared in some other magazine was fully rebutted by me in the course of a letter which I wrote to V.P. Singh, former finance minister, on May 18, 1987. This letter was released to the press on June 8 and appeared in virtually every newspaper in India. I must assume that its contents were known to you or to your editorial staff. I am therefore surprised and concerned that such a statement should have been allowed to be published in your magazine.

Bombay — J.R.D. Tata, *Chairman, Tata Sons Ltd*

While we respect Mr Tata's views, our report was factual in that the Enforcement Directorate suspects Indian Hotels of siphoning money out, and maintains that investigations into the matter are continuing. We made no comment on the merits of the case and cast no aspersions on the company ourselves. Our report merely listed this among several cases on which the Finance Ministry has not made much progress.

—Editor

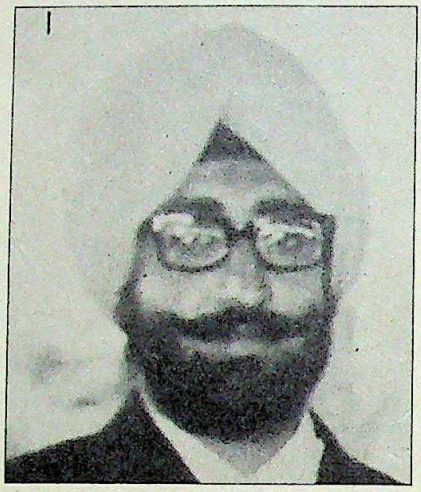
ARBITRARY ACT

Your cover story ("On the Firing Line", September 30) is an eye-opener on one of the many arbitrary decisions taken by the Government. Through the raids, Rajiv Gandhi has sounded a warning to those who dare criticise the Government. If the raids have been carried out on the basis of economic offences, one wonders why no action was taken against Reliance Industries, which is a much bigger economic offender.

Delhi — CHANDRA VANU SOM

■ By raiding the Indian Express, Rajiv Gandhi has created more trouble for himself. In fact, the spell of short-pitched missiles and bouncers by Arun Shourie has left batsman Rajiv with no option but to duck. How long the batsman will now survive remains to be seen.

Patna — GYAN BHADRA



MISTAKEN IDENTITY

I wish to invite your attention to a serious mistake in the photograph on page 63 of your issue of October 15 ("S.S. Mann: Stuck in Jail"). Mann's name has been given to some clean-shaven prisoner with a trimmed beard, whereas Mann is a kesa-dhari Sikh. A wrong person has been depicted in his place. Even before his arrest and being lodged in jail, he has held Sikhism in full respect and maintained full keshas and beard like any Gursikh. It looks to me as if there is an effort to malign the detenu and create a vicious atmosphere against S.S. Mann.

Sirhind — JOGINDER SINGH MANN, *(Father of S.S. Mann)*

We regret the inadvertent error in publishing the wrong picture, which is not of S.S. Mann. There was absolutely no intent to malign him in any way or to call into question his respect for Sikhism. His correct picture is published here. —Editor

SOCIALIST JARGON

Your comment ("Lefter than Thou", September 30) projects the socialist schizophrenia of the political duo—Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh. Who can save the country from the "capitalist bulls" and the "socialist bears", with the Government in the hands of opportunists? Without distributive justice, no extent of improved productivity can banish poverty.

Patna — C.P. VERMA

DOUBLE SPEAK

The facts in your story ("Accumulating Assets", September 30) were only a tip of the iceberg. In spite of the need to conserve resources to combat drought in the state, the Uttar Pradesh Government under Bir Bahadur Singh is flooding newspapers in Delhi and the state with special six-page supplements. The occasion—the completion of two years of Government. And to top it all, the same Government is urging the people of the state to observe austerity.

Lucknow — RAM AUTAR SHARMA

SECURITY RISK

People like Unnikrishnan ("Spy-Catching", September 30) are dangerous for India's security. It is tragic that there are many people in India who lack a sense of patriotism and are ready to betray the country.

Jeddah — S. BISWAS

RANK OPPORTUNISM

Your special feature ("The Bhopal Bonanza", September 30) reveals that a disgraceful situation prevails in this city. Any right-minded person will be shocked to learn how the so-called social workers, government officials and professionals are cashing in on a tragedy.

Kottayam — V.K. SATHYAVAN NAIR

CRUEL SPORT

It is perhaps the first time that a scandal in the racecourse has been given so much publicity ("Death on the Track", September 30). But it is common to exploit horses for the benefit of owners, trainers, jockeys and punters. Many new stud farms have sprouted. Young horses naturally stand a better chance. Old ones are sold off to amateur riding or serum institutes, where they are exploited again. Many like us feel that horse-racing should be banned in India.

Pune — DIANA RATNAGAR, *chairperson, Beauty Without Cruelty*

POWER UNLIMITED

The adoption of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Bill ("Draconian Measure", September 30), has lowered India's standing on human rights issues. The fact that any government official can preside over the special courts makes the judiciary irrelevant.

Rhode Island, US — BILL SINGER

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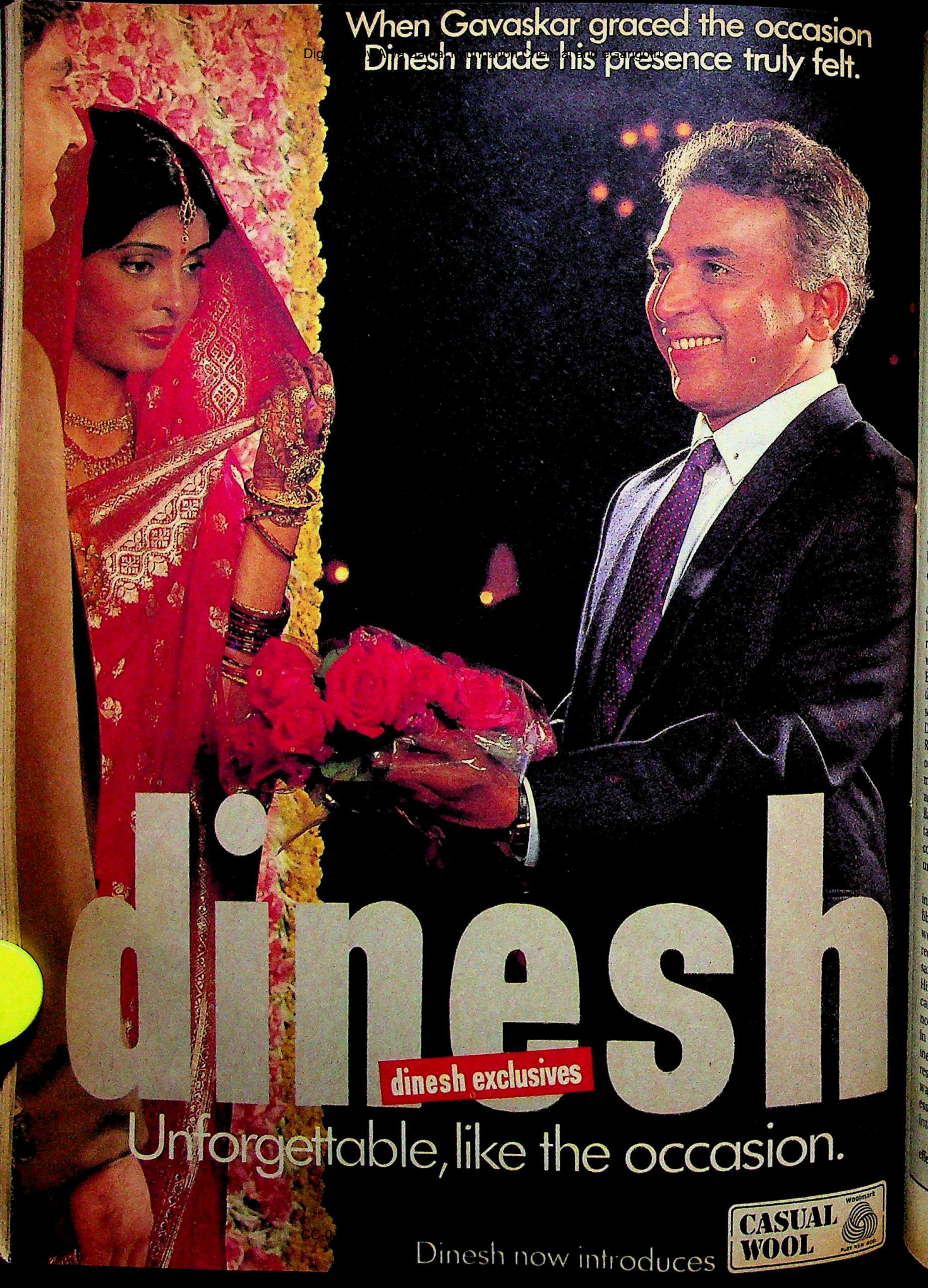

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Moral Bankruptcy

THE general public reaction to Roop Kanwar's sati in Rajasthan's Deorala village—the roasting alive of a young woman before thousands of frenzied spectators—has now begun to fall into predictable patterns: blame it all on the pagan Rajputs who have failed to find their place in the modern world; blame it all on the media for hyping up the event; blame it all on the inefficiency of the local police and administration; blame it all on the feminists for over-reacting to an isolated incident.

The blame-letting, ironically, is indicative of a healthy trend: the country is at least engaged in a proper debate over social perversity. The Deorala sati is not being swept under the rug of unassailable religious sanction. The incident has not been allowed to remain a two-paragraph squib within the inside pages of newspapers. The press and women's organisations have rightly refused to ignore a pagan practice, and the administration is justly being condemned for failing, not once but twice, to prevent the glorification of sati.

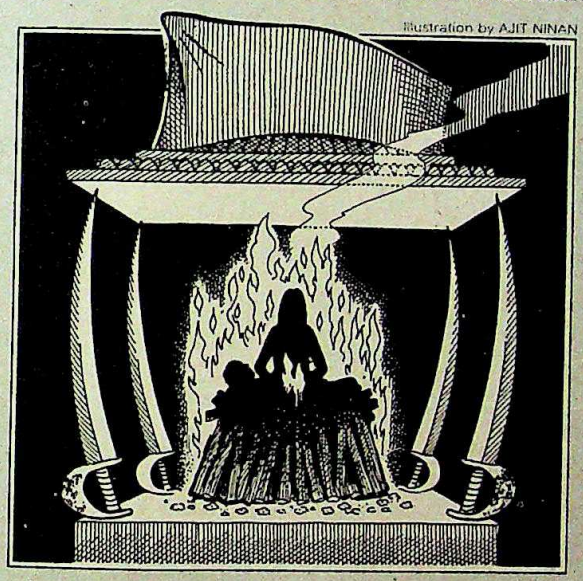
Illustration by AJIT NINAN

It can be argued that the outpouring of Rajput sentiment in favour of sati is in direct response to criticism from women activists and the press. Earlier sati instances saw neither, nor did the incidents themselves become flash-points like Deorala has become. But Raja Ram Mohan Roy faced a similar outpouring of orthodox sentiment when he joined battle on the issue more than a century-and-a-half ago. Ignoring the issue may have prevented the flash-point that Deorala has become, but it would have been tantamount to appeasement. And social reform does not come through appeasement, any more than ignoring the undercurrent of approval for sati will wish the problem away.

The state and society must learn from history. The British initially did nothing in the early nineteenth century, using the liberal argument that with greater education better sense would prevail and retrograde religious practices would recede. They didn't. After the British kept their hands off the sati issue, accepting it as a practice sanctified by custom and Hindu mythology, the number of sati incidents rose dramatically—from 300 a year to more than 600. Appeasement did not work then and will not now. When sati was finally banned in Bengal by Lord William Bentinck in 1829, there was the inevitable defiant reaction. It was after an equally spirited response to this from Roy's Brahmo Samaj that the practice was somewhat controlled. And the law against what is essentially a human sacrifice was ultimately incorporated into the Indian Penal Code.

It became abundantly clear at the time that the most effective way to deal with exploitative religious fundamentalism was to demonstrate that the state meant business. You break the law, you go to jail. But there was another important element. Social reform legislation during the pre-Independence days had a chance of working because the reformists devoted their life-styles and souls to the causes they held dear and refused to pander to superstition. Roy was hounded throughout his life, and so ostracised by the Brahmins that he had a difficult time even finding a bride for his son. Gandhi, too, constantly challenged the scriptures and the epics and he integrated untouchables into his ashram even under vehement opposition from the financiers of his movement. Today, in contrast, what is evident is a moral bankruptcy of the Indian state and its rulers, a bankruptcy sought to be hidden under the cloak of instant ordinances like the one promulgated last fortnight by the Rajasthan Government.

Especially after Nehru, the moral will of the leadership to battle social evils either by enforcing the laws or through deep personal commitment has evanesced. And with it has disappeared moral authority. This is precisely the larger question that the Deorala sati has raised. It has become symbolic of the Government's pathetic inability to deal firmly with crimes against women and against the more helpless sections of society. And if these crimes masquerade under religious sanction, the leadership having pandered to fundamentalist depredations in search of political mileage, is all the more stymied.

The laws against child marriages, female infanticide, dowry and bride burnings are rarely enforced. There are sati shrines and sati celebrations, in which leading government personages participate. And there has not been a single conviction in connection with the 28 known sati incidents in Rajasthan since Independence. Rajiv Gandhi, who failed to react for two weeks to the Deorala sati, finds time to attend what used to nauseate his grandfather: *yagnas*. His mother sought out sundry tantriks for advice and solace. His ministers regularly consult astrologers and gurus. His government enacted the Muslim Women's Bill, and the Rajputs have taken a page right out of it in order to justify Deorala's sati and its consecration as a matter of Hindu Personal Law.

It is convenient to make the Rajputs the whipping boy in this grisly drama. But the brutal truth remains that the forces of exploitation and obscurantism see only one thing in the absence of moral and political will: moral and political sanction. To deny this to them requires proper implementation of the numerous social reform laws, backed up by an active reformist movement led by the country's political leaders. Without these, there can only be more Deoralas.

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Dogged Pursuers

● After their brief but hectic stay in the capital, Bofors executives Per Ove Morberg and Lars Gothlin thought they could finally heave a sigh of uninterrupted relief after boarding the British Airways aircraft that stood ready for departure at Palam airport. But even as they lounged comfortably in their first class seats, little did they know that they were the subject of some last-minute snooping by Intelligence Bureau (IB) officials who had been on their trail since the very day they landed in New Delhi.

The main object of the IB exercise was to discover whether the two executives were making secret contacts with anybody outside the Government. Acting on suspicion that a secret tryst may be made aboard the aircraft, a handful of IB plain clothesmen

got onto the plane and began to scour the seats in the rear. The snooping was so obvious that a stewardess approached the sleuths and politely informed them that if they were looking for Morberg and Gothlin, the pair was comfortably nestled in the first class area. Embarrassed over their cloak and dagger routine having misfired, the IB team quietly left, but not without a last menacing glance at the Swedes as they passed their seats.

Unchanged Clout

● Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh's wife, continues to exercise considerable clout in the

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

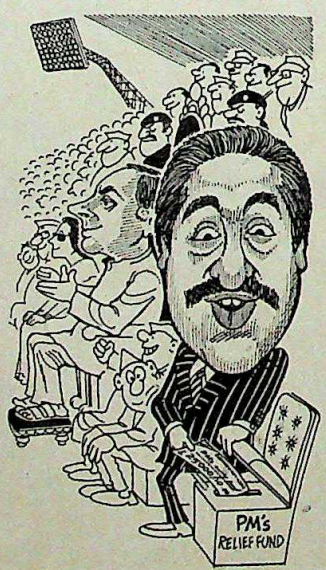
nation's capital, as became abundantly clear recently. Some 80 students, of Pune's Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), came to camp in New Delhi to seek redressal of their grievances. They had earlier walked out of their hostels en masse, in protest against what they called, the gross inefficiency of the FTII management.

They first knocked on Information Minister Ajit Panja's door for an audience. But Panja refused to see them. So they wound their way to the Bachchans' New Delhi residence to relate their story to Jaya, who also happens to be an FTII alumna. She listened sympathetically and then, without much ado, picked up the telephone and asked to talk to Panja. The information minister promptly came on the line. When she politely asked why he had refused to see the students, Panja mumbled an answer. No excuses, no ifs and buts, thundered Jaya, he should see them immediately. Panja, now tame as a kitten, meowed his assent.

Outbidding All

● For the country's industrialists and assorted glitterati, obtaining a seat next to—or even close to—Rajiv Gandhi at the exhibition Reliance Cup cricket match between India and Pakistan in aid of the Prime Minister's Drought Relief Fund, became as prestigious an endeavour as sitting in the Queen's Royal Box at the London Opera during a command performance. Anil Ambani, Reliance's executive director, virtually had to turn off his phone in the last month to stall the incoming calls from galaxies of VVIPs, asking him to use his influence in getting them the coveted seats.

But industrialist Vijay Mallya made the show's organisers an offer they couldn't refuse: a Rs 25-lakh contribution to the drought relief fund. But at a price: a guaranteed seat next to the



prime minister. And that is how Mallya managed to bag, what will probably go down in history as, world cricket's most expensive seat.

Ill Feelings

● The Union Health Ministry is having unhealthy problems. They stem from a hostile outbreak between Union Education Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who also nurses the health portfolio and Saroj Khaparde, his abrasive minister of state for health.

The battle has reached such a feverish pitch that whatever Khaparde proposes, Rao disposes into the sanitary

bin. Recently, when Khaparde passed an order that no voluntary health organisation should receive funds from the Government, Rao quietly reversed the order. Khaparde is now reportedly searching for a tonic to soothe Rao and get back to good health in the ministry herself.

Better Diplomacy

● Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has finally learnt the art of keeping the oldies in the party happy without giving them any significant power. During his first two years in office, he maintained his distance from Kamalapati Tripathi, Umashanker Dixit, and Dwarka Prasad Mishra—all in their '80s. But now Rajiv summons them for consultation on political matters. In return, Tripathi meets the press daily at the AICC(I) office and praises the prime minister. But it remains to be seen whether the troika will be rewarded by accommodating their proteges in the party organisation or in the Cabinet.

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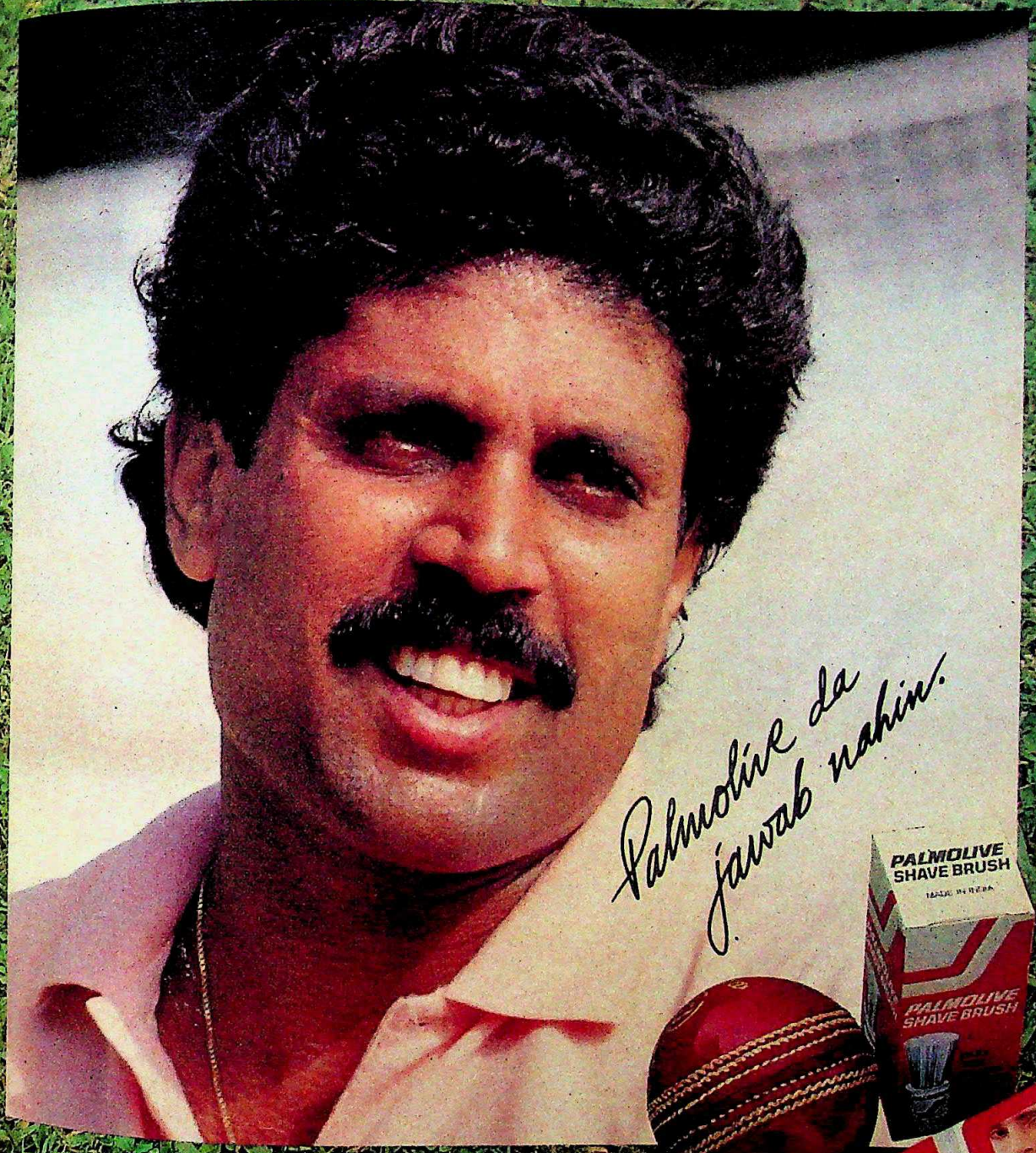
FOR TOUGH, SUCCESSFUL MEN



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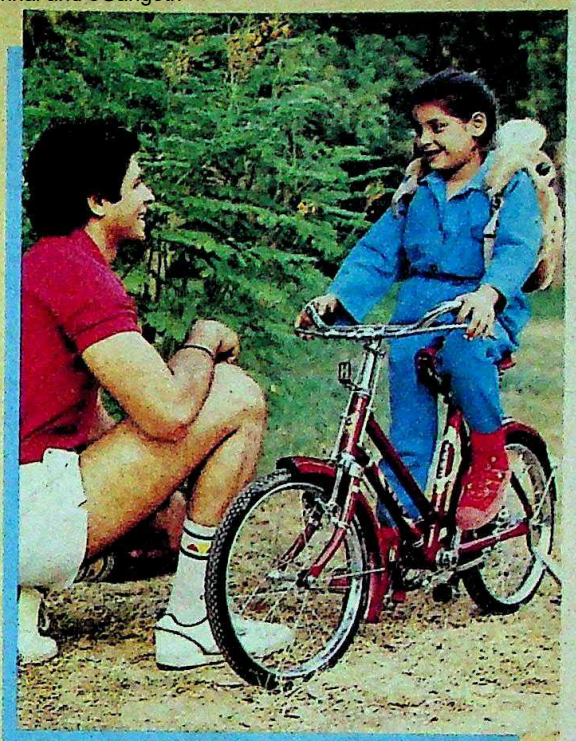

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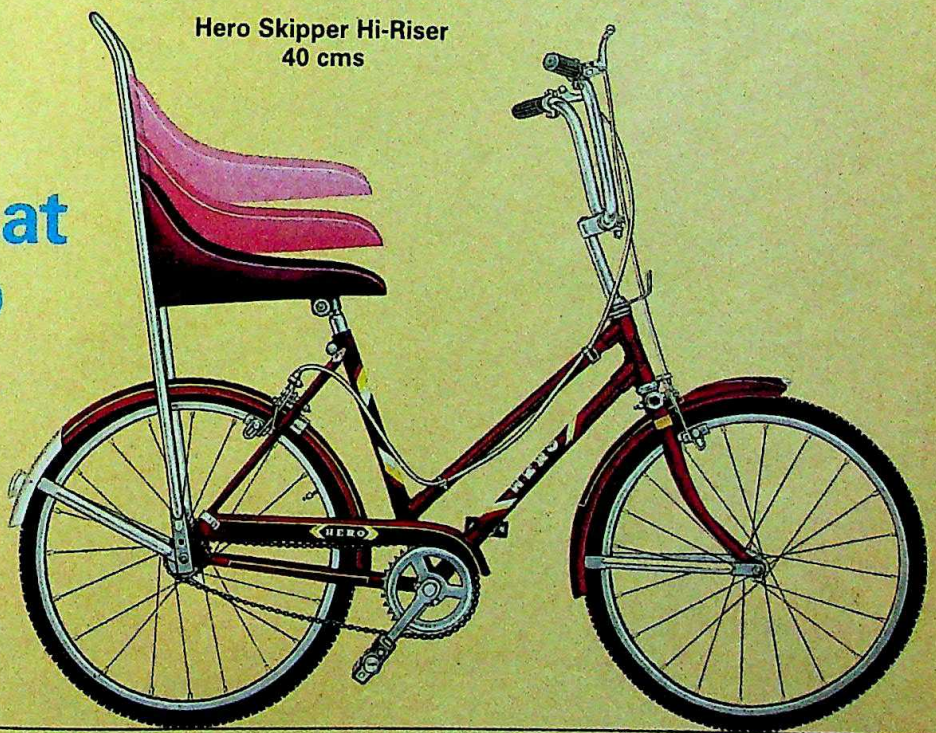

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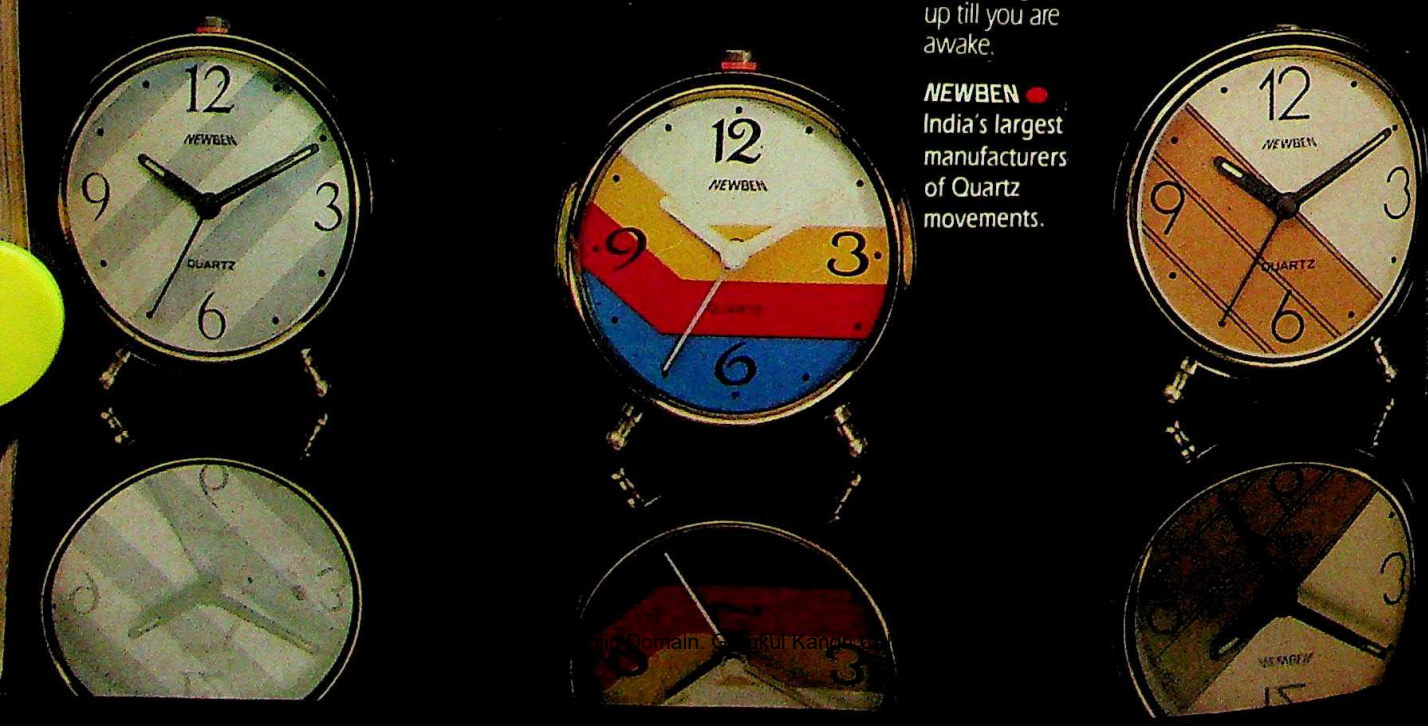

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• *As the Jan Morcha is not a political party, it cannot logically have a party-to-party relationship with any political party.*

■ Excerpt from the Jan Morcha manifesto

• *This Morcha (Jan Morcha), in the process of sticking to the left or right, will lose its paste and fall down.*

■ GHULAM NABI AZAD, quoted in *The Times of India*

• *I do not belong to a particular group and I am not a member of any party....From the first day itself, I had made it clear that nobody, no group could use me as its rubber stamp.*

■ DARSHAN SINGH RAGI in *Sunday*

• *Roop Kanwar has brought glory to womanhood. After all, not every woman commits sati after her husband's death.*

■ KALYAN SINGH KALVI, Rajasthan Janata Party chief

• *I am ready to admit that I have failed... that our generation has failed.*

■ MARGARET ALVA, on the Deorala sati incident, quoted in *The Sunday Observer*

• *My proximity to the prime minister is purely social. I've never been an advisor of his. I'm not really very important in the prime minister's life.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *Sunday*

• *I am quite sure that in the 1990s, the way I am thinking now will be the way the country will be thinking.*

■ SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY in *Gentleman*

• *One important lesson I learnt from the Shaw Wallace affair is that it is advisable to win the confidence of the professional managers of a company prior to acquiring a major shareholding in it.*

■ MANOHAR CHHABRIA, chairman of the Chhabria group, in *Business World*

• *I had told the press in 1983 that Rs 25,000 crore is in Swiss banks. It is just one of those things one knows exists.*

■ SWRAJ PAUL in *Probe India*

• *In India and Pakistan, I've been offered film parts, romantic hero stuff, but I couldn't do that. Politics, which attracts me in principle, is a problem, because Pakistan is not a true democracy. And I fear I'd be bored in diplomacy or the civil service.*

■ IMRAN KHAN, on retiring from cricket, quoted in *Sunday Mail*

• *Everything I possess should be beautiful and the best—house, car, plane or woman. Why not? Even God likes good things.*

■ DHIRENDRA BRAHMACHARI in *Onlooker*

• *It's time I stopped and I am going to stop exposing. I am sick and tired of doing rain, water-fall and wet sequences.*

■ MANDAKINI in *Stardust*

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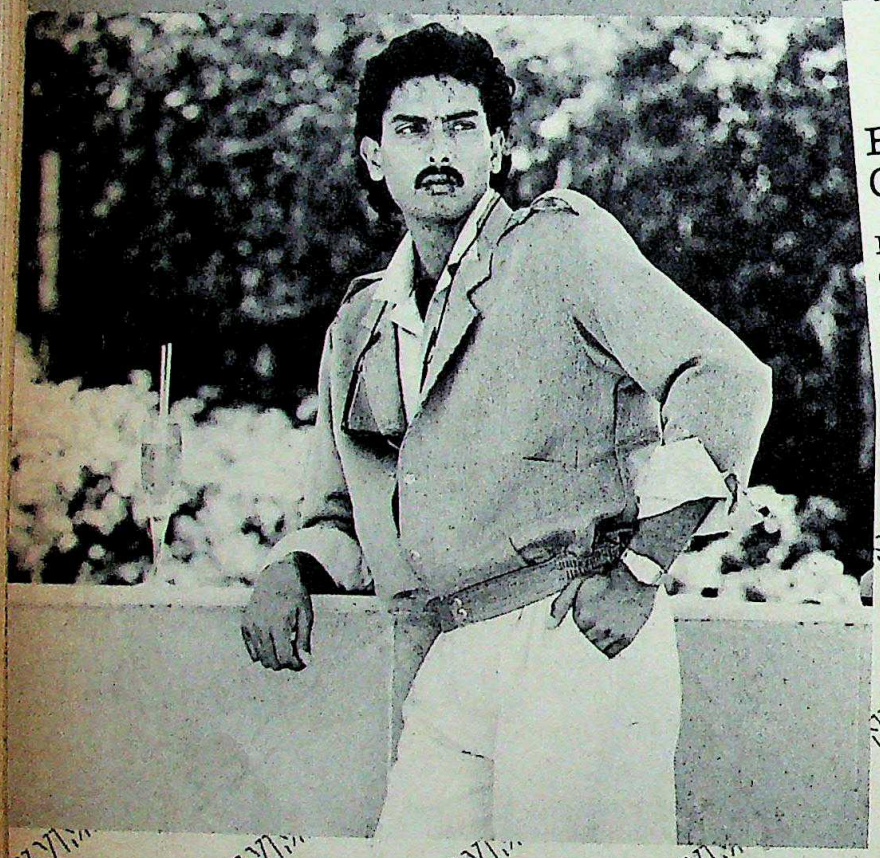

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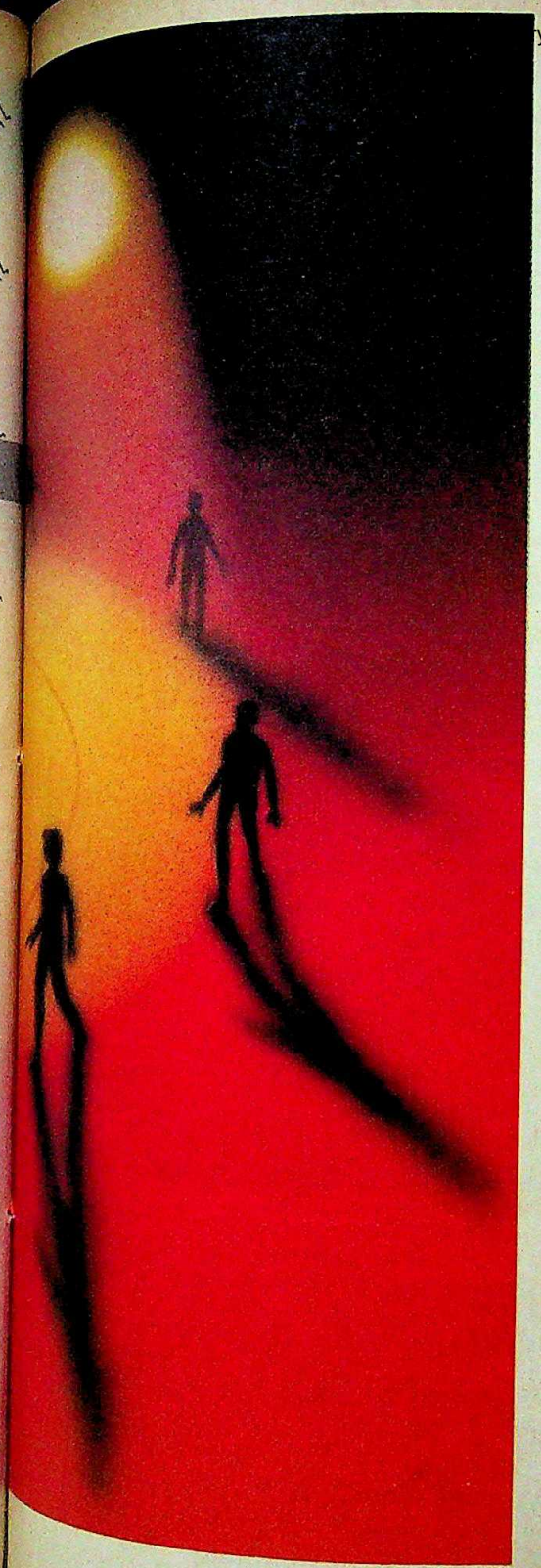

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DEVIL'S DUES

■ The Ramlila show at Dussehra joyfully celebrates the triumph of good over evil. But for the villagers of Dabubari in Hapur, who were watching the traditional drama, the reverse came uncomfortably close to being true.

The moment of the demon king's death arrived, and the villagers waited in expectant silence. But Ravana, departing from the prescribed script, began attacking Lord Rama with renewed vigour—and unwritten battle cries. With his grand finale in dire straits, Lord Rama decided to call for some modern props—the police—to come to his rescue.

It turned out that Ravana had only been fighting for his last year's dues. And he thought that the on-stage appeal would be most effective. And so it was. The real villains—the organisers—were made to pay up, and the ending eventually carried on as ordained. But it left behind a modern twist to the old epic: if you don't give the devil his dues, you can be sure he'll get his revenge.

ROAD REVENGE

■ They are the bane of all smaller mortals on Delhi's roads. And when the monstrous vehicles loom into sight, others scuttle away. But on the Cantonment Road, one bus driver learnt that it doesn't pay to be a road hog.

Incensed by an auto-rickshaw that refused to give way, the bus driver decided to test its mettle. So he ran the pesky three-wheeler into the road divider, scraping its side in the process. Only, he hadn't bargained on its two female occupants who were shaken but not cowed down.

Cheered on by the women and their kids, the auto driver swerved back, stalled the chartered bus, climbed onto its wheel and pulled the astonished driver right out. Heaping the choicest abuses on him, the duo then soundly walloped their prey. They let him off, screaming for mercy, only when they were sure he'd learnt his lesson: biggest isn't always best.

QUEUED UP

■ For the rail traveller, long queues that seem to end only when the tickets run out are bad enough. But in Bangalore, railway officials have devised worse ways to harass the unsuspecting customer.

A local journalist had planned to go to Madras on October 25 and return the next day, so he filled in two forms at one go at the station. Then, he came across an inexplicable rule: different counters for even and odd dates for the same train. So he suffered long waits in two queues for each booking.

That wasn't all. A delay of his trip till the 30th had him back at the line ups. First, at an 'odd' queue to cancel the ticket of the 25th, then, to an 'even' one for his new forward ticket and to cancel his old return one. Totally confused, he'd forgotten his return on the 31st: another 'odd' queue. After all the odds and evens, the poor man is still at sixes and sevens.

ACCIDENTAL RELIEF

■ The modern protocol officer's woes are just as bad as the security man's. The awful task of making sure that their political charges' unending demands are met—not to mention ensuring all the right papers are signed—often falls to this official species.

But relief can come in the line of duty, as an overworked under secretary in the Maharashtra Government found. Looking after eight to 10 travel-happy VIPs every day had him going about in a daze. Then, one morning, he realised he had to escort VIPs to Sahar airport.

Running behind schedule, a frenzied drive followed, and when everyone had tumbled out of the cars, the under-secretary was left behind. Dashing after his charges, madly scribbling on his papers, he was abruptly halted—after walking through an unmarked glass door. The official won his vacation: in hospital nursing his cuts.

GHOSTLY CAPER

■ The mysterious ways of the supernatural have people behaving in the oddest ways. And in Parel in Bombay, an 'other-worldly' presence in a small general store has the owner in a flat spin.

Amruthraj Jain was pottering around his shop when he noticed small cuts on his clothes. Glancing down, he saw tiny blade pieces on the ground. He put them on the counter; then, they disappeared. Screaming 'ghost', Jain ran to his guru. But the mantras were of no avail; the cuts soon appeared on the clothes of his wife and son.

News of the incredible incident drew large mobs demanding that the police bring out the 'ghosts'. And amidst all the hullabaloo, no one has yet thought of an obvious reason—rats, or termites, or Jain's imagination—or even of verifying the evidence. Which just goes to show, some mysteries are better left unsolved.

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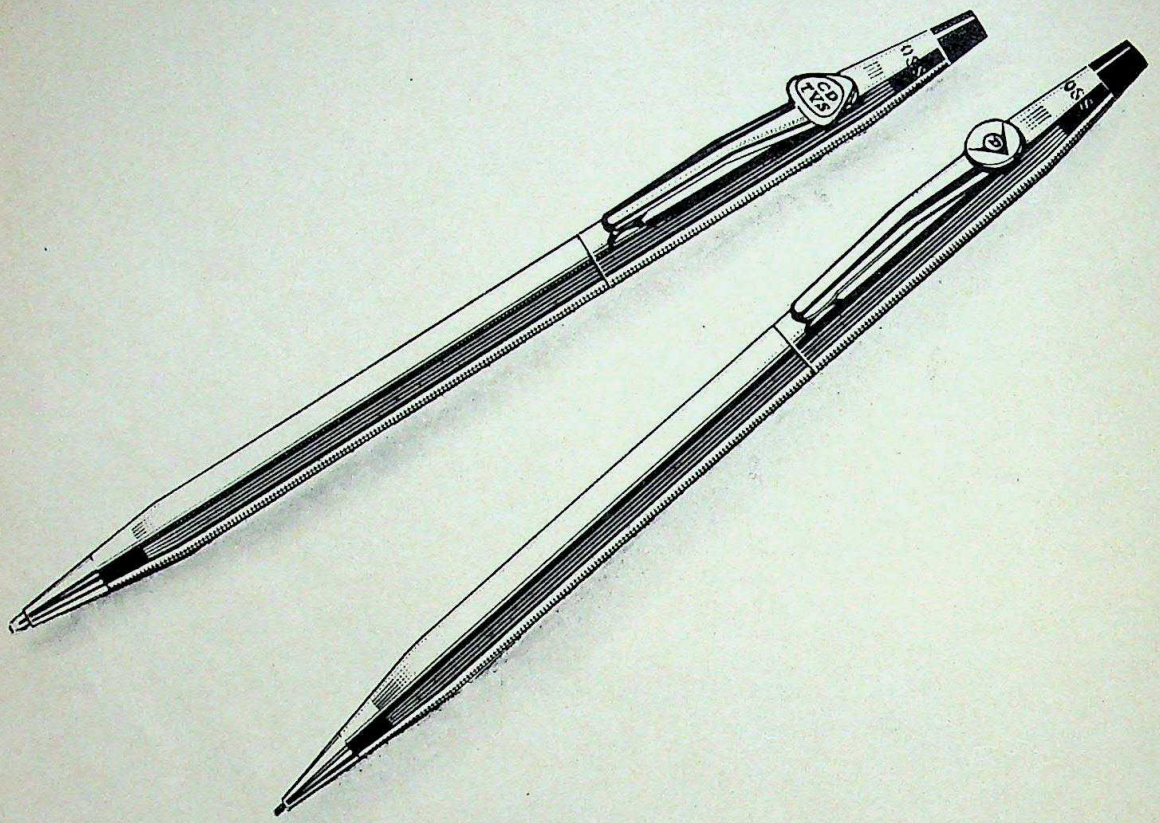

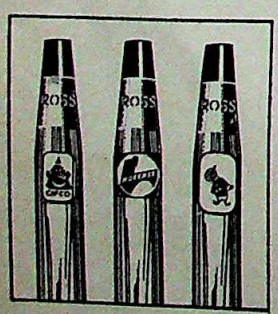

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War and Peace

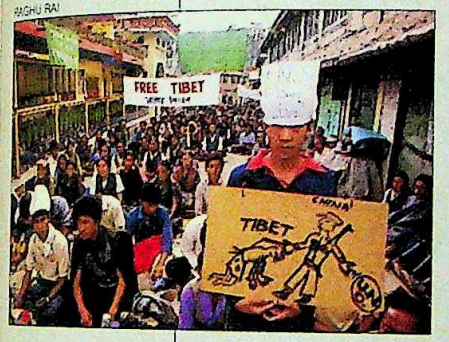
THE crackle of competing conflicts carpented the fortnight that was on a brittle frame-piece. On the southern flank of the country, Indian soldiers were being thrust into what could be their most malignant military misadventure in memory. On the white wasteland of the Siachen glacier, Indian and Pakistani troops fought their bloodiest battle so far for the control of inhabitable territory. And, in Lhasa, the most serious anti-Chinese riots since 1959 fanned the dormant Tibetan issue into explosive life.

SHYAM TEKWANI

Indian soldiers were being thrust into what could be their most malignant military misadventure in memory

There were some painful paradoxes on parade. In Jaffna, the Indian Army massed its might against the very people it was sent in to protect. In Siachen, India and Pakistan engaged in fierce fire-fights while the two countries co-host a contest called Cricket For Peace. In Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama's discourse on the disturbances was diluted by India's diplomatic decision to ignore the ethnic persecution in Tibet in favour of better bargains with Beijing.

RAGHU RAI



In Lhasa, the worst anti-Chinese riots since 1959 fanned the Tibetan issue into life

On the domestic front, the paradoxes were no less in prominence. The enigmatic V.P. Singh formed his long-awaited Jan Morcha but what his movement currently lacks the most is *jan*. In Rajasthan, the Government carefully stared the other way while a massive meeting in support of sati was staged in the heart of the state capital. In Punjab, Sikhism's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, once again returned to being the citadel of sedition. And, by way of variety, the finalists of the last cricket World Cup, India and the West Indies, crashed to demoralising defeats in their opening Reliance Cup encounters.

There was, however, some consolation in the fact that issues of greater import and the prime minister's Commonwealth safari had finally, if temporarily, laid the Bofors ghost to rest. Ultimately, the Government's credibility will be better served by scotching scandals like the public paeans to paganism in Rajasthan than by obtaining clearance certificates from Swedish officials in Stockholm.

BHAWAN SINGH

The enigmatic V.P. Singh formed his long-awaited Jan Morcha but what his movement currently lacks the most is *jan*

CHAWLA

The battlefields in public priority will currently be those on which the Reliance Cup is being fought

In any event, the guns that could prove even more damaging are those currently in the hands of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka. New Delhi's misinterpretation of the militant mind has trapped the Indian Army into literally grabbing the tiger by the tail. Last fortnight's offensive by the Indian Army against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has turned Sri Lanka's ethnic strife on its head—the final responsibility for procuring peace now rests with New Delhi and not Colombo. The political, and psychological, price for that posture could be potent. Even more so if the accord, already grievously endangered, collapses in a heap—of Indian bodies.

Conversely, collapsed accords, political upheavals and a scandal-a-day diet has left the Indian public somewhat satiated and in desperate search of less demoralising diversions. Thus, the battlefields in public priority will currently be those on which the Reliance Cup is being fought. India's historic entry into the Davis Cup finals has already set the mood and the progress of India's cricket team will be watched with far more pride and passion than that of the luckless Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka.

—DILIP BOBB

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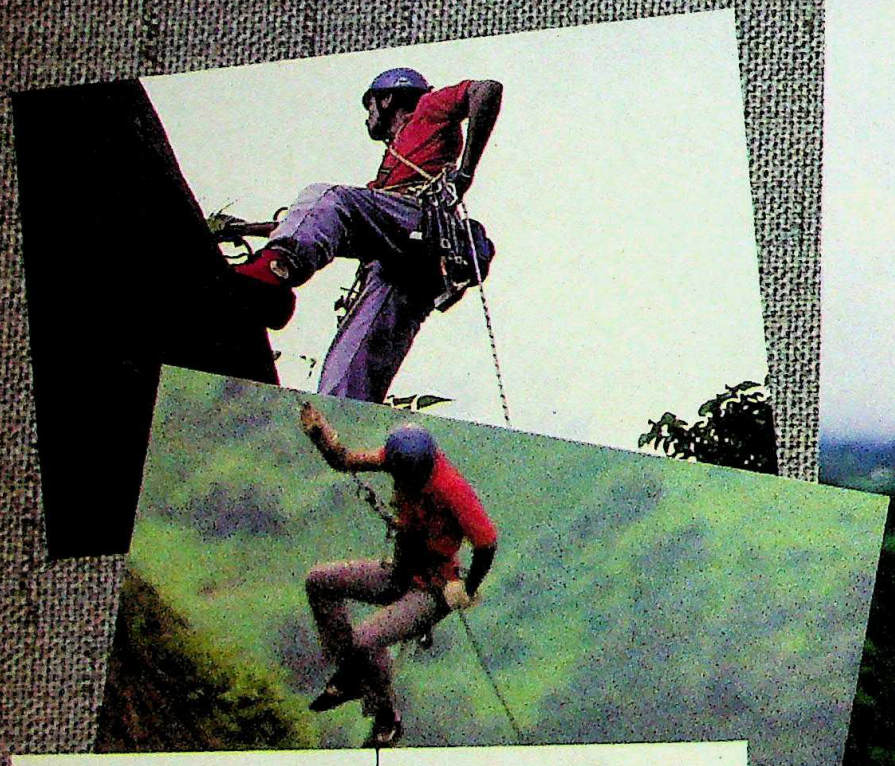
The Modern Man.



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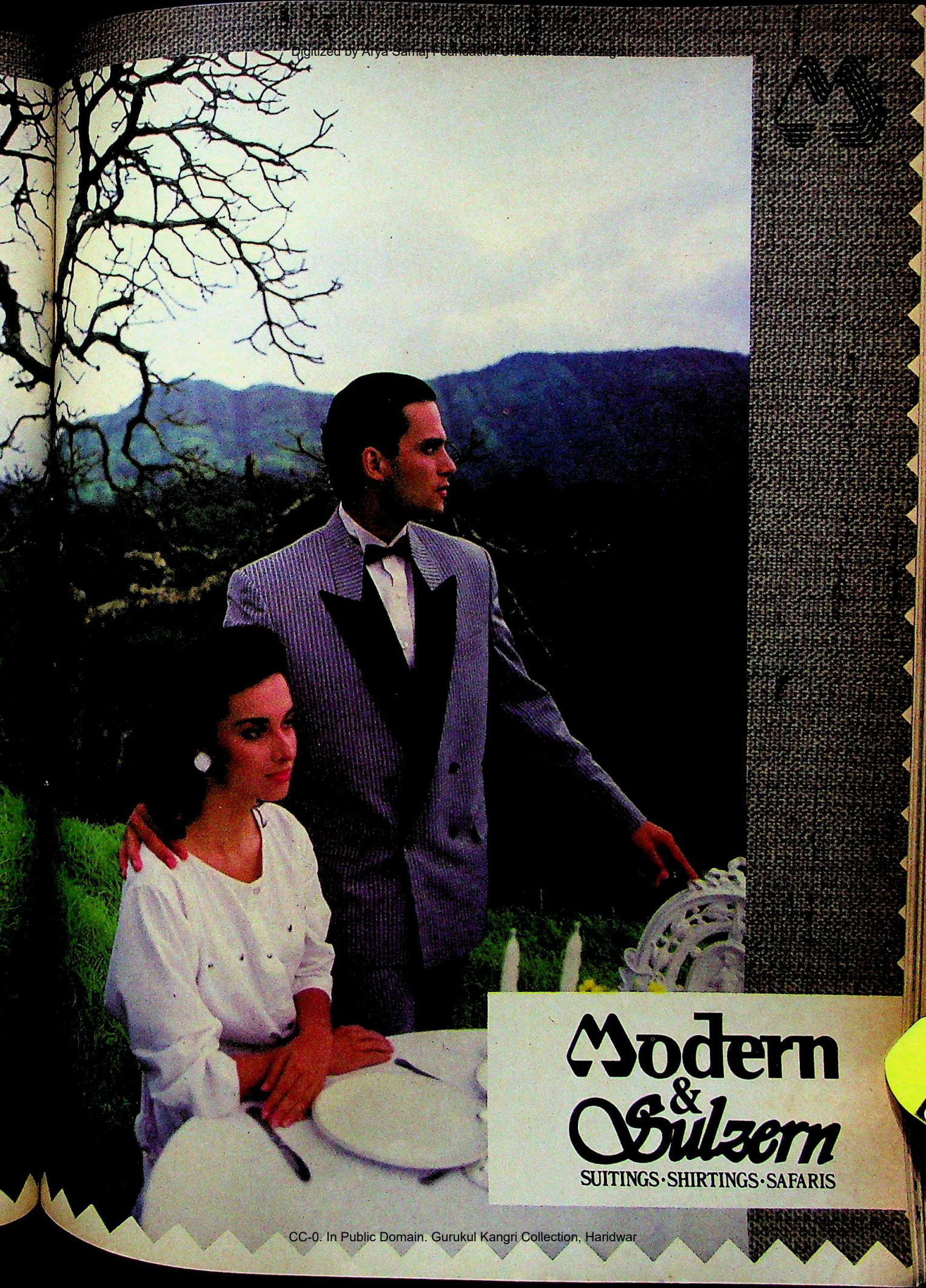

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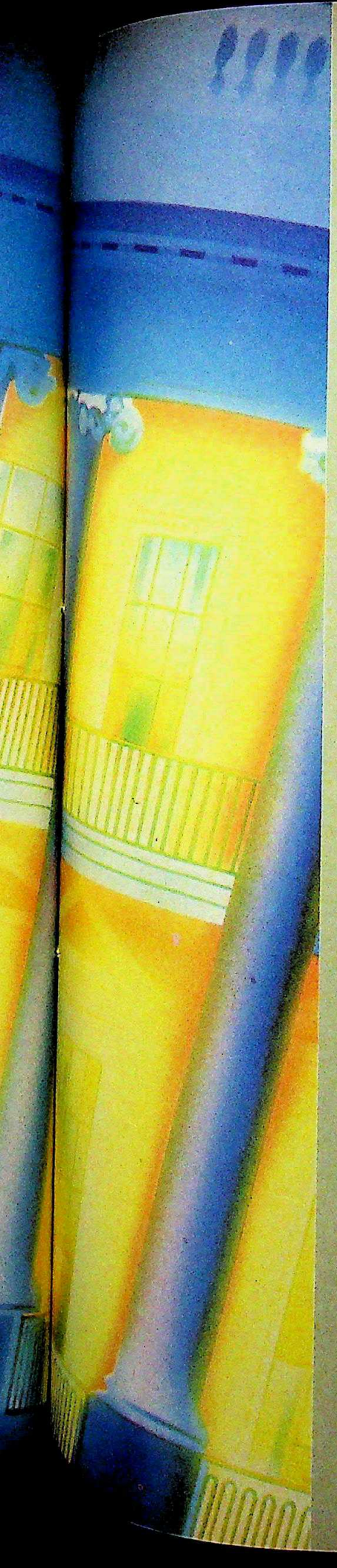

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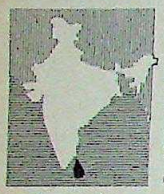
SRI LANKA

Tiger by the Tail

The Indian Army's offensive has dangerous overtones



IT is a sight familiar enough to India's border population. The skies awash with waves of lumbering troop carriers, the heavily-fortified camps below unloading tanks and armoured personnel carriers, troops in full battle dress on patrol, the distant thunder of gun-fire. But this time, there was one vital difference—the border was one that India's military strategists had never even considered in their operational plans, and the enemy happened to be people of the same ethnic blood.

Barely 10 weeks after Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Junius Jayewardene put their signatures to an accord designed to bring peace to the troubled island, India's role in that process has acquired alarming overtones. The 8,000-strong Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), originally sent in to police the peace between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, at first found itself a helpless spectator to a bloody internecine war between the Tamil groups that left over 150 dead. And by last fortnight, in what is the ultimate irony, the IPKF was sucked into a full-scale battle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the most dominant militant Tamil group in the island.

That could be an overture to a diplomatic and even military disaster. The fact that the Indian Army is now engaged in an open war with the LTTE—who they originally intended to protect—has all but destroyed the accord's legitimacy. More dangerous is the fact that the Indian Army could get bogged down in a Vietnam or Afghanistan-type misadventure.

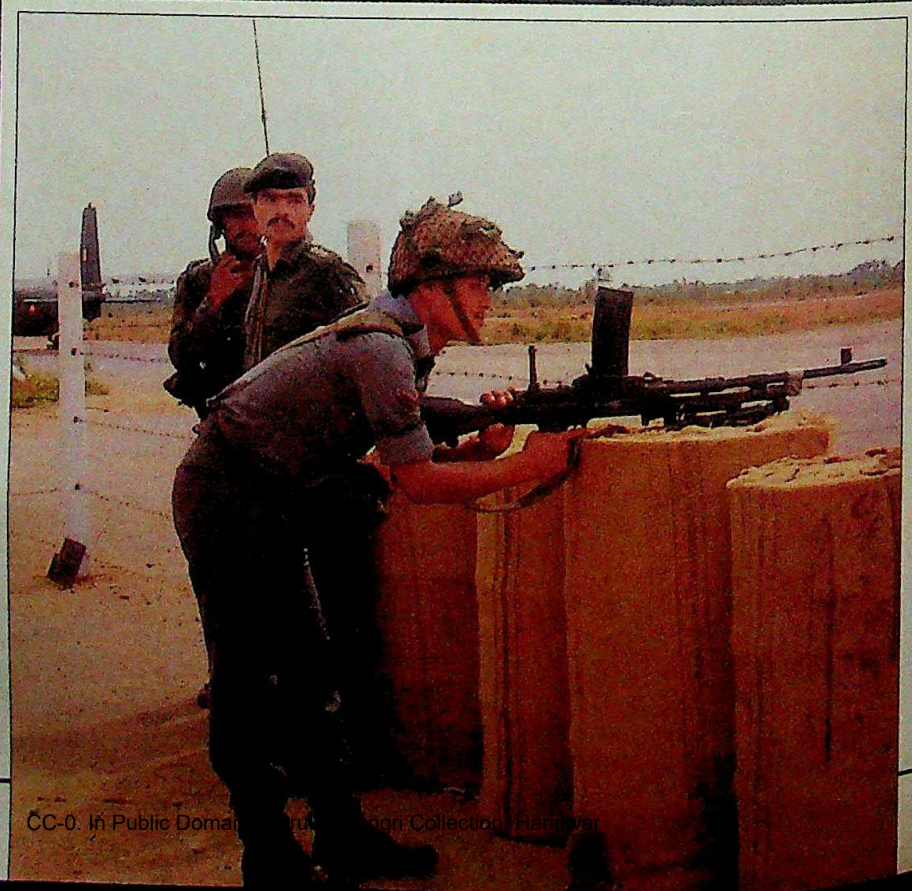
The LTTE is the most heavily-armed, the most fiercely motivated and the most battle conditioned of the Tamil militant groups. It has fought a similar guerrilla war for the last four years against the Sri Lankan security forces and inflicted heavy casualties. It has a near-total support of the local population, amongst whom it can mix without detection. And, it is fighting on a familiar battlefield though, admittedly, against a superior and better-trained force.

The official death count after New Delhi gave the green signal for the IPKF to launch an offensive against the Tigers, is an estimated 250 Tamil militants, mostly LTTE men, killed and 500 injured. On the other hand, 18 IPKF personnel lost their lives and 79 have been injured. But the fact that 300 people have died in three days of fighting is an alarming indicator.

In Jaffna, the Tigers used women citizens of the town to form a human shield in an effort to keep out the approaching Indian army. As the military action intensified, whole buildings were razed to the ground, window panes of houses and shops were smashed, doors broken and ajar, shops closed. There was indefinite curfew. Gunshots and the deafening sounds of intermittent explosions rent the air. Some 40,000 trembling residents huddled into schools, colleges, temples and public buildings.

The IPKF objective was to capture the LTTE leaders, seize their arms and demolish opposition to the accord. And the army tried to enter Jaffna town from three axes: the southwest, northwest and the west of the town. However, the initial assessment that the action would be over in five days was later revised to 10 days. The very fact that the IPKF strength in northern and eastern Sri Lanka was doubled to an official 16,000 (unofficial sources put it closer to 30,000) and supplemented with squadrons of tanks, APCs and even a battalion of para-commandos who were

Captured LTTE leaders killed themselves with cyanide, precipitating a crisis that resulted in the IPKF taking on the LTTE.



Indian troops in Jaffna (left) and Tamil Tigers with cyanide capsules

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UNI/AFP

Bodies of Sinhalese killed by LTTE militants in the eastern province

The IPKF allowed the war between the militant factions to get out of control and failed to stop the mass killings.

air-dropped over Jaffna, indicates that the war has literally caught a tiger by the tail.

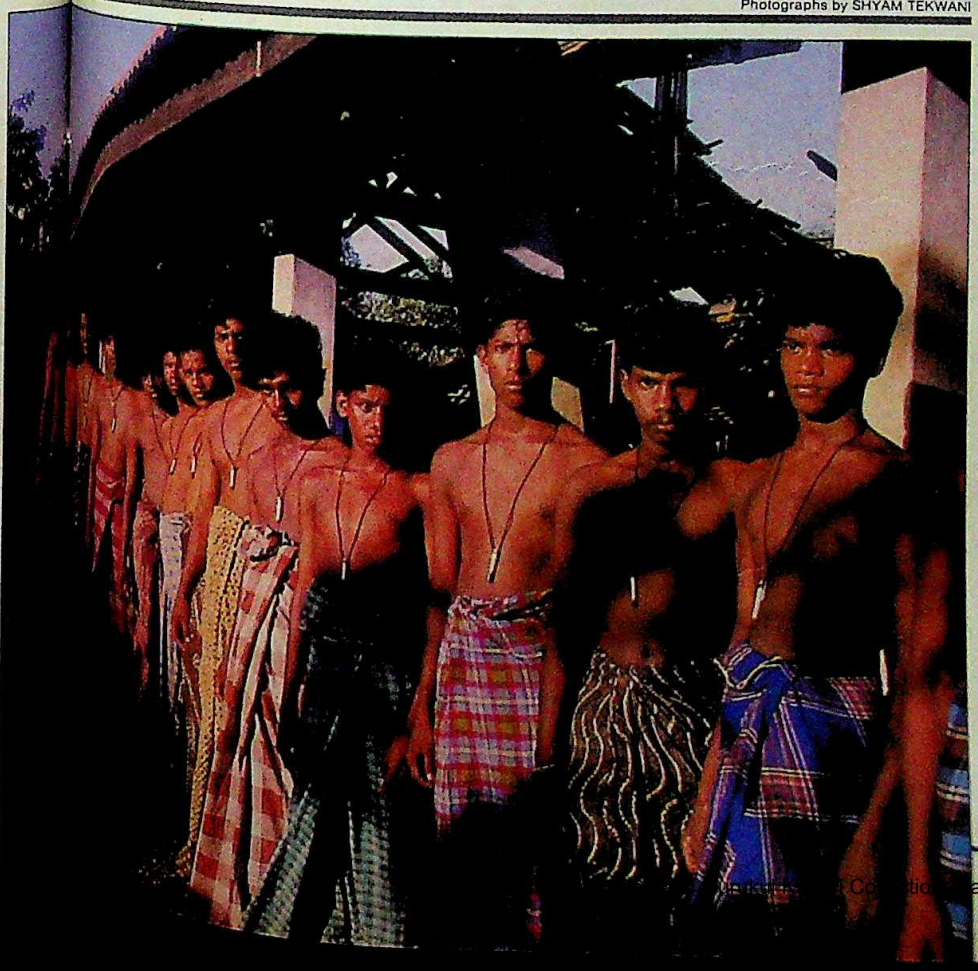
This unenviable situation is largely of its own making. It did nothing to ensure that the Tigers surrendered all their arms. The IPKF allowed the internecine war between the militant factions to get out of control and failed to stop the ensuing mass killing of Sinhalese and Tamil civilians. And now, it is faced with an invisible enemy who has heavily mined key areas in Jaffna district.

The situation was serious enough for Defence Minister K.C. Pant and Chief of Army Staff K. Sundarji to rush to Colombo last fortnight in a last-ditch effort to salvage the endangered accord. Sundarji issued detailed written instructions to his field commanders to disarm the militants, rout them out of their hide-outs and shoot at sight, if they resisted. Said Jyotindra Nath Dixit, India's high commissioner in Colombo: "Our troops have fanned out to seize all arms in the possession of the Tamil militants."

Within three days of "full-fledged operations", some 500 suspected LTTE members have been taken into custody. Two ordnance factories of the Tigers were destroyed and arms as well as ammunition recovered. Over 400 kg of explosives that were unearthed in the eastern province have been destroyed. Moreover, the printing presses of two newspapers—*Eelamurasu* and *Murasoli*—which the Tamil Tigers were running in Jaffna, were also blown up by the IPKF.

The Indian action was not confined to Sri Lankan soil. In search and raid operations on LTTE offices launched simultaneously in Tamil Nadu, six powerful radio transmitters were seized in an attempt to break their communications network. The IPKF is now engaged in a concentrated manhunt for senior LTTE leaders: military commander Velupillai Pirabhakaran, seen by India as the arch villain endangering the accord and on whose head Jayewardene has put a price of Rs 1 million, T. Yogi of the group's political wing, A.S. Balasingham, ideologue and spokesman, and five other hardcore leaders. But that will not be easily accomplished. The LTTE leaders have many hide-outs in the peninsula which they switch and can count on the

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



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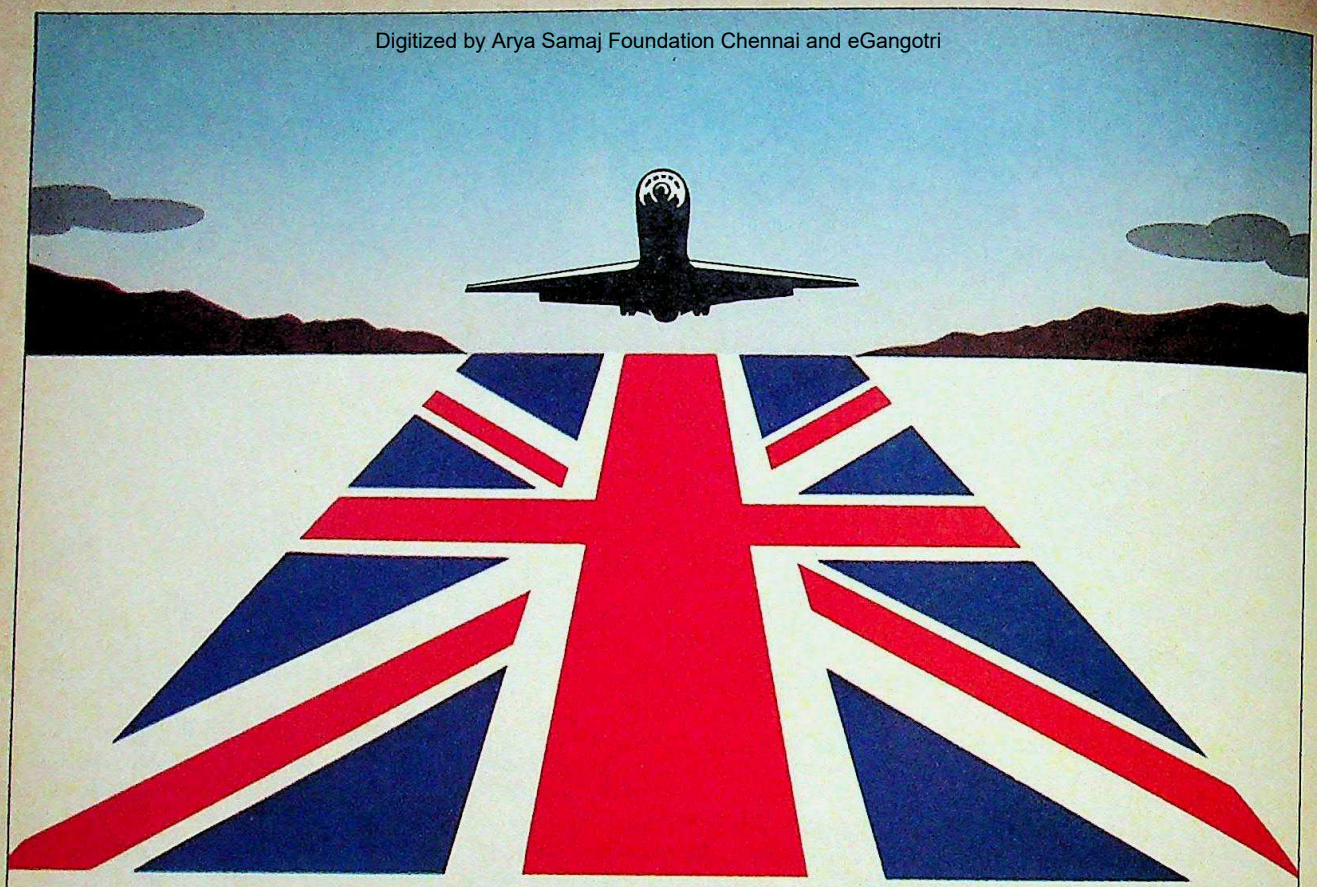

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locals to give them sanctuary.

The onerous nature of that objective is already in evidence. At Pooneryn, south of the Elephant Pass which connects the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the island, a land-mine explosion critically injured three Indian soldiers. Three Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel and two soldiers were killed in LTTE attacks on Indian patrols, in the first two days of the Indian Army's 'operation arms seizure'. Seven CRPF personnel and 10 soldiers were also injured in the pitched battle where heavy Indian artillery was deployed. And three paratroopers were shot dead during the para-drop over Jaffna Fort. A Sri Lankan government source said the Tigers also managed to take five Indian soldiers into custody and hacked them to death. Dead Indian paratroopers' bodies were publicly displayed in the town.

Meanwhile, Pirabhakaran has remained elusive. From his Jaffna hideout, he sent a message to Rajiv Gandhi via his Madras office, asking him to stop the Indian Army offensive. "The offensive of your army directed against us violates the peace agreement and can cause grave consequences," the message stated. Separate messages went out also to the Tamil Nadu chief minister M.G. Ramachandran and DMK President M. Karunanidhi. Fumed an Indian High Commission official: "Pirabhakaran is now trying to dabble in Tamil Nadu's politics for his nefarious ends."

Having taken a stand in the face of mounting criticism from the Jayewardene Government, it is unlikely the offensive will be called off. But it is a battle that will be difficult to win since it now involves virtually the entire Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Says Vettivelu Yogeswaran, former Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) MP from Jaffna: "How can the Indian Army be sure that every body it has killed is a militant? It will be difficult for the Indian security forces to prove that." Added Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, a leading Colombo lawyer and also a former TULF MP: "The action of the IPKF in launching its military offensive against the LTTE is a set-back to the whole peace process. It is alienating significant sections of the Tamil population, because a large section of the Tamil population had emotionally identified itself with the Tigers."

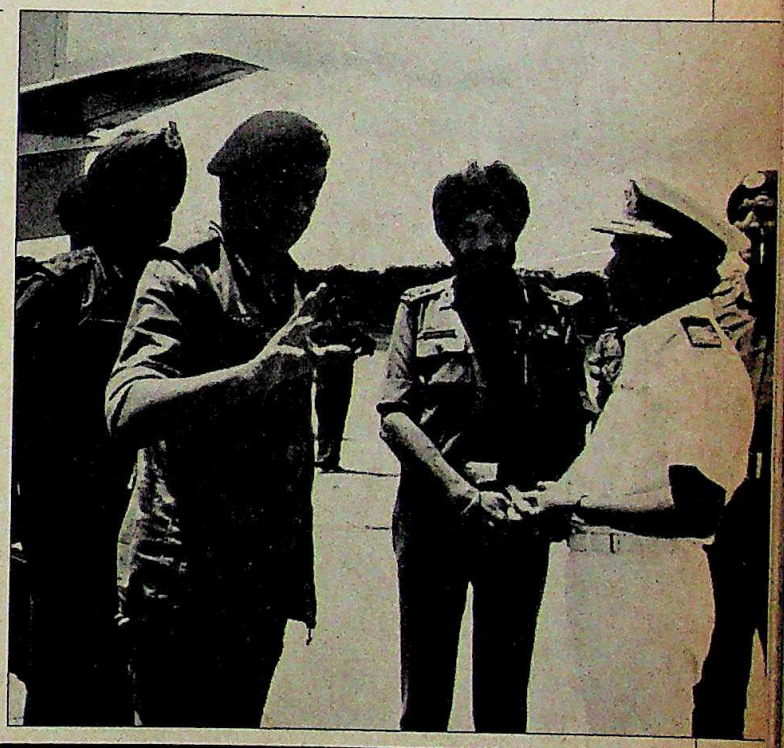
The danger of alienating the Tamils in the northern and eastern provinces is already evident in their sullen mood and the hatred with which they now view the IPKF. Lamented Father Chandra Fernando, vice-president of the Batticaloa Citizens Committee: "The Indian Army seems to have started going the way of the Sri Lankan Army. We plan to seriously complain to Indian authorities about the activities of the IPKF."

The current operation, however, has been quickly put under wraps. Communications between Colombo and Jaffna have been cut and all transport heading north is being stopped and turned back.

The IPKF is obviously worried about civilian casualties. But in their current operations, that will be virtually impossible to avoid. Sri Lankan Tamils, who have managed to reach Colombo from central Vavuniya and surrounding areas, are narrating stories of acute civilian suffering in the north. Said a 50-year-old Jaffna Tamil businessman, who managed to escape from the peninsula to Colombo after the battle outbreak: "Fourteen innocent Tamil people were killed outside the Kailasa Pilliar Koil near Nallur in Jaffna, in an exchange of fire between IPKF personnel and the Tigers. Only eight Tigers were killed in the shoot-out. This should give an idea about the increased proportion of civilian killings."

Indian Army sources vehemently denied allegations of civilian killings in their search operations or retaliation against LTTE attacks. Said a top IPKF army officer: "We always remember that we are fighting insurgents in a foreign country, so we take the utmost care not to harm a single civilian." Argued an Indian High Commission official: "People in Sri Lanka who criticise us for not achieving total arms surrender by the militants within the deadline stipulated in the accord, should remember that the Sri Lankan Army has unsuccessfully fought the militants for four years. How can the IPKF seize all their arms within a specific time frame?"

The Indian reaction came in the wake of charges by Jayewardene and others in his Government that while Colombo had fulfilled its commitments under the accord (phased release of Tamil detenus, introduction of the Provincial Council Bill and its reference to the Supreme Court), Indian soldiers had not satisfied the prerequisite of achieving total arms surrender by the militants. Jayewardene has, in fact, warned that if the Indian soldiers did not do so,



Sundarji and IPKF commanders discuss strategy in Jaffna

In Jaffna, Sundarji issued instructions to disarm the militants, rout them out of their hide-outs, and shoot at sight if they resisted.

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they will be asked to quit—a move within his powers under the accord.

But if much of Jayewardene's recent statements are populist-aimed, there is now no denying that New Delhi had miscalculated badly by becoming signatory to an accord which the Tigers had always denounced and then, by not ensuring the surrender of all Tamil militant arms within 72 hours of the signing of the accord, as enjoined under the agreement. The current situation offers tailor-made fodder for the opponents of the accord who are becoming more vocal in their criticism. Says Anura Bandaranaike, leader of the Opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party in Parliament: "The Indian Army is like the Trojan horse. We accepted them and expected them to bring peace, and they then started watching as our people were butchered. President Jayewardene has appealed to the Indians to do their duty or quit. But they won't quit. They have come here to stay. They won't take the President's orders."

Dinesh Gunawardene, MP and leader of the Mahajana Ekasath Peramuna, which opposed the accord, protests: "The so-called peace accord has failed to bring about cessation of hostilities. Only some arms were surrendered and the so-called peace-keeping force failed miserably to protect the Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils." Further, Jayewardene now says that he will not allow the crucial merger of the northern and eastern provinces till the militants are totally disarmed.

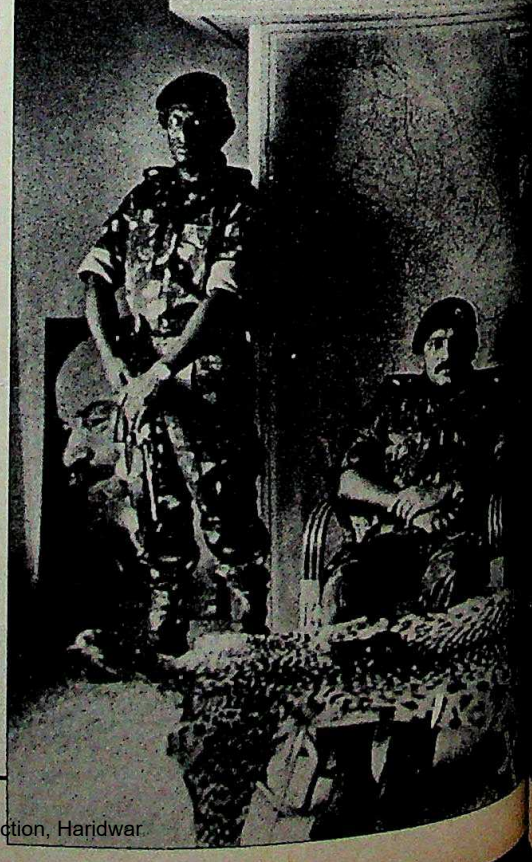
But that is obviously going to be an onerous task. The Tigers have made a mockery of the IPKF in the eastern province by massacring an estimated 200 civilians, mostly Sinhalese, under the very nose of the soldiers. The Tigers have also reportedly terrorised and chased out entire Sinhalese colonies, and an estimated 10,000 Sinhalese have been rendered homeless in the eastern provinces, many of whom have started arriving in Colombo. They have also killed prominent Tamils like the Batticaloa government agent M. Anthonimuthu. Said Father Fernando: "The IPKF cannot escape the blame for allowing large-scale civilian massacre by the Tigers." Said Sri Lanka's Education Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe: "Sinhalese people have genuine misgivings about the IPKF having been an idle bystander when Tamil terrorists attacked Sinhalese civilians in a series of incidents in Trincomalee."

The large-scale civilian massacre by the LTTE was a sequel to the IPKF bungle in allowing the Sri Lankan Government to try and transport 17 LTTE members—intercepted by the Sri Lankan Navy off Point Pedro, in a boat reportedly stacked with arms and ammunition—to Colombo for trial. The 17 Tigers, who included Jaffna regional commander Kumarappa and Trincomalee commander Pulendran, were being detained by the Sri Lankan forces in Palaly. The Sri Lankan Government's argument for the attempt to get them to Colombo was that they had broken the accord by transporting arms and ammunition, after they were meant to have surrendered all their arms. Added National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali: "In any case, Pulendran was required for the Kittulutwe massacre of 120 bus passengers last April, which was a crime committed outside the northern and eastern provinces."

THE Tigers, however, had threatened grave consequences if the men were taken to Colombo, where they feared they would be tortured or killed. The Indian authorities could have stopped the transfer and Dixit apparently tried to convince Jayewardene but failed. The result was tragic—all 17 detenus consumed cyanide. Twelve, including Kumarappa and Pulendran died, while the other five were in intensive care at the IPKF hospital in Palaly.

In fact, New Delhi's dealing with the Tigers has been a series of grievous blunders, specially in the last month. It underestimated the exponential propaganda effect of Amrithalingam Thileepan's fast in September, in Jaffna. And neither was it aware that the LTTE command structure was being weighted in favour of military commanders, with the political leadership being sidelined. Kadavul, Naresh and Tommy, all politically conscious leaders of the Tigers in Batticaloa, have left the LTTE in the last one year, and recently, Francis, the politically mature LTTE leader from the district, was replaced by Suresh.

The LTTE is the most heavily armed, the most fiercely motivated and the most battle conditioned of the Tamil militant groups.



LTTE chief Pirabhakaran flanked by his bodyguards

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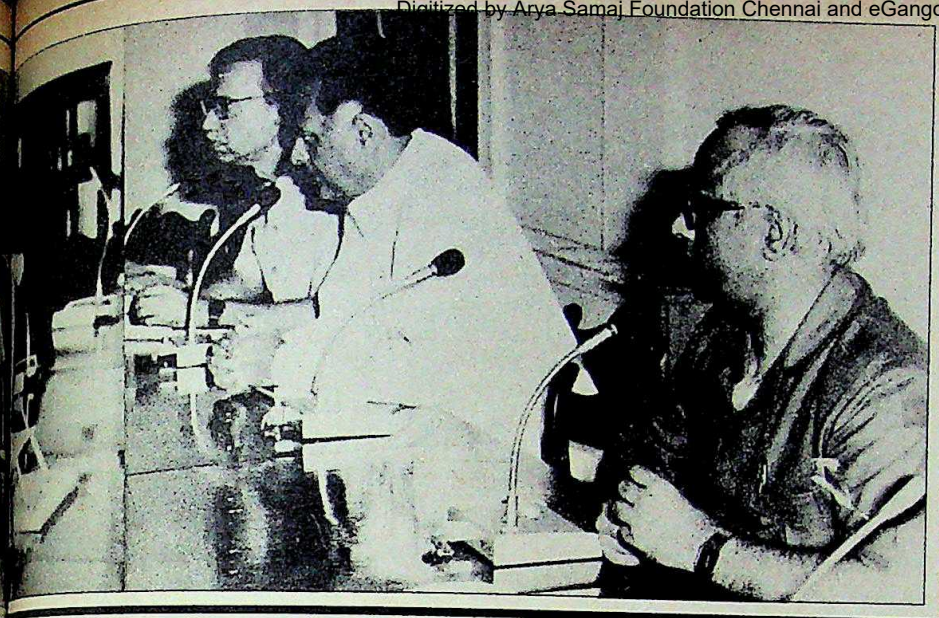

Jayewardene (left) and Pant confer in Colombo

There is now a suggestion from the Sri Lankan side to announce another interim council that will exclude the LTTE.

Karuna, who was till recently a personal bodyguard of Pirabhakaran, has become the military commander for Batticaloa. In fact, Karuna's appointment was made after the signing of the accord, clearly implying that the Tigers had not given up their military ambitions.

That the Tigers hadn't changed their stripes was equally evident from the breakdown of negotiations between them and Dixit on the composition of the interim administrative council (IAC) for the north and the east. Jayewardene, under Dixit's persuasion, went out of the way to accommodate the LTTE in the composition of the 12-member IAC. He selected the chairman of the council, C.V.K. Sivagnanam, from the panel of three names (two from the north and one from the east) submitted by the LTTE. He gave the LTTE six more seats in the IAC. The six members were selected from a panel of nine names (seven from the north, two from the east) given by the Tigers. And he conceded the Tigers' demand that no other Tamil militant group would find a place in the council. He also agreed that one of the two Muslim representatives would be an LTTE nominee.

But still the Tigers reneged, under the pretext that the President had created the impression that they represented only the north, in the names he had selected. But the panel of names submitted for consideration by the Tigers had itself spoken of the group's northern bias. So when Sivagnanam backed out of the chairmanship, the Tigers insisted only N. Pathmanabhan, former assistant government agent in the east, should replace him.

Faced with this intransigence, the decision was taken to launch the offensive against the Tigers, first between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene on the telephone, and later during Pant's visit. Jayewardene announced that the LTTE had been outlawed and there is now a suggestion from the Sri Lankan side to announce another interim council that will exclude the Tigers and give more representation to the other militant groups which have supported the accord.

But substantial sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil population are of the opinion that no settlement that excludes the Tigers would work. Said a Jaffna Tamil citizen, who left for Colombo after the outbreak of hostilities: "The Tigers perhaps wouldn't be able to hold out for long against the Indian Army. But defeating them militarily wouldn't be the solution. You will have to talk them into agreeing."

There are still important leaders like Kittu, former Jaffna regional commander in the LTTE, who are mature moderates. Kittu told INDIA TODAY last fortnight: "We hoped a situation wouldn't arise in which we would have to clash with the Indian Army. But the blame should be on the IPKF that such a situation has arisen now. We are for the accord, although we doubt the Sri Lankan Government's sincerity in implementing it. We, however, certainly want an understanding with the IPKF."

But the voice of the moderates is being drowned in the gun-fire that echoed through Jaffna last fortnight. Added to that is the ominous rumble of Indian tanks—with reinforced treads to counter the effect of the land-mines strewn all over the area—that have been brought in to augment the already awesome arsenal of firepower in the peninsula.

IPKF sources say that their orders are to go all out, at least for the next week or two, to ensure that the militants are disarmed and key leaders of the LTTE apprehended. But India's decision to go in for a military short-cut rather than a mixture of the carrot and the stick, could yet prove to be its biggest bungle in a situation where there have already been too many.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Colombo

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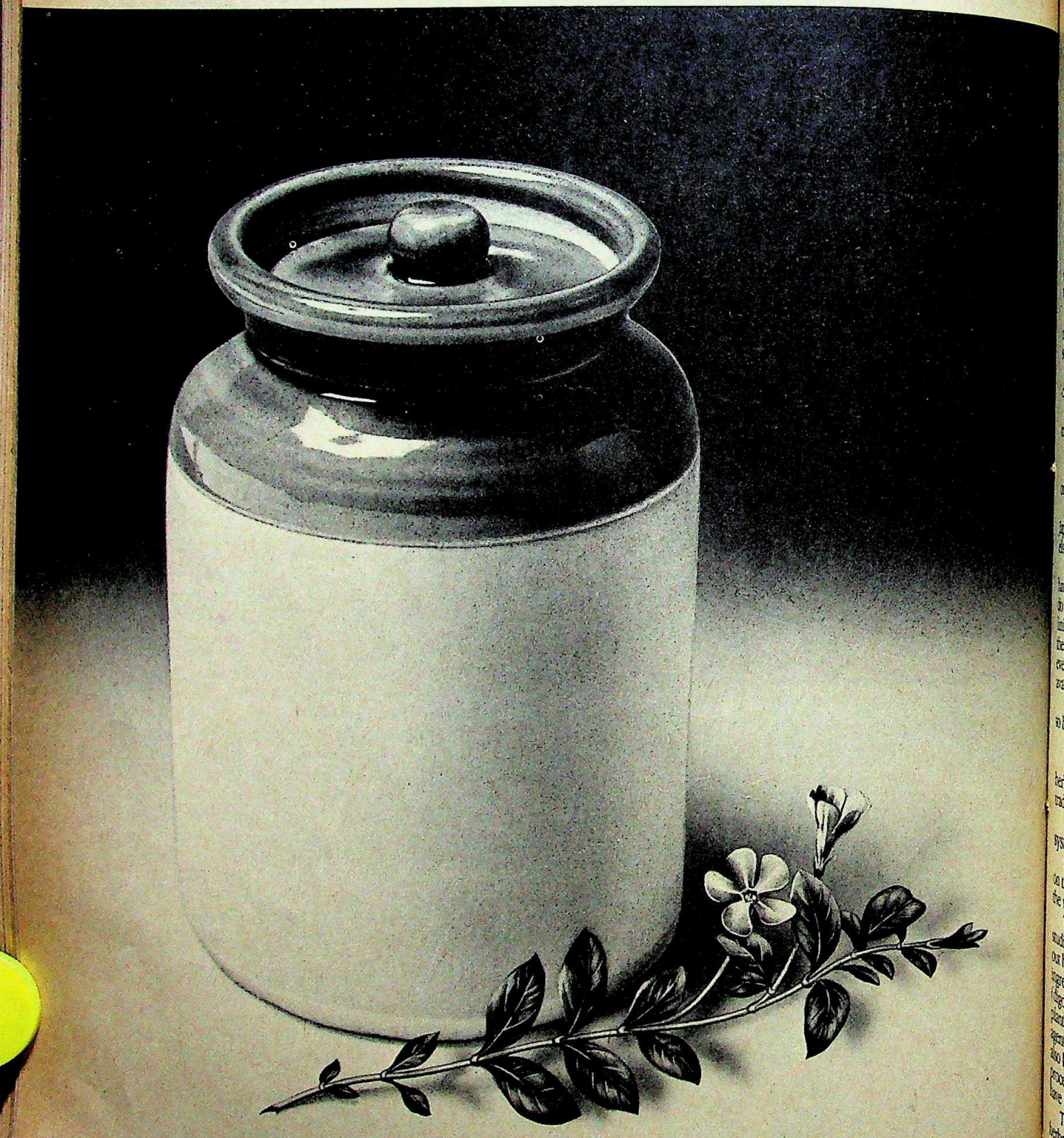
A cure for cancer.



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Pro-sati rally in Jaipur: popular support

RAJASTHAN

Militant Defiance

Government measures unite Rajputs into bold action

IN what was perhaps the most militant, vociferous and vituperative defiance of the state's law and authority, some 70,000 Rajasthanis—mostly Rajput men, women and children—thronged Jaipur's Ramlila grounds last fortnight, to consecrate and glorify 18-year-old Roop Kanwar—who was burnt alive on September 4 on her husband's funeral pyre—as a devi. They used the occasion to assert that sati was an integral part of Rajput culture and the Hindu dharma, and that they would continue to celebrate the practice and build monuments to Roop Kanwar.

The size and war-like mood of the crowd even took the state Government, which was expecting no more than 15,000 participants, by surprise. A week earlier, Chief Minister Harideo Joshi's Ministry had issued a tough, no-nonsense ordinance, "to provide for the more effective prevention of the practice of sati". The ordinance, effective from October 1, makes the glorification of sati through the observance of public rituals, processions, creation of commemorative trusts or funds, a criminal offence, irrespective of whether a sati is voluntary or not. And the death penalty has been decreed for those aiding or abetting the practice.

In related get-tough measures the police rounded up nearly 100 people from Deorala and six nearby villages, in connection with the prosecution of the Roop Kanwar sati. They also instituted a high-level administrative inquiry under IAS officer Tej Kumar, virtually barred the entry of outsiders into Deorala in order to prevent the erection of a memorial at the sati sthal, and promised to confiscate the estimated Rs 40 lakh that has already poured into the sati committee's coffers.

But it became obvious at the rally that none of this mattered. The new ordinance and arrests had galvanised the Rajput community into defiant action as never before. As state officials, police and CRPF men looked on helplessly, members of the newly formed Dharma Raksha Samiti which had organised the function, collected donations in the name of Roop Kanwar. The crowds marched in a procession 3-km-long, carrying saffron war banners and chanting: "Roop Kanwar *ki jai jai kar*," (we salute Roop Kanwar), and "*Dharm ki raksha kaun karega? Hum karenge, hum karenge!*" (who will protect the faith? We will!).

During the six-hour-long rally, priests recited hymns from Hindu scriptures. The backdrop to the dais on which they sat had a huge symbolic sati painting: a woman with a beatific expression being consumed by the flames of her husband's funeral pyre. At the end, the participants took a mass pledge to convene even bigger rallies and to leave their houses in darkness on Diwali, unless the Government released the detenus and revoked the ordinance.

Politically, the state Government was clearly in a fix. This was the second time in a month that it had utterly failed—either through lack of political will or preparedness—to prevent so brazen a flouting of official authority. Last month, following a high court order, the Government had vowed to prevent the *chunari mahotsav* ceremony at Deorala. But it was unable to do so as lakhs of people had streamed into the village for the post-sati ceremony.

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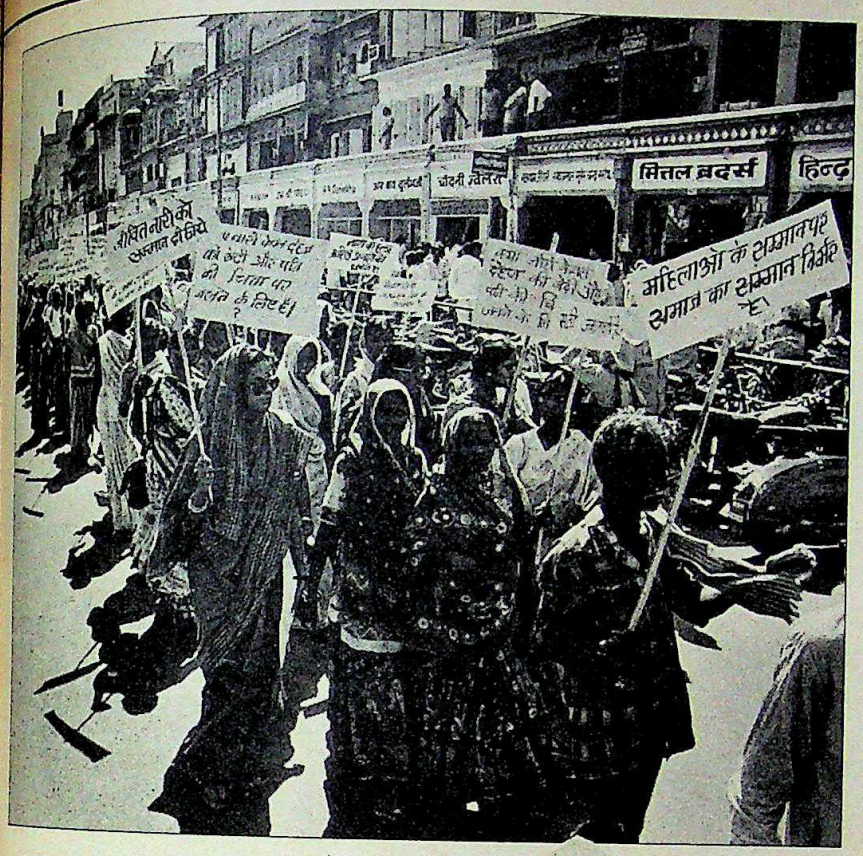

Women march in Jaipur in protest

Immediately afterwards, even before the promulgation of the ordinance, government officials were aware that prominent leaders of the Rajput Sabha like Devi Singh Mandawa and Narendra Singh Rajawat, along with state Janata Party leader Kalyan Singh Kalvi, Yuva Janata leader Rajindra Singh Rathor, and the BJP, would make political capital of the issue. Yet there was no ban on the procession.

Kalvi, notwithstanding official disapproval from the party high command, was clearly the hero of the show, which also had the backing of the BJP and the Hindu Mahasabha. He was hailed by speaker after speaker as the champion of Rajput and Hindu traditions. While Kalvi's tone was moderate—"nothing," he said, "can stop the worship of satis and sants"—other speakers openly mocked the Centre and Joshi's Government.

"Roop Kanwar sati," said Indra Kumar Tiwari, a publisher, is the "roop of Sita. If you try to stop us, Rajiv Gandhi, you will be destroyed as Narsingha destroyed Hryanakashyap." Roop Kanwar's mother Sare and her sister Santosh sat on the stage in rapt attention as Hindu Mahasabha leader Gauri Shanker Kothari asked the nation's leaders to join him in saluting Roop Kanwar "for her devotion to her husband". Claimed Kothari: "This is just the beginning. We will take the fight against this assault on the Hindu dharma to all corners of the land."

Chief Minister Harideo Joshi's new ordinance, issued against the glorification of sati, also places the burden of proof on the accused to establish their innocence.

Lending an added touch of Hindu revivalism to the rally were two chosen disciples of the Puri Shankaracharya Niranjan Dev Tirth, who has openly supported sati, and Guru Shivananda Maharaj of the Dharma Vishvavidyalaya of Churu, Rajasthan. The guru opened his remarks by asking the crowd to repeat after him "*sati dharm ki jai*" (hail to the sati faith). He then proceeded to tell the crowd that all the *dharma shastras* sanctioned sati and that "the earth is balanced on the *shakti* (power) of *sati mata*".

Bhakti Lal, a former Janata MLA, urged the people to return to their villages and build temples dedicated to Roop Kanwar. He described Rajiv Gandhi as a "Parsi, married to a foreign woman, who is insulting the Hindu religion". The crowds grew militant and demanded in chorus that a temple be constructed immediately at Deorala. A youth rushed on to the stage and announced that a Rajput Commando Force had already been formed to meet their demands. And Onkar Singh, a former IAS officer announced that if the rest of the Hindu community did not back them, the Rajputs would split away from the community as the Sikhs had in Punjab.

Even opposition leader and former chief minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, who had earlier severely remonstrated against the villagers of Deorala about the sati having brought shame on the community, did not spare the chief minister. Though he didn't participate in the rally, Shekhawat asserted that by promulgating the ordinance in Rajasthan, while crimes against women continued unabated throughout the country, the Government seemed to be singling out Rajputs for punishment. "The Government is simply covering up its own failures," he said. "There are laws in the books that serve the same purpose." He attacked the Government for making "indiscriminate arrests of innocent people instead of prosecuting those charged with the crime".

However, Chief Minister Joshi says: "By this ordinance we are telling families that they must know what the law is and what they will suffer if they break it. The burden of proof is now on the accused to prove that he has not committed the offence. Also, we are making it compulsory for all village panches and sarpanches to report any satis immediately to the police.

"Just passing ordinances won't do," says Dr Hemlata Prabhu, coordinator of

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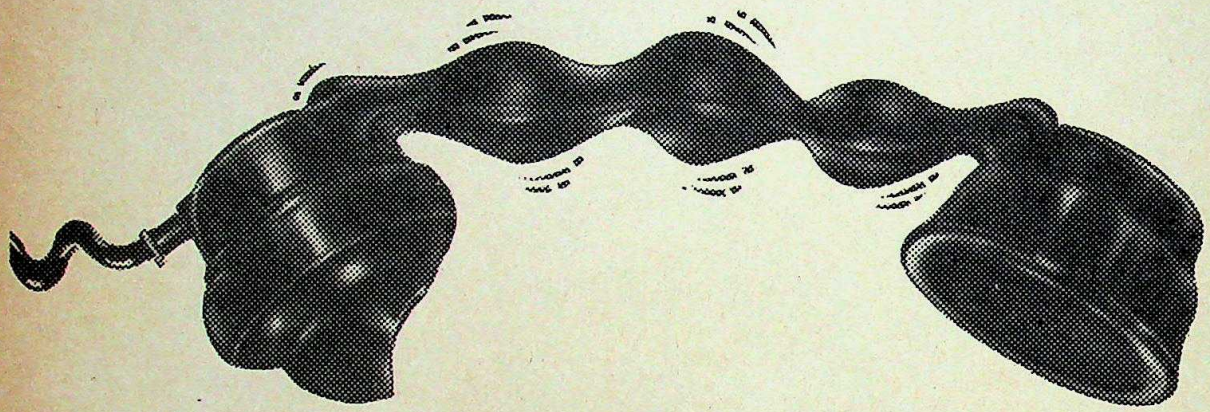

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KALYAN SINGH KALVI

"Beliefs cannot be repressed"

STATE Janata Party leader Kalyan Singh Kalvi, the star of the Rajput demonstration, shot into prominence after he defied a party directive and attended Roop Kanwar's chunari ceremony. Excerpts from an interview with Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR:

Q. Why do you support the practice of sati?

A. Sati was never a system, it is not one now, and will not be one in the future. It is a case of an individual decision.

"This is but one suicide. What about implementing the law on the widow burnings that go on? There are satis in Uttar Pradesh and in Madhya Pradesh."

Q. There is a law against it. Even if it is an individual decision, should people break the law?

A. I'm not against prosecuting it as a crime. The matter is already under investigation. The FIR named six people who have been arrested. But why arrest a hundred innocent people as is happening now?

Q. But the state can investigate.

A. Yes, but in this case, the state is acting under pressure from the Centre which wants to divert attention from its failures in other areas.

Q. You are mixing up issues.

A. No. My stand is clear. They can prosecute under the law but they cannot interfere in our traditions. It is our tradition here, no matter who dies, to have certain ceremonies such as kirtan and shradhanjali after 12 days. These rituals are performed even for murderers who are executed. People's beliefs and sentiments cannot be repressed.

Q. Why do you find the new ordinance distasteful?

A. This is but one suicide. What about implementing the law on the widow burnings? There are satis in Uttar Pradesh and in Madhya Pradesh. Jains are known to die by fasting. Buddhists are known to immolate themselves. So why apply this law only to us?

Q. Don't you feel that these sati commemorations amount to glorifying a crime?

A. Satis happen extremely rarely. And to build temples to them is part of Rajput culture which believes that sati and *shakti* (power) are identical.

Q. But this demeans women.

A. In our culture, we worship the motherland, dharma, and nari. We are ready to die for any of them.

Q. You worship nari, but what if she is burned forcibly? Isn't that an assault on her?

A. Absolutely. We would consider someone forcing a woman to commit sati a heinous crime.

Q. But widows are mistreated and neglected.

A. I've always worked for the upliftment of women and have fought against the dowry system. I've supported women's education and widow welfare schemes.

Q. Again, what about sati?

A. Beliefs and convictions are hard to kill. Some here worship trees, others, dogs as an avatar of Bharonji, rats in temples, and even donkeys.

the Women's Rehabilitation Group. "The key is how social legislation is implemented." Two days earlier, along with other women's groups, Prabhu had organised a silent march of some 3,000 women—students, villagers, tribals and professionals—through the city. The processionists carried banners proclaiming: *"Nari ki hatya nari samaaj ki chunauti hai."* (a woman's murder is a challenge to the entire sex).

THE procession was small compared to the Rajput gathering. But it signalled a growing awareness among even village women, of the need to demonstrate against their plight. And it was indeed pressure from the women's groups—telegrams to Rajiv Gandhi, a writ to the high court, petitions to the Rajasthan chief minister—that forced both the Centre and the state to change their initial reaction of benign neglect to one of condemnation.

But there is still the widespread feeling that the Government is shaky on the issue. Rajiv Gandhi's first statement condemning the sati incident came on September 22, a fortnight after he had received a strongly-worded telegram from the women's organisations. And while several Central ministers, including Sheila Dixit and Rajendra Kumari Bajpai came to Jaipur on the day of the women's anti-sati demonstrations, they did not march with the group.

It is easy to condemn the Rajputs as retrograde and uncivilised. But the glaring fact remains that the Government itself appears to sanction and glorify the practice of sati. Prominent leaders, including Rajasthan's governor, have visited the Rani Sati temple at Jhunjhunnu. Four sati temples were built in Delhi, in the mid-'70s, despite the Government's opposition. And boards of some 40 sati temples in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan include IAS officers. Not a single person has been punished in connection with the 28 sati incidents that have occurred in Rajasthan since 1947. And 124 sati festivals, attended by politicians of all shades, are celebrated throughout the country annually.

A historian, Dr Pratibha Jain sums it up: "There is no follow-up any longer to social legislation. The life-styles of our leaders no longer exemplify a seriousness of social purpose. Rajiv Gandhi himself attends yagnas. When you lead a superstitious life you are left with no moral authority to break the superstition."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR in Jaipur

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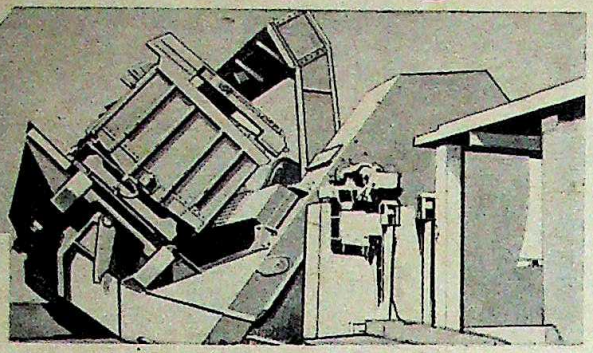
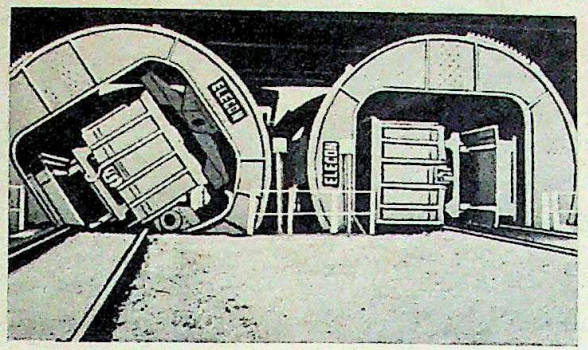
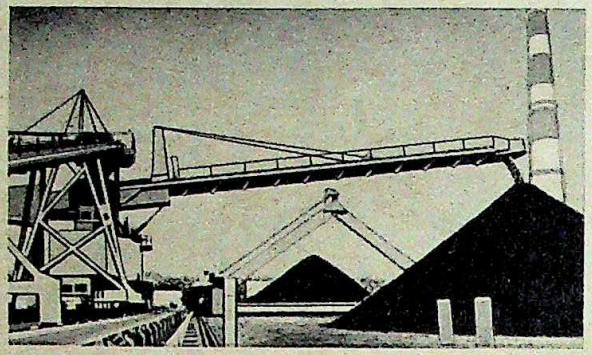


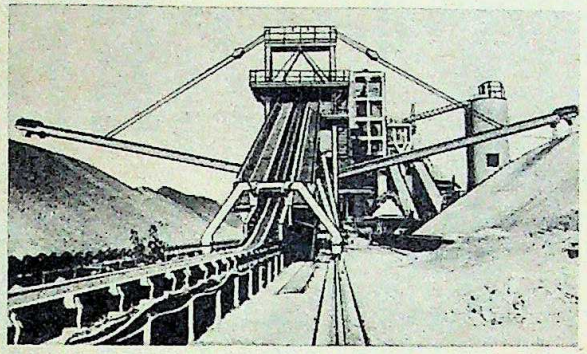
Rotaside Wagon Tippler — in Power station.



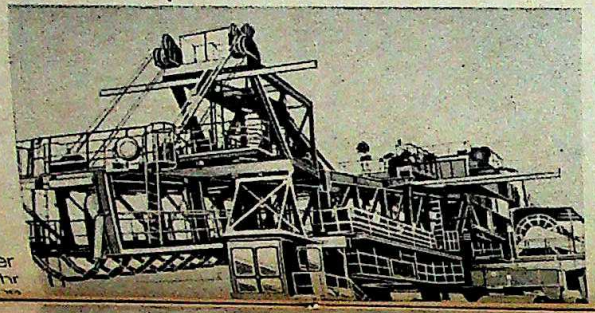
High Speed Rotary Wagon Tippler installation in a Port — handling Iron ore



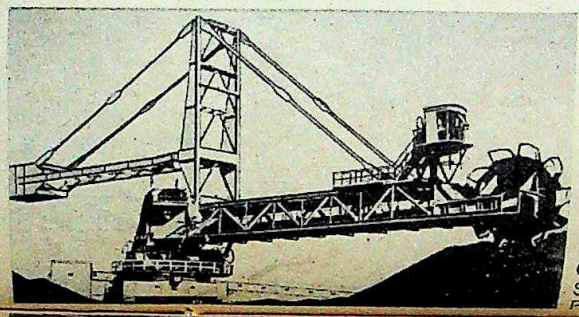
Single Boom Slewing & Luffing Stacker — in Iron ore mine.



Twin Boom Stacker — for a Cement plant.



Crawler Mounted Tripper handling 11000 tons/hr



Combined Bucket Wheel Stacker Reclaimer — in a Power station.

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Crawler Mounted Tripper handling 11000 tons/hr

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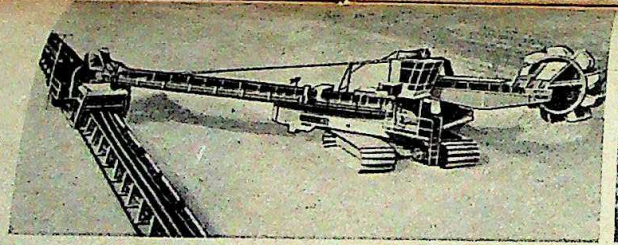
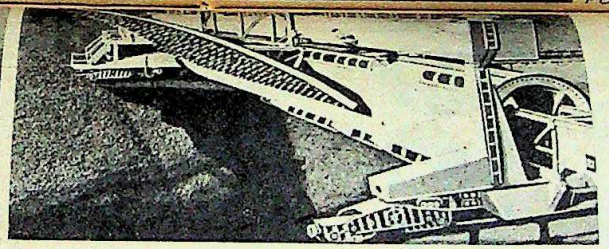
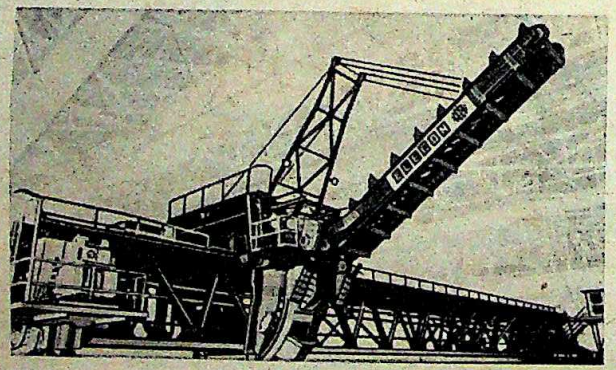


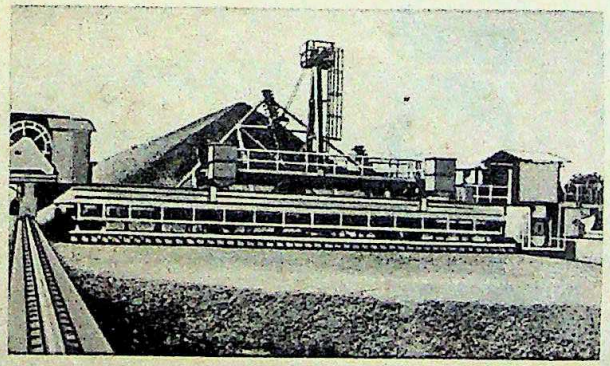
Crawler Mounted Bucket Wheel Excavator for removing overburden — in an Opencast mine.



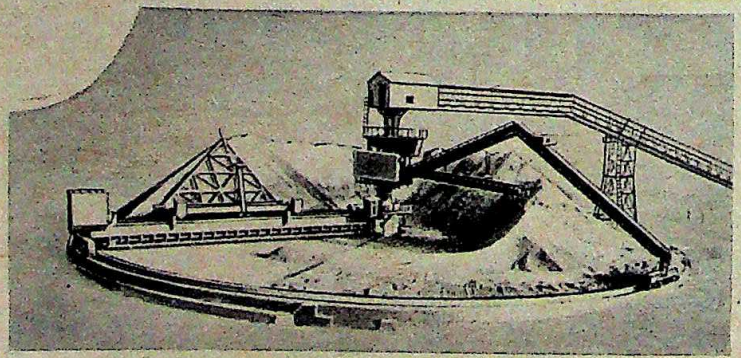
Barrel-type Blender Reclaimer — in a Steel plant.



Bridge-type Bucket Wheel Reclaimer, reclaiming Iron ore for shipment — in a Port.



Bridge-type Scraper Reclaimer — in a Cement plant.



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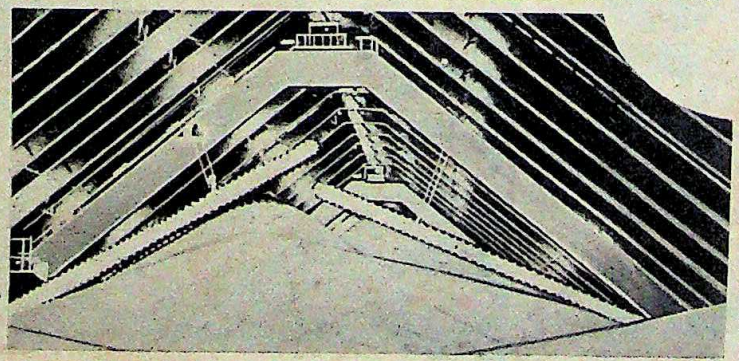

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CHILDREN'S FILM SOCIETY

Nobody's Child

Official apathy leads to mass resignations

THE gap between official pronouncements on culture and actual action came once again to the fore. While the Government emphasised the need of producing good films for children, the resignation of the entire executive council of the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI), the sole organisation entrusted with the task, went largely unnoticed. The fifth International Children's Film Festival is to be held in Bhubaneswar in November, but the Information & Broadcasting Ministry did not consider the drastic action of chairman Amol Palekar and other film personalities serious enough to merit immediate attention.

The CFSI executive quit, charging the ministry with showing little interest in helping to restructure the CFSI, simplify outdated regulations and make it financially self-sufficient. "The resignation of the executive council was not impulsive," says Palekar. "The attitude of the ministry was not what we expected. The CFSI is treated like an orphan, or even an illegitimate child."

The society, formed in 1955, began impressively with *Jaldeep*, which won the Best Children's Film Award at the Venice film festival. It has since produced over a hundred short and feature-length films, and imported an equal number of foreign films. But the CFSI failed to inspire young film makers to create path-breaking films for children. Says film director and former National Film Development Corporation chairman Hrishikesh Mukherjee: "Without good children's films, the future of adult films is very bleak. But the Government has failed to give it priority."

Palekar's surprise appointment as chairman in April 1985 had created hopes that the society would gain attention. But Palekar quit in disgust on September 22 when that didn't happen. All the non-governmental council members—Hindi film writer-director Gulzar, Bengali actor Anil Chatterjee, Oriya writer J.P. Das and T.S. Narasimhan, Kannada film maker and producer of *Malgudi Days* also resigned.

Palekar did try to revive the moribund set-up. The new council persuaded the Karnataka Government to gift a five-acre plot in Bangalore to construct a state-of-the-art studio complex. The Rs 8-crore project is to come up in collaboration with Czechoslovakia, known for the production of animation and puppet films. The CFSI has Rs 1.5 crore in the bank, money accumulated from an interest-free loan given by the Motion Picture Export Association of America.

Then, Palekar simplified the system of project approval for new films. Instead of having to submit the entire script and await CFSI approval, reputed film makers only have to submit a story synopsis and approximate budget first. The CFSI can reject the proposal, but it pays for the film maker's labour, up to a maximum of Rs 5,000 for a full-length screen-play. There are no budget limits and the nature of the film determines the outlay.

Palekar feels the new system had begun showing results: more and better scripts were being presented. Seven out of 80 proposals were approved this year, including *Aaj Ka Robin Hood* by Bengali director Tapan Sinha and *Crocodile and the Boy* by naturalist Romulus Whittaker. *Robin Hood*, an unusual study of a child in bondage, was also the CFSI's first co-production, and Palekar says the West Bengal and Manipur governments—and private producers—are now keen to make films with the CFSI. "*Robin Hood* was also a major step in a new direction—the production of not just adventure, but also serious, thought-provoking films for children," he adds.

Palekar, however, was hamstrung by the absence of a full-time chief executive officer, whose appointment has been delayed first by a court case and then by official lethargy. While he denies charges of arrogant behaviour towards CFSI officials, the society's administration has been affected by the fact that three officers—the secretary, the marketing manager and the public relations officer—have filed petitions in the Bombay High Court challenging various decisions. Several meetings with Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Ajit Panja, and even the intervention of Rajiv Gandhi in June, did not amount to much.

Even worse, the resignation elicited barely a response from the ministry. Palekar insists that the resignations are a sign of despair that the children's film movement will ever be taken seriously by Delhi's cultural czars.

With the Bhubaneswar festival scheduled around Children's Day, Palekar and company have offered to continue till the festival is over. But while thousands of children will succumb to the magic of the medium there, the hope of a vibrant cinema for the young in India will remain a distant dream.

—M. RAHMAN

Still from CFSI film: dashed hopes

Palekar says that the resignations are an expression of despair at governmental neglect.

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"When Govind got leprosy, we made sure he lost nothing but his fears."

" 'I have leprosy,' Govind confided in a whisper. 'The doctor has confirmed it. I know I must leave this job. And my home. My life is shattered. No one will want me. I will become deformed...' he wept silently. I understood now why he had become increasingly absent-minded at work and aloof from his co-workers. 'Govind,' I assured him, 'even if you have leprosy, you have this management's full support. There's no question of taking away your job.'

"When told of Govind's problem, the management unanimously agreed to give all support. On the doctor's advice, Govind took leave for treatment to render his case non-infectious. We convinced his family that leprosy was like any other disease and that his wife and children were in no danger of infection. We made sure Govind kept all his appointments. We even gave him occasional pep talks when he became depressed.

"After he was declared non-infectious, he rejoined work and was encouraged to lead a normal life by his co-workers.

"A few days ago the doctor gave Govind the happy news that he's just a few months away from cure. I'm glad that he lost nothing. Not his job. Not his family's love. Nor his social standing. And least of all, his confidence. Nothing except his irrational fears."

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- 30% of newly detected cases are children. However, leprosy is not hereditary.

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The true identity of the leprosy patient has been concealed for want of community support.

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V.P. SINGH

Floating a New Forum

The Jan Morcha raises more questions than answers

JUDGING by the colour of the flag and the complexion of the crowd which gathered at former defence minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's residence last fortnight, it seemed to be the birth of yet one more party dominated by former Congressmen. But in the end, the organisation that emerged—Jan Morcha—was not just another Congress(I). In the floating of the new forum, Singh and his supporters had deliberately refrained from calling it a Congress or even a political party for that matter.

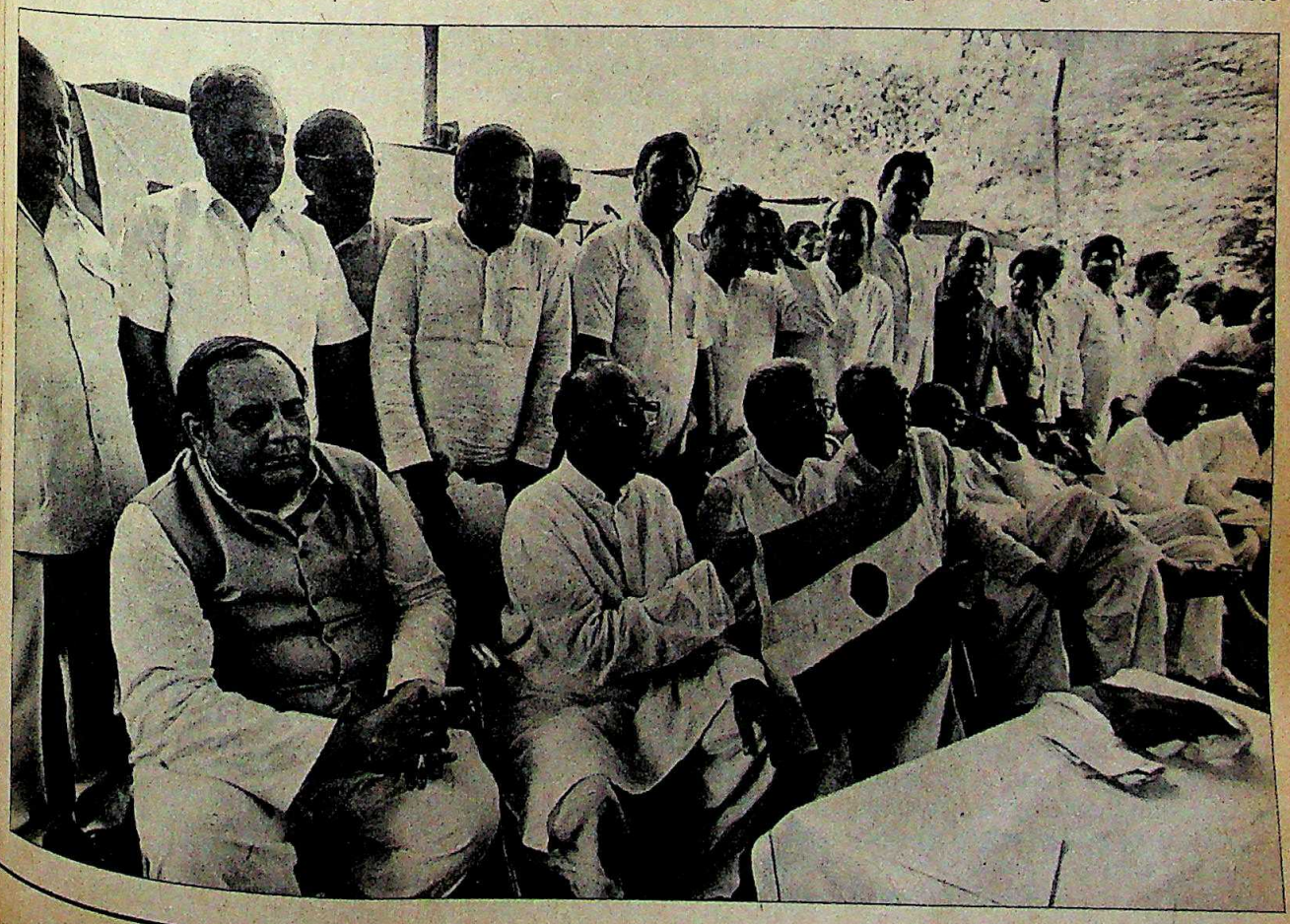
Preceding the inauguration of the Jan Morcha were six hours of speeches by various leaders, and the hoisting—over the white shamiana pitched at Singh's residence—of a tricolour with a red blob in the middle. An hour later, parliamentarian Ram Dhan, the newly-elected Morcha chief, and Singh released a six-point pledge for its members. Asserted Singh: "Our flag is a symbol of change, a revolution and a new hope. We are not concerned with elections. We are concerned with mass movements. Our members, if elected to legislative bodies, will not join any political party."

But even with the formal beginning of the second phase of Singh's continuing campaign, he seemed to be ignoring the realities of political life. Earlier, he had been trapped because of his failure to make a clear choice of alliance between parties of the left and the right. And even now he appeared unwilling to accept the fact that his is essentially a political movement designed to challenge and oust Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

His Morcha's programme and the speeches delivered at the meetings were nothing short of a well-planned strategy similar to that of a political party. To begin with, the Morcha will start a membership drive to enrol over one crore members. The Morcha's policy statement concluded with the familiar commitment that it would strive to build "a strong, united, secular, democratic, self-reliant and non-aligned India." The first item on the Morcha's agenda of action is to launch an agitation all over Uttar Pradesh "against rising prices and communalism".

Yet, there are many reasons for Singh's insistence that his new organisation is not a political party. He has learnt during his brief flirtation with opposition parties that he and members of his group will not be acceptable as leaders of a united opposition—as was evident in the Devi Lal-sponsored opposition meeting at Surajkund in September. Even the communists were not ready to accept him as the leader of a left-oriented united opposition group. It was this experience, sources close to the new Morcha say, that compelled the former defence minister and his followers to launch their own set-up which would give them the necessary bargaining power at the time of elections.

Moreover, Singh's group still pins its hopes on mass desertions from the ruling party. If Singh had founded a new party, Congressmen might have been loath to



Jan Morcha leaders at the inauguration: readying for battle

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join it and those deciding to do so would have attracted the provisions of the anti-defection law and risked losing their seats in the legislatures. Significantly, the Congress(I) has already petitioned the Law Ministry and the speaker of the Lok Sabha to invoke the anti-defection law against those who have pledged their support to the Morcha. Said Arif Mohammed Khan, a prominent associate of the former defence minister: "Our doors are open to all those who believe in our pledge and are willing to work without any power or condition. We will not depend on any single political party for our movement."

Morcha leaders firmly believe that their strategy of going it alone will win them public support. Instead of depending on other political groups for organising his public meetings, as he has done in the past, Singh now plans to activate his followers for the task. The first public meeting under the Morcha banner in Mathura was a huge success and over 10,000 members were enrolled there.

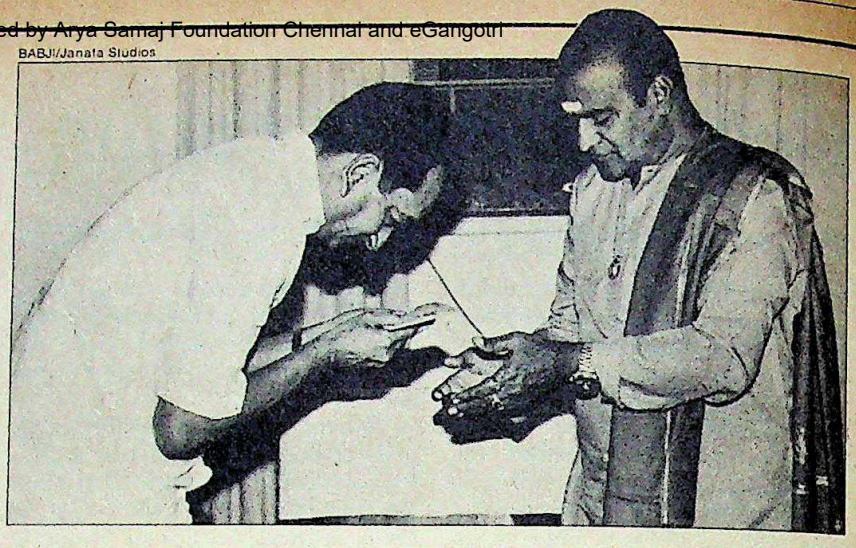
Yet the way in which the Morcha is enlisting supporters may spell trouble in the near future. So far, there are no guidelines or checks on the people being accepted in the forum. Even men with controversial images have begun jumping on to the V.P. Singh bandwagon. For example, in Delhi a person with a criminal record left the Congress(I) and joined the former defence minister. Says AICC(I) General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad: "V.P. Singh has collected those who are corrupt."

But even as Singh's problems mount, he has been careful enough not to burn his bridges with either the non-communist Opposition or the leftists. He has agreed to address public meetings with Devi Lal and Jyoti Basu. But opposition leaders are sceptical about Singh's forum. The Lok Dal (A) has already directed its workers to keep away from it and the BJP has instructed its cadres to go slow in participating in Singh's public programmmes.

The Congress(I), nonetheless, is decidedly worried about Singh's growing influence in the northern belt. The party's most urgent political priority now is to draw up an exhaustive plan to try and stem Singh's rising popularity in Uttar Pradesh, especially after the resignation of the state's transport minister, Sanjay Singh. Singh's upcoming battles against the ruling party promise to generate more fireworks than the ones in the past.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

BABJI/Janata Studios



Reddi with NTR: patching up

ANDHRA PRADESH

Making Peace

End of a conflict

FOR long, Andhra Pradesh Revenue Minister N. Srinivasulu Reddi has enjoyed the confidence of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, even standing in for him in the Assembly on occasion. Among the first of the Reddis to join the Kamma-dominated Telugu Desam—Rama Rao is a Kamma—he rose quickly in the ministry. But in the last three months, relations between the two have soured.

But last fortnight it seemed that a patch-up had taken place when Srinivasulu and his wife held a half-hour conciliatory meeting with Rama Rao. The minister declared his intention never to seek promotion and gave an assurance to help the chief minister's actor-son Balakrishna secure his father's post if Rama Rao entered national politics. Said Srinivasulu after the meeting: "The chief minister assured me that he does not entertain any suspicions about me."

But it seems unlikely that Rama Rao will quietly accept a reconciliation after the kind of defiance Srinivasulu had shown. The conflict was triggered off in August when Srinivasulu's brother, Chandrasekhar Reddi, and a supporter, M. Gangadharam, were suspended from the party at the behest of Rama Rao's son-in-law and party Political Secretary N. Chandrababu Naidu. Srinivasulu reacted by complaining even at cabinet meetings, that the Government was sidelining the party's interests—indirectly objecting to Naidu's role.

Moreover, Srinivasulu announced that he would tour 23 districts to conduct a people's petitions day. This followed Rama Rao's decision to hold people's assemblies to personally—and speedily—solve local grievances. In retaliation, the chief minister deliberately called cabinet meetings on days when the revenue minister was on tour.

The suspensions had come following complaints by the revenue minister's rivals in his home turf, Nellore district, that he was interfering in local administration and arranging out-of-turn contracts for various works to his supporters. In retaliation, the minister accused local MLA Ramnarayan Reddy—one of his critics—and his family of swindling the District Cooperative Marketing Society of lakhs of rupees since 1981.

Amidst all this mud-slinging, last fortnight's meeting between Rama Rao and Srinivasulu, which was also attended by Naidu, seemed a compromise. It was arranged by state Health Minister, Dr D. Venkateswara Rao, another son-in-law of the chief minister. Rama Rao agreed to revoke Chandrashekhar Reddi's suspension but not that of Gangadharam. He also promised Srinivasulu that he would order an inquiry by a senior official into the District Cooperative Marketing Society scandal.

Though outwardly Srinivasulu has emerged intact, this probably only marks a temporary truce. It is possible that if Rama Rao finds an experienced Reddi leader capable of assuming ministerial capabilities, Srinivasulu could find himself in trouble. In that case Srinivasulu, who once declared that he is willing "to give my head for Rama Rao" may find the chief minister taking him up on his offer. —AMARNATH K. MENON

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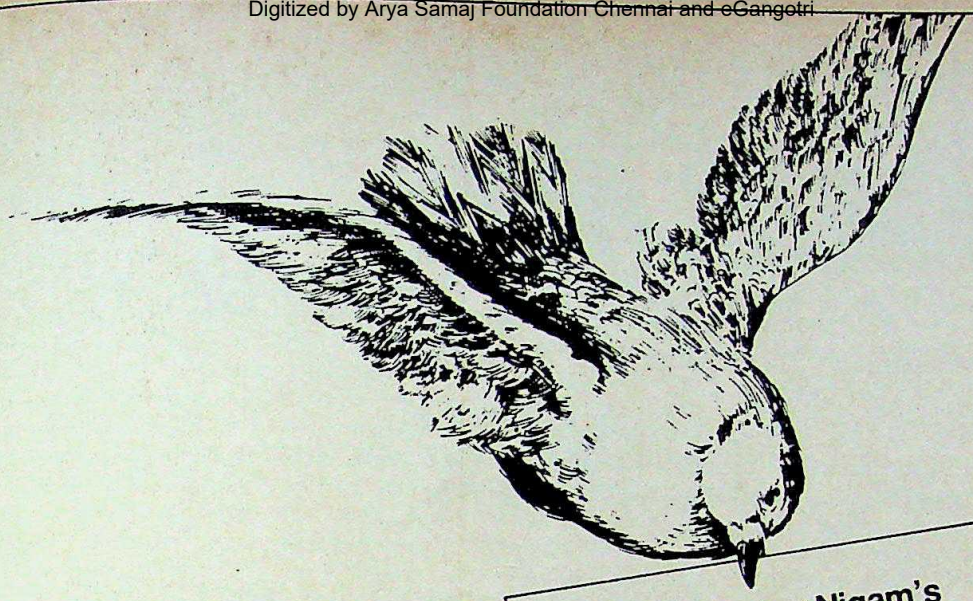

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• Percentage availability of international circuits	99.4	99.5
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• No. of outgoing calls/minutes (in lakhs)	22/60	23/63
• No. of incoming calls/minutes (in lakhs)	23/63	25/68
TELEGRAMS		
• No. of outward telegrams (in lakhs)	3.24	2.90
• No. of inward telegrams (in lakhs)	4.08	3.56
• No. of complaints for 1000 (outgoing and incoming telegrams)	0.79	0.56

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE		(Rs. in Lakhs)
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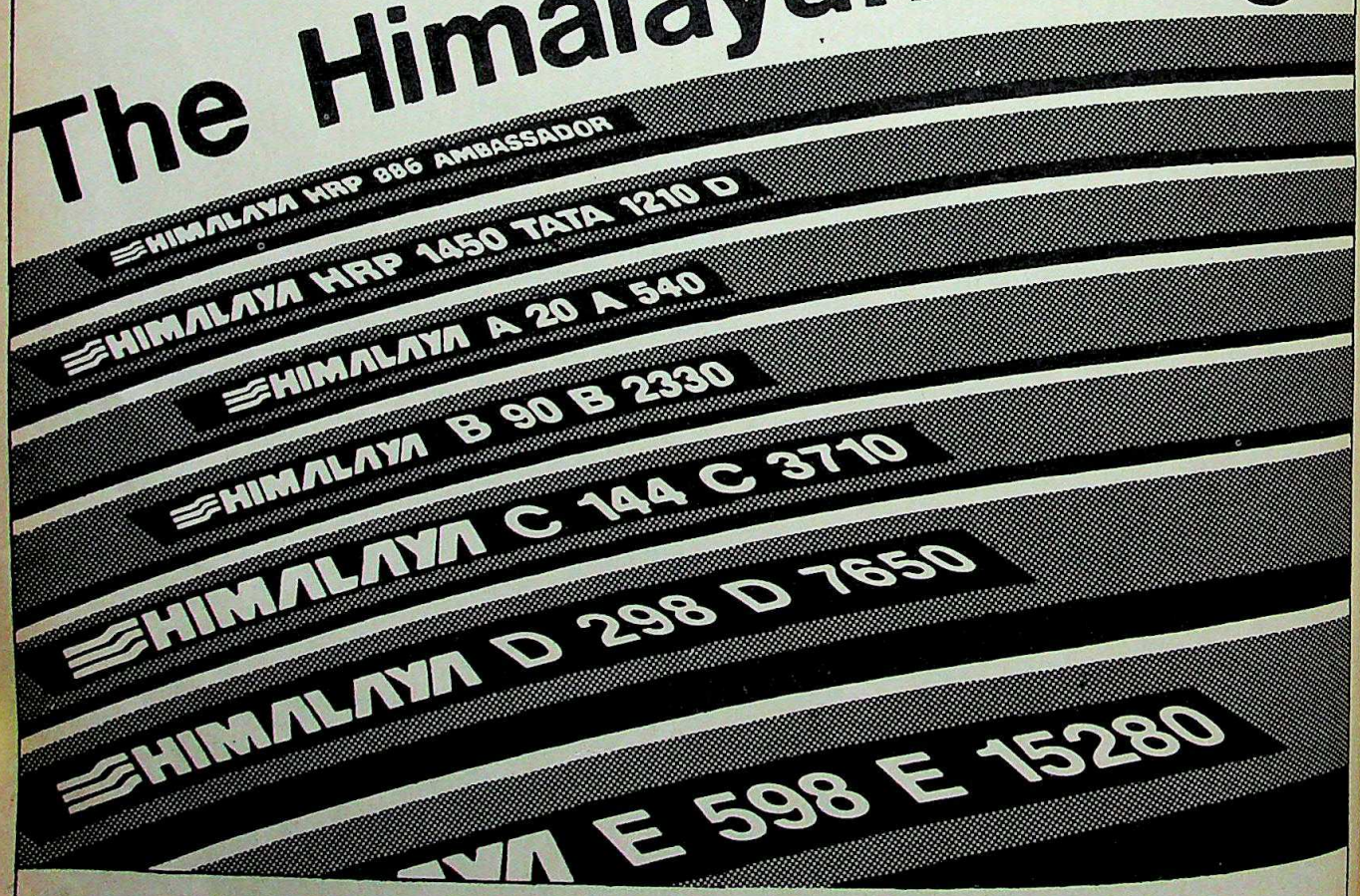

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PUNJAB

Locked Horns

Allegations fly freely

IN the fast moving scene of panthic politics in Punjab, to be known as a stooge of the 'Dilli darbar' means sure political death for a Sikh leader. Little wonder then, acting Akal Takht chief Darshan Singh Ragi and Panthic Committee 'dictator' Gurbachan Singh Manochal have each been trying to prove the other a government agent. Interestingly, Ragi and Manochal had not long ago unitedly called former chief minister S.S. Barnala a 'government stooge'.

The two fell apart in early August when the militants rejected Ragi's 'compromise' on the issue of Khalistan. A round of allegations and counter-allegations followed. And the battle of wits reached fever pitch last week when Ragi boldly asserted: "No leader in the SGPC (Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee) or Akali politics is free from the terror of bullets." He said that any significant step by "right-thinking people" was therefore ruled out till the shadow of the gun was cast off.

The outlawed Panthic Committee, which has undertaken the task of uniting the terrorist groups, immediately decided to neutralise Ragi. In a series of announcements, the committee declared that a Sarbat Khalsa would be held on Diwali in the temple complex—hinting that the forum would be used to dislodge Ragi from his seat of spiritual and temporal power. SGPC members were warned that anybody siding with Ragi then would be dealt with severely.

The militant group clearly wanted the moderates to know it meant business because, unlike in the past, the statement was followed up by action a few days later. A band of armed terrorists attacked and critically injured a senior SGPC member and Ragi loyalist, Hari Singh Arawala—with his wife and brother—at his Amritsar house. His brother-in-law died on the spot.

The attack was followed by an announcement from the Golden Temple that an 11-member Council of Khalistan had been formed, of which four are foreign-based Sikhs, two seats have been reserved for a representative each from Sikhs in the UK and the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), which does not recognise the Panthic Committee. The KLF has obviously been accommodated to avoid tensions amongst the militants.

Politically, the formation of the Council of Khalistan may not amount to much but tactically it has been a clever step. The leadership will now be able to exploit the nomination of foreign members to garner funds. The publicity also gives the committee considerable political mileage. Manochal can use the new "international" look of his council to run down opponents like leaders of the KLF and the presidium faction of the All India Sikh Students Federation, which have questioned the Panthic Committee's right to convene a Sarbat Khalsa.

Meanwhile, Manochal in a signed statement, threatened Ragi with the same fate as the slain Akali leader Harchand Singh Longowal if he did not immediately stop his campaign against the committee. What was also significant was that this was the first time since his assuming the role of acting jathedar that Manochal had addressed Ragi without preceding his name with the honorific "Singh Sahab" or "Jathedar".

So great was the impact that Ragi has not been to the Akal Takht in over two months in spite of his backers' insistence. Ragi also turned down Youth Akali Dal President Sher Singh Dhoomsheri's proposal that his party would mobilise "lakhs of Sikhs" to accompany him in a procession if he decided to enter the Golden Temple.

Incredible as it may sound, Ragi believes that the underground leadership of the Panthic Committee is being manipulated by the Centre. "The Government is using the militants to divide and weaken the Sikh *qaum*," he said. About Manochal, Ragi maintains that he will be exposed sooner or later. He also scoffs at the Panthic Committee's claim that it represents all militant groups.

Manochal asserts the same: "Darshan Singh is a mouthpiece of the Centre." In his 11-page unsigned letter announcing the council, Manochal appealed to the Sikh masses to keep away from Ragi's misleading campaign.

Moreover, the document also claims that the Panthic Committee has the right to convene a Sarbat Khalsa twice a year. This, in effect, subordinates the Akal Takht to the committee which can overrule the priests' decisions by getting them rejected in the Sarbat Khalsa.

The scene is now set for a confrontation and the committee is hopeful of getting its announcements "passed" at the Sarbat Khalsa. But both state Governor S.S. Ray and the police chief J.F. Ribeiro have categorically said that the congregation will not be allowed inside the temple. However, the militants can still hold an impromptu meeting, exploiting the presence of devotees gathered inside the Golden Temple on Diwali. Under these circumstances, the Punjab administration has only two options: raid the complex to flush out terrorists around Diwali or impose curfew in Amritsar to prevent people from gathering together as in previous years. Neither option offers particularly pleasant prospects.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

Militant Panthic Committee 'dictator' Gurbachan Singh Manochal is heading for a confrontation with the moderate Darshan Singh Ragi, the acting Akal Takht chief at a Sarbat Khalsa called on Diwali day in the Golden Temple complex.

Darshan Singh Ragi

Gurbachan Singh Manochal

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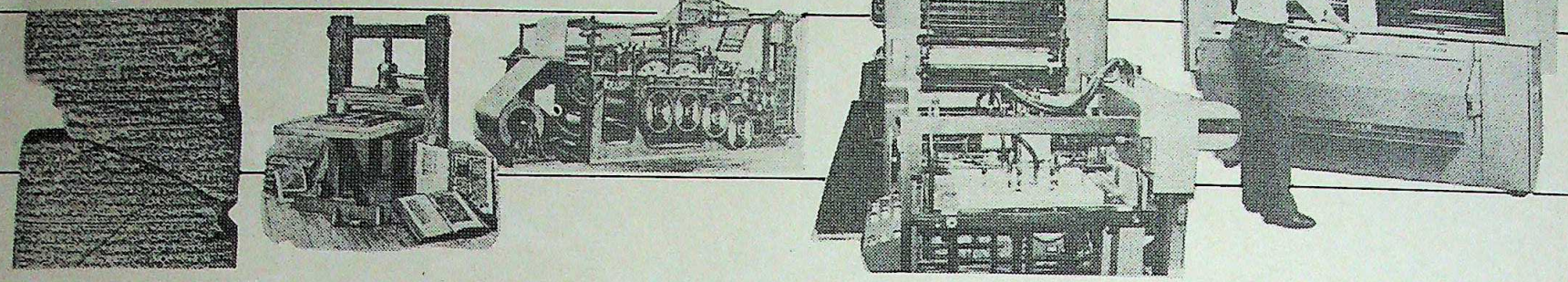

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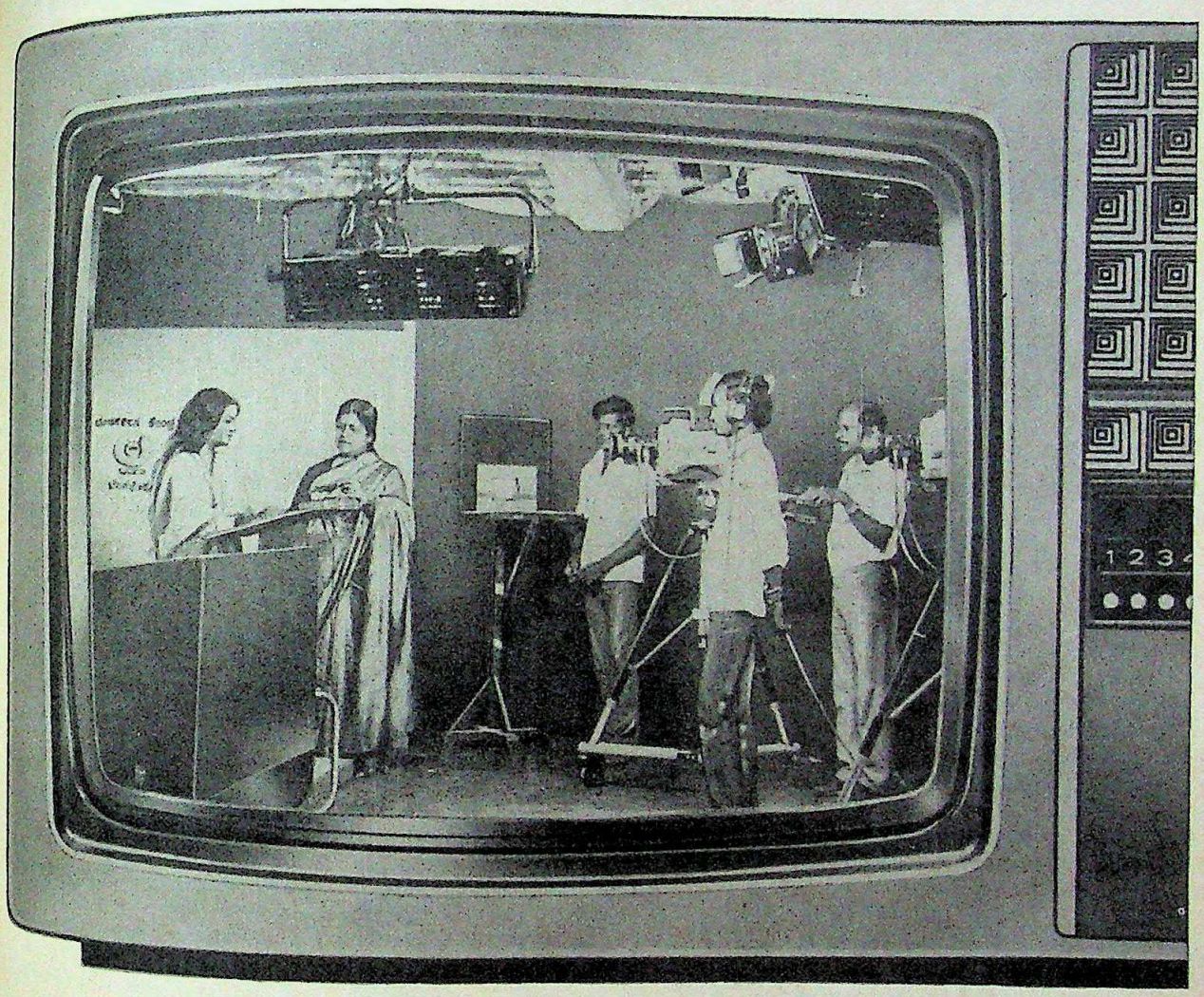

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KARNATAKA

Cannonade of Charges

A powerful minister is put on the defensive

THE man who would be king is under siege. Karnataka's powerful Public Works Department (PWD) Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, who has entertained dreams for long of succeeding Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde by fostering a rebellion within the Janata Party is himself in all kinds of trouble. Embroiled in lawsuits and charges of corruption, Deve Gowda's is the uneasy head that may never wear the crown if the allegations are proved.

The Karnataka High Court has admitted three writ petitions accusing Deve Gowda of corruption, misuse of office and violation of land grant rules. They have been filed by S. Narasimhiah, a resident of the minister's home town, Holenarsipur in Hassan district. But more dangerous for him is the affidavit that G. Puttaswamy Gowda, the Hassan District Congress(I) Committee president, has submitted to the Governor A.N. Banerjee. This has led to an investigation by the Lok Ayukta. Puttaswamy has accused Deve Gowda of "corruption and criminal misconduct" and seeks to prosecute him under the Prevention of Corruption Act and under the Indian Penal Code.

The charges against Deve Gowda as placed before the high court and the Lok Ayukta are:

► A government tank was purchased near Holenarsipur in clear violation of land grant rules at one-tenth its market value in the name of Chanamma, Deve Gowda's wife. The 4.39 acres on which the tank stood, were levelled into a coconut plantation.

► Fifty-two acres of land were purchased in Bidadi, near Bangalore, for Rs 1.5 lakh by his son, H.D. Kumaraswamy and sister-in-law Savitri. Land was bought bit by bit beginning 1985 although it had been distributed to landless Harijans in 1978 and was non-transferrable for 15 years.

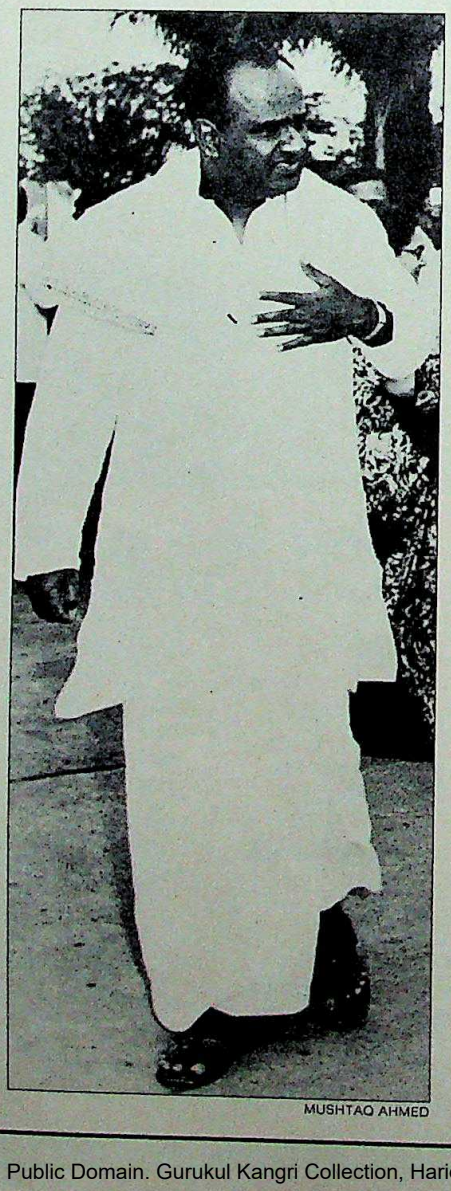
► Members of his community—the Vokkaligas—have been preferred for jobs in the Mysore City Corporation (MCC) and the City Improvement Trust Board (CITB). Fourteen of the 18 engineers at the CITB are Vokkaligas and five are close relatives of the minister, while 10 of the 13 engineers at MCC are Vokkaligas.

► Fifty-two plots in Mysore have been illegally allotted to members of his family—including his brother, sister, sister-in-law and daughter—at 25 per cent of the market value. As none of them is a resident of Mysore, they are not eligible for the allotment.

► A cinema hall was constructed in Holenarsipur on a plot which was part of 22.09 acres earmarked for landless peasants. Deve Gowda allegedly used his clout to blunt public resistance to the purchase of the plot in the name of his son, H.D. Revanna and got a no-objection-certificate from the tehsildar. Men and materials of the PWD are believed to have been used for the construction which began in 1985 and was completed in just a year.

► Revanna purchased fertile wetlands in the Holenarsipur taluk this year though their sale was prohibited till 1993.

Deve Gowda: in a fix



MUSHTAQ AHMED

While the high court petitions were admitted in June, Puttaswamy took recourse to the Antulay case verdict which stated that a governor is not bound by the advice of the Cabinet while sanctioning the prosecution of ministers. On receiving Puttaswamy's complaint in July, the governor referred the matter to the Lok Ayukta, A.D. Koshal. After the inquiry—which included three sessions with Deve Gowda and five with Puttaswamy—was completed, Koshal began on-the-spot investigations in late September. Said Koshal: "If at the inquiry stage, a prima facie case is not ruled out, then we think it is worthy of investigation."

Deve Gowda, however, is maintaining a brave facade: "I am not perturbed. I have faced many challenges. I am a seasoned fighter." But he is fighting with his back to the wall and there is no mistaking the pressure the minister is faced with. He also claims that Puttaswamy is indulging in "a vilification campaign" because of a "personal vendetta". Apparently, the two men—both are Vokkaligas from Holenarsipur—were once good friends. They fell out after the 1983 assembly elections that catapulted the Janata Party to power—Puttaswamy had earlier been a member of that party—apparently because Deve Gowda did not help his friend become a minister. Even before Puttaswamy joined the Congress (I) in 1984, the two were sworn enemies.

The allegations against Deve Gowda have impaired his ambitions of replacing Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde.

Puttaswamy, meanwhile, continues his barrage of accusations: according to him, Deve Gowda has repeatedly used political muscle to bend officials of Hassan district to his will. For instance, two years ago a Congressman, H.B. Radhakrishna Shetty, had sent a complaint to the deputy commissioner (DC) of Hassan alleging

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encroachment of land in Holenarsipur by Deve Gowda. Oddly, it was only on September 2, 1987, after the Lok Ayukta inquiry began, that the DC's office sent him a reply. As proof of Deve Gowda's malpractices, Puttaswamy points out that Thippeswamy, the tehsildar of Holenarsipur at the time of the tank sale, is now the minister's private secretary.

Of all the charges, the Lok Ayukta is seriously examining two —the sale and subsequent conversion of the tank into a coconut plantation and the purchase of land in Bidadi. The first took place during Gundu Rao's chief ministership and though he was then an opposition leader, Deve Gowda was known to have had a good rapport with Rao. The collector granted permission for the sale on September 4, 1982, without taking the Taluk Development Board (TDB)—which owned the land—into confidence. Later, the TDB had strongly opposed the sale. And in the Bidadi case, the dissident leader is liable for penal punishment because of a government order covering buyers of land from the landless Harijans since they can be misled or intimidated.

Deve Gowda has few satisfactory explanations to offer and merely says: "I will not succumb to bullying tactics." He claims to have built the cinema hall after raising a Rs 24-lakh bank loan, aside from the income from his farmlands— Rs 2.75 lakh from a banana crop and Rs 4.75 lakh from a bumper potato crop. "Those must have been some potatoes. He deserves a national award for them," says Puttaswamy derisively.

Interestingly, the acquisition proceedings for the 22.09 acres in Holenarsipur were dropped and the area was de-notified—conveniently—three months after Deve Gowda became PWD minister, though he claims to have nothing to do with the decision. He does, however, admit to helping three relatives to get plum sites in Mysore, but says that "if I am hauled up for this, so will a dozen other ministers". Meanwhile, as the chorus of accusations grew louder, the minister's supporters took up the chant that "it is not the high court or the Lok Ayukta but the people's court that really matters".

Should the charges be proved, it will be his family members and not Deve Gowda himself who will face the punishment. But the damage to his public image will be irrepairable. In fact, even the ongoing investigation has tarnished his image and nothing short of an unequivocal assertion from the Lok Ayukta that there is no truth in the accusations can lift the minister from the doldrums.

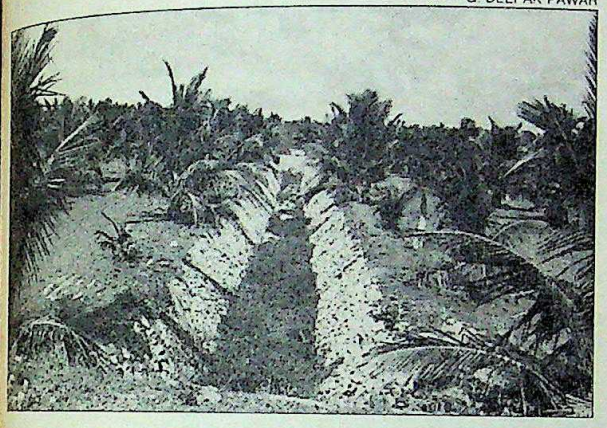
Meanwhile, many people seem to believe that Hegde, not Puttaswamy has masterminded the campaign against Deve Gowda, who has been fanning dissidence against the chief minister. Hegde is close to the governor and could well have encouraged him to refer the matter to the Lok Ayukta. As one Deve Gowda supporter pointed out: "It is very odd for the governor to refer the case to the Lok Ayukta when there are three high court cases pending." In fact, even Puttaswamy had not approached the Lok Ayukta directly because his lawyer A.K. Subbaiah, had filed seven complaints against Hegde there and four of them were dismissed "without a proper hearing". Says BJP leader-turned-Congress(I) supporter Subbaiah, who is also handling the high court cases against Deve Gowda: "The Lok Ayukta is completely under Hegde who is exploiting the case to compel Deve Gowda to surrender. Once he caves in, the whole issue will be whitewashed." Retorts Koshal: "I can't help it if a perverted man who makes false complaints gets frustrated and says he has no confidence in the judge because he does not rule in his favour."

And early this month Deve Gowda did reach a compromise with Hegde over the choice of president for the Janata Party's state unit. The new president—M.P. Prakash—is a Hegde loyalist and surprisingly, the dissident leader agreed to support his candidacy. Soon after that there were rumours of the Lok Ayukta investigation being stalled. The Law Department is believed to be sending a communication to the governor pointing out that the Lok Ayukta need not look into the charges as the matter is before the high court. Once confined to the courts, the case would lose its urgency as the legal process will take at least a couple of years to be settled.

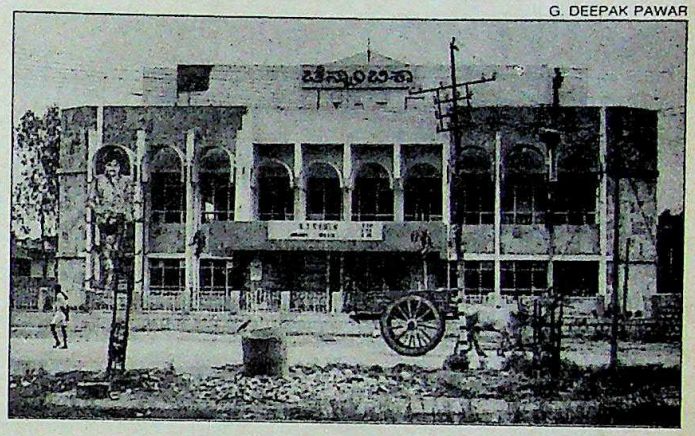
Although Deve Gowda says that "I will not be finished so easily as I have a strong mass base," it is not for nothing that Hegde has earned the reputation of being a brilliant neutraliser of his opponents. All the political luminaries who at some stage posed a threat to him—Congress(I) stalwarts S. Bangarappa and Veerappa Moily, peasant leader M.S. Janjundaswamy, and matinee idol Raj Kumar—are in a limbo today. And his present troubles could well lead Deve Gowda to the ranks of these fallen heroes.

—ANITA PRATAP in Bangalore

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



G. DEEPAK PAWAR



Coconut plantation (left); and cinema hall: under scrutiny

Puttaswamy's complaint of criminal misconduct against Deve Gowda has led to a Lok Ayukta investigation.

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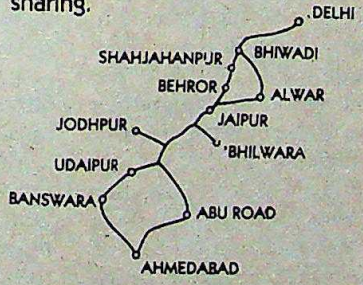

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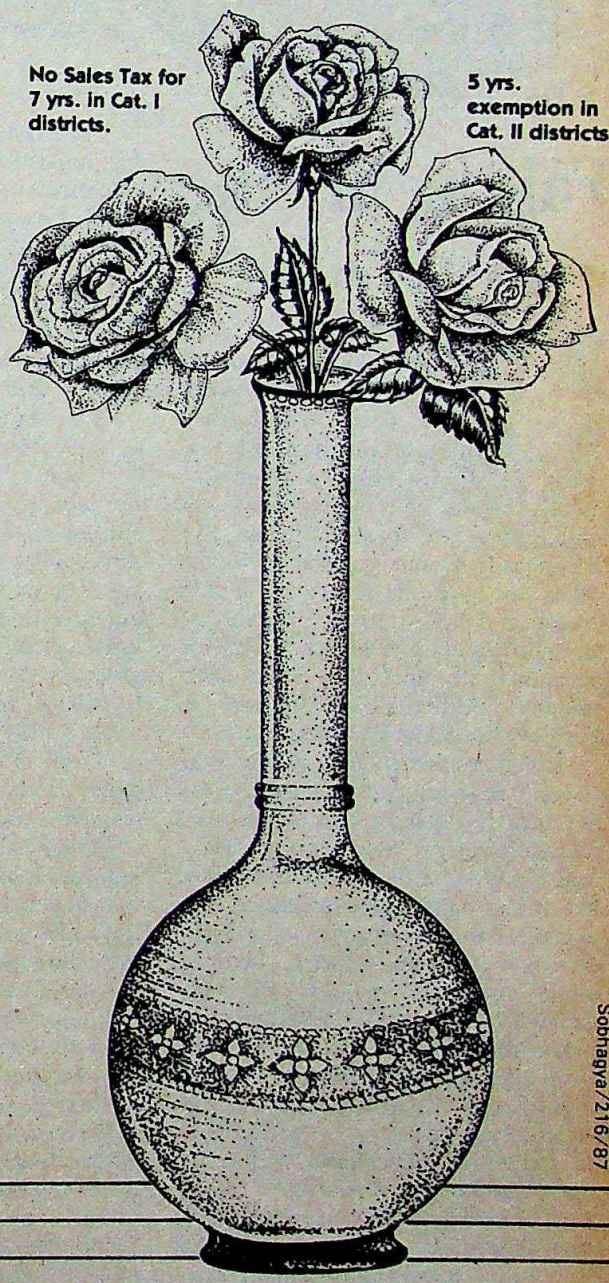

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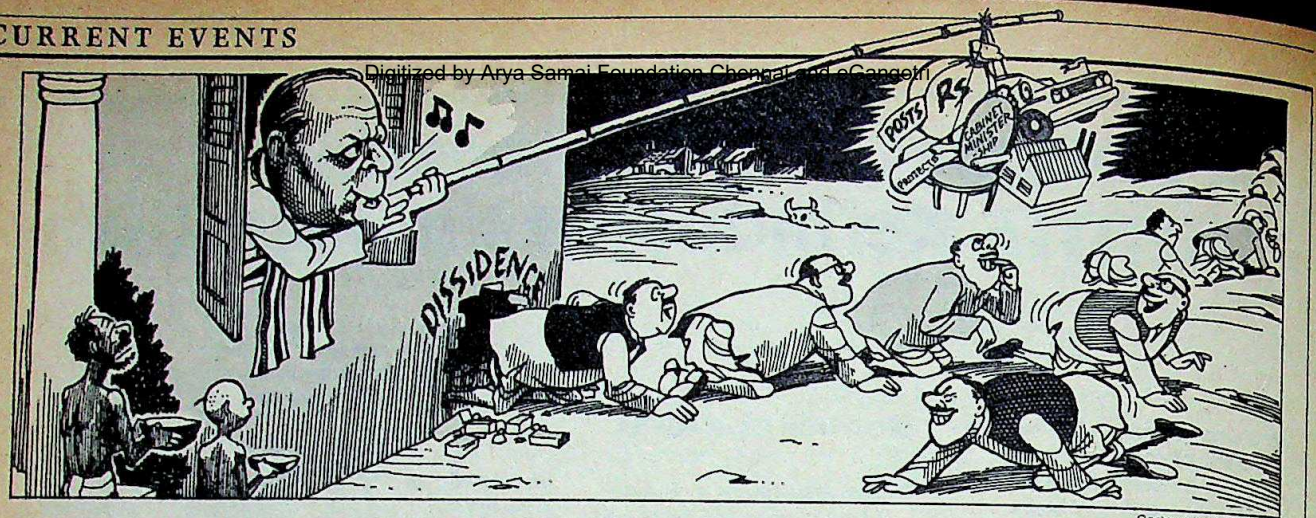

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

ORISSA

Falling in Line

Patnaik tempts dissidents

THESE are both good times and bad times for Congress(I) dissidents in Orissa. The frustration involved in trying to effect a change in chief ministership was highlighted last fortnight when two Congress(I) leaders decided to switch sides and back the rebels under V.P. Singh. In doing so, Anadi Charan Das, MP, and Bhanjaman Behera, MLA, were accepting the fact that with Delhi steadily backing Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik, the battle had been lost.

But there are other dissidents who haven't done too badly for themselves. Much to their delight, Patnaik has been dangling carrots right through 1987, and many have deserted what looked like a lost cause quite willingly. This explains Patnaik's casual reaction to the desertion of Das and Behera: "They are alone—no one else will go." His confidence has also been strengthened by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's endorsement of his leadership during his recent tour of the drought-affected parts of Orissa. Rajiv's directive to the dissidents to settle their differences within the party also helped, of course.

The dissidents said they were biding their time and waiting for the arrival of Ram Ratan Ram, AICC(I) general secretary in charge of Orissa affairs, in the coming fortnight. Rajiv's reprimand had obviously worked, for former finance minister Gangadhar Mahapatra, a serious contender for chief ministership, said that the fight henceforth would be "within the party forum".

The truth, though, is that the dissident movement has lost its momentum influenced as it has been by Patnaik's winning ways. Asked a senior dissident despairingly: "How long can we fight a person with state power and money?" He admitted that in the past few weeks at least 15 rebel leaders have been granted liberal loans to set up business, cinema houses—and even to buy cars.

It is hard to imagine that as recently as November 1986, the number of dissident MLAs had crossed 70—and the situation seemed to be getting out of Patnaik's hand. But he began by sacking three ministers, ring leaders of the rebellion, and moved quickly again, inducting three dissidents as ministers the very next month. Ever since, Patnaik has gradually gone from strength to strength, using a combination of carrot, and on fewer occasions, the stick.

Proof of the success of Patnaik's policy is that the group of hardcore dissidents has thinned down from the original 10 MLAs in 1985 to three—Bhagawat Mohanty, Ram Chandra Ulaka and Dambarudhar Manjhi. The rest have had good reason to change their attitudes towards the chief minister.

Some examples from the last few months of Patnaik's style of operation vis-a-vis dissidents, and its effect:

► Sitakant Mahapatra, it is believed, has been assured a berth in the ministry. In the meanwhile, he has gained considerable clout by becoming a member of the 20-Point Programme Review Committee and the state Natural Calamities Committee. Both these bodies are headed by the chief minister.

► Jagannath Rout's long-standing demands of a primary health centre and a fire brigade unit in his constituency were conceded soon after he pledged loyalty to Patnaik.

► After Kartik Prasad Tariar softened his stance towards the state leadership, a new subdivision was created in his constituency, Biramaharajpur, though there is no provision for this in the state budget. (The subdivision, though, is still without a subdivisional officer.)

► Dr Sushil Kumar Prusti, accused of being involved in gem smuggling, landed himself in an awkward spot after some incriminating documents found their way to the chief minister's office. He has turned oddly silent now.

Patnaik has also played with the dissidents in other ways, creating confusion in their ranks. At the time of the presidential elections earlier this year, when every legislator's vote counted, he met 18 of them on one pretext or another and let it be known that they had pledged him their loyalty. Embarrassed, they later denied having done so, but for that period, the dissidents were suddenly unsure of which of them had actually gone over to Patnaik.

More recently, the reverse took place. Eighteen legislators submitted a memorandum to the Orissa Governor B.N. Pande, accusing the chief minister of neglect and apathy to the people's plight. They therefore demanded the imposition of President's rule. On hearing this, Patnaik cut short his trip to New Delhi, following which four leaders whose names had appeared on the memorandum denied having signed it, thus negating its impact.

Patnaik is resorting to the very methods that had been used by his one-time confidant Basant Kumar Biswal on his behalf. Now that the two have fallen out and Biswal is a prominent figure in the dissident campaign, he is ironically confronted with a situation in which the very methods that he had once resorted to are being used to draw his people away from him. More and more Congress(I) leaders are realising that dissidence pays in Orissa.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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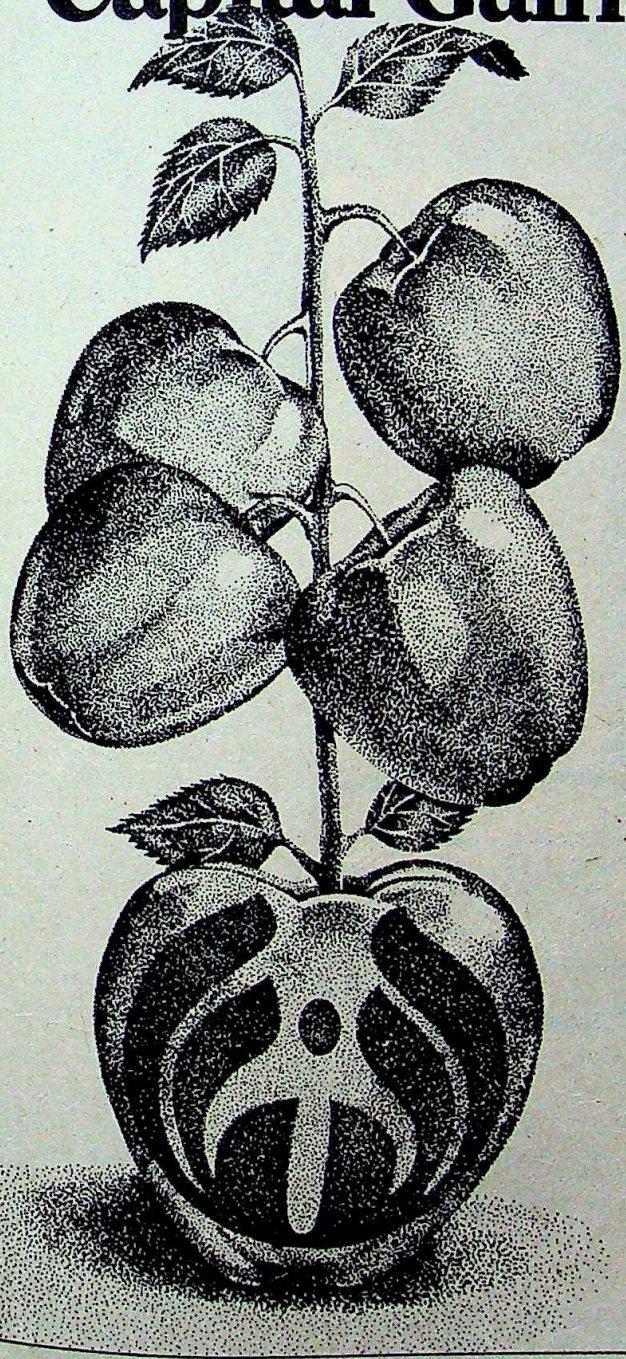

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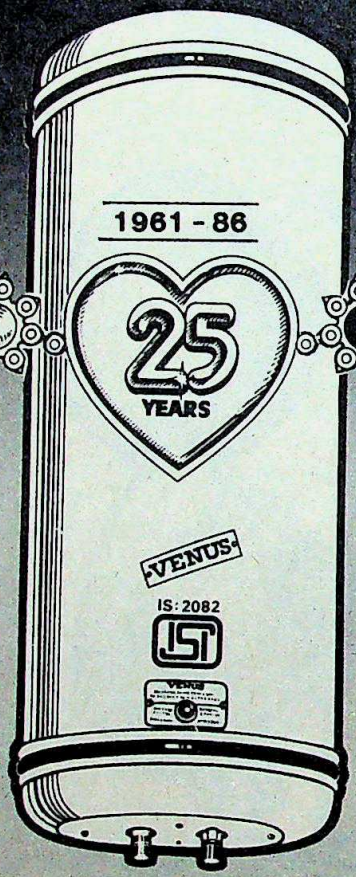

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PRAVIN GAJJAR/Jai Hind

Jagdishan with supporters: popular man

GUJARAT

Local Hero

A transfer leads to riots

IN his two-year humdrum existence as Chief Minister, Amarsinh Chaudhary has hardly ever been personally involved in so explosive an issue. But last fortnight, when he abruptly transferred Rajkot Municipal Commissioner S. Jagdishan, little did he realise the extent of public fury that would arise. The unprecedented rioting in otherwise placid Rajkot led to large-scale destruction of property. The police firing that ensued left two dead and scores injured.

Jagdishan, 33, within just 18 months had gained widespread public approval, particularly from the middle and lower classes, for his campaign against illegal building and land encroachment. He also initiated novel schemes to improve water supply, the steps coming as the town struggled with a three-year-long water scarcity. And when the IAS officer, reputed for his integrity, was transferred, residents were enraged by what was seen as an arbitrary and politically-motivated decision.

So strong were public feelings that even politicians who had earlier opposed Jagdishan's crusade against land-grabbers (*see* INDIA TODAY December 31, 1986) now decried Chaudhary's action. The BJP, whose members controlling the Rajkot Municipal Corporation had been victims of Jagdishan's drive, joined in the chorus of protest. As many as 15 Congress(I) municipal councillors also threatened to quit their membership.

Despite pleas by most ruling party MLAs in Rajkot to revoke the decision, Chaudhary remained firm, saying: "Interference in purely administrative matters is unwarranted." Ironically, he himself had ordered the transfer following a delegation on October 1 by Congress(I) leaders complaining against Jagdishan's anti-encroachment drive. It was led by Manoharsinh Jadeja—a former minister and a member of the Rajkot royal family—and Shantaben Chavda, secretary of the state PCC(I). They also pressed him to direct Jagdishan to free the wayside carts that had been seized.

Jagdishan soon received a call on the matter from the chief minister's office, and reportedly responded that "he would look into it". The infuriated chief minister then directed Chief Secretary R. Chandramauli to transfer the obstinate municipal commissioner. On October 5, Jagdishan was posted to Ahmedabad as joint managing director, Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation, and handed over charge to the Collector, Rajiv Takru.

By that time news of the transfer had spread through town. The Citizens Action Committee, which aims to bring Jagdishan back, called for a protest bandh the next day. Said committee chief P.C. Barot: "The chief minister has unfortunately succumbed to the pressure applied by big builders and land-grabbers through Jadeja and Chavda. It's a total sell-out on the part of Chaudhary."

On October 6, huge adulatory crowds gathered at Jagdishan's home, and people jostled to get a glimpse of their hero. The tension erupted into violence at noon when some youths lay down on the road attempting to block his departing car. The local administration only further inflamed the residents by its behaviour. Takru himself was seen preventing people from meeting Jagdishan near his house. Deputy Inspector General of Police, P.K. Dutta, acting as police commissioner, headed a violent police charge on the crowds around Jagdishan's car. He also threatened to arrest Jagdishan "if he did not leave town immediately". After a heated exchange, Jagdishan finally made an exit.

Soon after, large-scale rioting broke out. Some banks and post offices were burnt down and cinema halls and hotels badly damaged. The arsonists uprooted electric poles and attacked a state electricity board plant, plunging parts of Rajkot into darkness. Roads were also blockaded, forcing suspension of state road transport services. Over two dozen vehicles were set aflame. The estimated damage: Rs 10 crore.

The mobs even targeted the houses of people who had opposed Jagdishan. Chavda's house was attacked and damaged, and the police only just managed to disperse the mobs surrounding Jadeja's Huzur Palace. In some cases, though, local policemen turned a blind eye to the rioting. Said a constable: "Officers with integrity are few in our country. Injustice has been done to Jagdishan."

Curfew was imposed in the evening only after Rajkot Police Commissioner R.N. Bhattacharya, away on holiday, returned. Admitted Bhattacharya: "Curfew should have been clamped much earlier." Eight additional companies of the State Reserve Police had to be requisitioned before peace was restored. Since then, however, the protest has spread to other towns of Saurashtra, Jamnagar among them.

Bhattacharya, among other top officials, feels that Jagdishan erred in encouraging a "personality cult", but the fact remains that he was a target of politically-motivated action. "As a civil servant I will go anywhere on government orders. But I regret the treatment meted out to me," he says indignantly.

Jagdishan had earlier been victimised when he was shunted from Banaskantha district, as was the collector S.K. Nanda, apparently under political pressure. But this time, caught red-handed in the act, the Chaudhary Government is surely regretting having caved in to political compulsions.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

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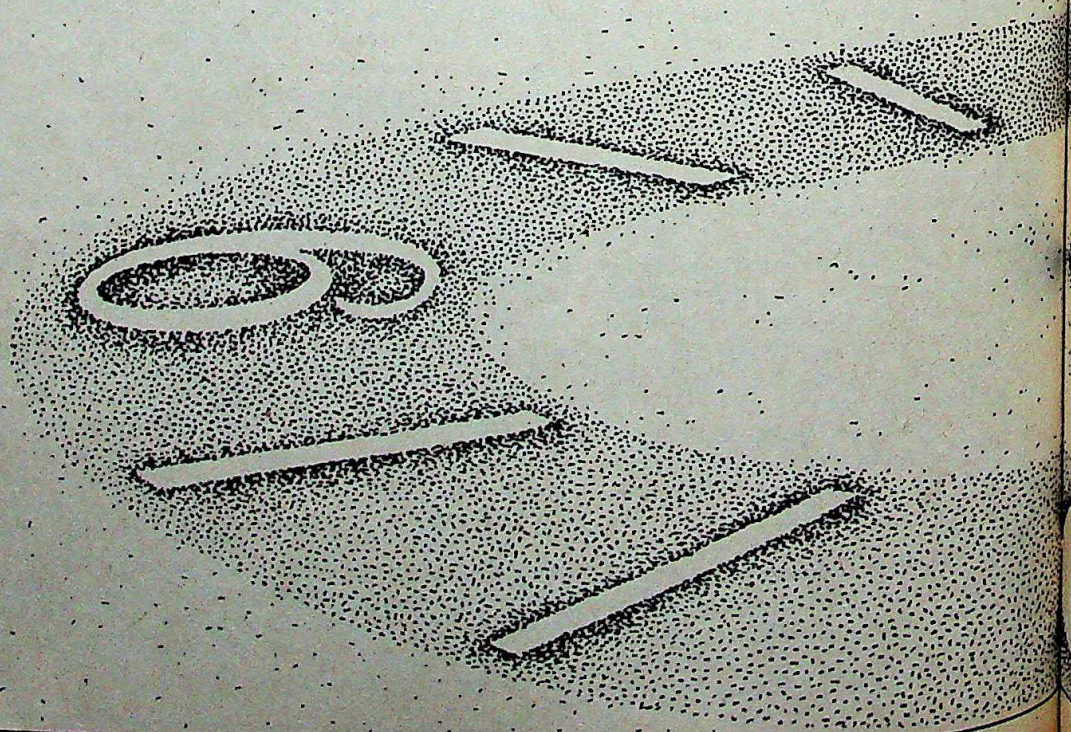

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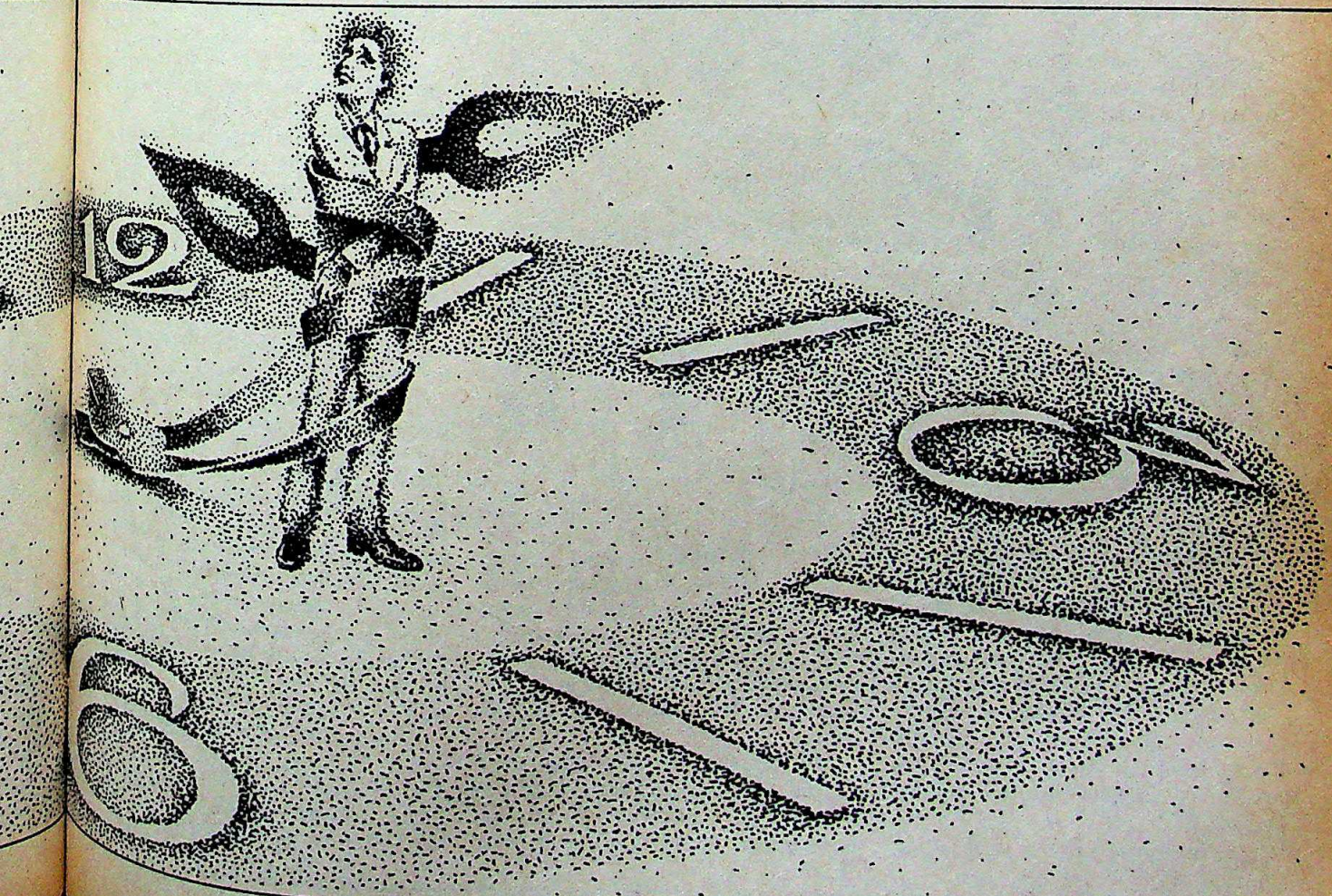

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KERALA

Volte Face

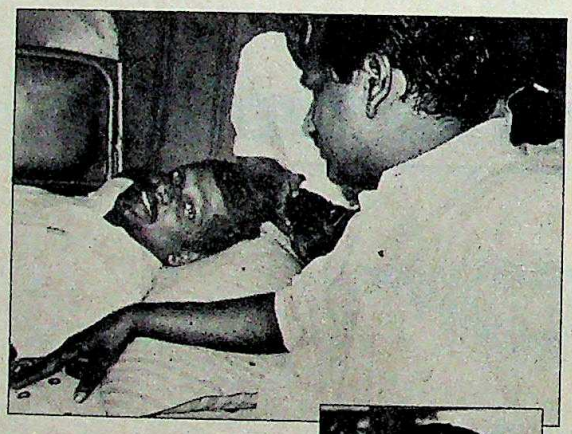
Marxists are embarrassed

LIQUOR can always be depended on to make news in Kerala. And it did again last fortnight when, within two months of issuing a controversial order relating to liquor shops, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) caved in to public pressure and withdrew it, leaving a number of red-faced Marxists.

Until August end, the rules had said that liquor shops in Kerala couldn't be set up within 400 metres of educational institutions, places of worship and burial grounds. On August 27, however, Excise Minister K.R. Gowri, without warning, lifted this ban by amending the Kerala Abkari Shop Rules 1974, giving the excise commissioner the right to permit shops within this radius in "very deserving and exceptional cases". Gowri's argument was that keeping in mind the large number of places near which shops could not be located, enforcing the ban strictly was proving to be an impractical task.

It was just the kind of break the Opposition had been on the look-out for long. While state Congress(I) President A.K. Antony and former chief minister K. Karunakaran had a field day attacking the Government at press conferences, former revenue minister P.J. Joseph went on an indefinite fast outside the state secretariat.

Antony with the fasting Joseph



Public pressure built up after Gowri changed rules to benefit liquor shops.

K.R. Gowri

The Marxists were particularly embarrassed because the step had taken even them by surprise. Gowri, who is known to have a mind of her own, had acted on her own initiative, without bothering to seek cabinet approval. Even Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar awkwardly confessed that he was unaware of the development but put this down to his being away in New Delhi for medical treatment.

Gowri, perhaps the most popular Marxist leader in Kerala, ascribed the commotion to a misinterpretation of the order. And she added that the impression that new shops would be opened within the 400-metre limit was wrong. According to her, the earlier United Democratic Front (UDF) government had imposed the ban in 1986-87 following the misuse of the discretionary power. But this had led to problems for the shops selling local liquor—the toddy sector employs about one lakh workers, most of them communist supporters.

Gowri claimed that the order lifting the ban was merely meant to regularise old shops that lay within the prescribed limit and whose owners were being subjected to harassment by excise officials. She also explained that the discretion related to only toddy and arrack shops and not to Indian made foreign liquor vends.

None of this explanation, however, washed with the critics. Said Karunakaran: "I charge this government with appeasing the liquor lobby in return for financial help received by the LDF during the last elections." The powerful Kerala Prohibition Council also threatened to launch an agitation on the location issue.

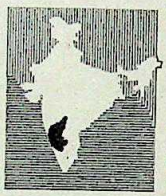
The pressure was more than what the LDF could take and last fortnight, it withdrew the discretionary power. Antony, though, accused the Government of doing a turnabout only after first regularising the shops. Said Joseph, after breaking his fast: "This should be a lesson to all governments that the liquor lobby will not be allowed to rule the state." In spite of these noble sentiments, the truth is that none of the political parties—including the Congress—have ever been able to shake off the powerful liquor lobby's grip.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

KARNATAKA

Close Call

Hegde avoids set-back



JUST what is the level of opposition that Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde faces within his party came to the fore on October 5, when the Janata Party's state unit president was elected. It was a close call for the chief minister. Though he could not get his first choice—Rural Development Minister Nazeer Sab—in, the compromise candidate, M.P. Prakash, is a Hegde loyalist, if not part of his inner circle.

In fact, Hegde was so unsure of his strength that he is believed to have thought in terms of resigning at the Janata Legislature Party (JLP) meeting—timed for October 6—in the event of Sab's loss. Declared the chief minister on the day after the election: "I am not a factional leader. Rather than be seen as a factional leader, I'll quit." Though Hegde did not have to take this drastic step, he was forced to compromise and could not put up Sab in the face of strong intra-party opposition.

Prakash was propped up instead as the "consensus choice" after six hours of hard bargaining between Hegde and Public Works Department Minister Deve Gowda, leader of the faction that was promoting rebel candidate M.S. Gurupadaswamy. Earlier, on September 30 and October 3, Hegde had had two rounds of discussions with party leaders but a consensus candidate failed to emerge, leading to intense canvassing by both the Hegde and Deve Gowda lobbies. The Deve Gowda group capitulated only at the last minute and agreed to back Prakash.

Though he lost the battle, Deve Gowda does draw satisfaction from having prevented Sab from sitting in the

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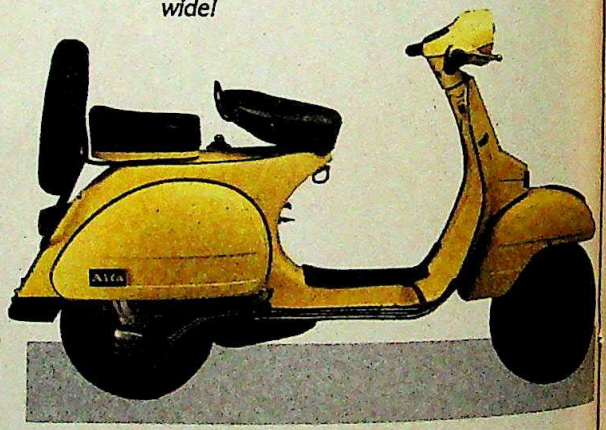

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Photographs by MUSHTAQ AHMED

Hegde with Prakash (seated); Deve Gowda (inset): a compromise candidate

president's chair. The primary objection to Sab was that he is identified as a Hegde man though the ostensible reason was that he had belonged to the Kranti Ranga—former chief minister Devraj Urs' party that eventually merged with the Janata Party. Prakash with his socialist background was much more acceptable. Moreover, Prakash is too junior to use the presidentship as a stepping stone to chief ministership, unlike Sab who is a seasoned politician apart from being very close to Hegde.

Said Deve Gowda after the election: "We felt that Gurupadaswamy should withdraw from the contest to avoid bitterness and discontent." But Hegde supporters claim that Deve Gowda opted out because he knew his candidate would be defeated. The truth of the matter, however, is that neither side was absolutely certain of victory. Hegde's apprehension stemmed from the fact that the 282-member State Council which elects the president is packed with Deve Gowda's supporters, while the minister himself believed that many of his men had been won over by ministers loyal to Hegde.

With Prakash at the helm of affairs, Hegde loyalists are hopeful of gradually gaining control of the party. Said the chief minister's backer, Education Minister Jeevaraj Alva, happily: "With the party and the Government going hand in hand henceforth, the course of politics in Karnataka will change." Though that might be more a statement of hope rather than reality, there is little doubt that Deve Gowda's ambitions of replacing Hegde will now be harder to fulfil.

—ANITA PRATAP in Bangalore

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Accord Concord

AFTER India had signed the accord with Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi described it as the most important agreement of the century. I was rather sceptical about that description. Now, however, I have changed my mind. Because everybody I have met is praising Rajiv Gandhi's policy in Sri Lanka. This is what people are saying:

Soviet diplomat: "We believe that Rajiv Gandhi's policy in Sri Lanka is simply wonderful. We believe that in the years to come it will prove to be the greatest boon to the Soviet Union because it will make us look good in Afghanistan...."

American diplomat: "I think that what is happening in Sri Lanka right now is absolutely great. It is indeed a great morale booster for the American people, who had earlier believed that American leaders were the only ones who were dumb enough to make a mistake like Vietnam...."

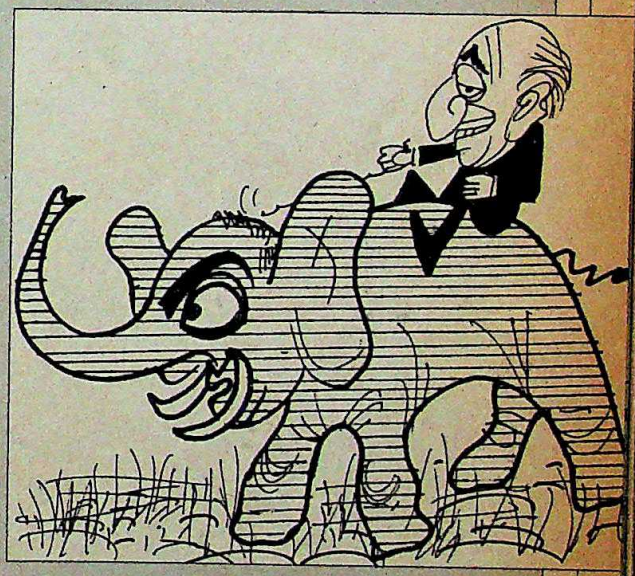
Sinhalese soldier: "The new arrangement is a great relief to us. Earlier, we had to shoot only the Tamils. But now we can shoot both the Tamils and the Indian troops and, better still, watch as they also shoot at each other...."

Tamil militant: "We are much better off than we were before, thanks to the accord. Earlier, we were shot by the brutal Sinhalese soldiers, now we are shot by the considerate Indian soldiers...."

Chinese diplomat: "We welcome the Indo-Sri Lankan accord as the start of a great new chapter in the affairs of Asia. We are therefore watching keenly the developments in Sri Lanka, and when the time is ripe we will certainly make our own contribution to the movement that has been started by Rajiv Gandhi—by striving for a similar accord in Arunachal...."

Pakistani diplomat: "Rajiv Gandhi has shown the way by his policy in Sri Lanka. As soon as President Zia-ul-Haq feels strong enough, we hope he will follow Rajiv Gandhi's footsteps by acting in Kashmir and Punjab...."

Sri Lankan diplomat: "Sri Lanka will be eternally grateful to Rajiv Gandhi for bailing President Jayewardene out what had become an impossible situation. Thank God, the people in our country have stopped abusing the Sri Lankan President. They now only abuse the Indian prime minister...."



Sikh militant: "Long live the Indo-Sri Lankan accord! Now at last our brothers in the south will appreciate why the Punjab accord had to fail...."

RSS leader: "Long live the accord—it is the first step towards Akhand Bharat...."

DMK leader: "Long live the accord—it is the first step towards Akhand Dravidistan...."

Eelam leader: "Long live the accord—it is the first step towards Akhand Eelam...."

Congress(I) leader: "The Indo-Sri Lankan accord was a fantastic piece of good work. Already, its benefits are visible—people have stopped talking about the mess on Bofors, they talk only of the mess in Sri Lanka...."

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ASSAM

Failed Accord

A return to unrest

AS if Rajiv's cup of botched accords is not already overflowing, there is bad news from Assam. Following a marathon meeting recently, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has decided to begin a blockade of commodities—including oil—from early November. The move is aimed to "pressure the Centre to implement the Assam accord in letter and spirit".

Sixteen meetings have taken place between the state and the Centre but most of the clauses of the accord are far from being implemented. Says a disappointed Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta: "At every meeting, they assure us that they are very keen to implement the accord. We are now convinced that they are engaged in delaying tactics." Adds Home Minister Bhrigu Phukan: "We have started doubting their intentions."

The accord had classified foreigners into three clear categories: those who had come in before 1966 from erstwhile East Pakistan would be accepted as Indian citizens; those who had arrived between 1966 and 1971 would be allowed to stay on, but without the right to vote for 10 years; and those Bangladeshis who had appeared after 1971, would be expelled.

When the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government set about the task of detecting illegal migrants, they found themselves constrained by the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act (IMDT), enacted specially for this purpose in 1983. The IMDT envisages primary investigation by the police in the case of a suspected foreigner and a subsequent reference to a three-judge panel of the tribunal. The police have completed investigations in about two lakh cases. Only 10 per cent, however, have been sent to the tribunal: the rest have been dropped due to lack of evidence.

Police sources complain that the act does not empower them to either arrest or extract information from the migrants. Moreover, say state officials, under the Foreigners Act, applicable elsewhere in the country, the onus of proof lies on the suspect whereas under the IMDT, it lies on the Government. This is where the problem lies, making the state Government's task virtually impossible.

Just how impossible is reflected by figures: the tribunal has disposed of only 431 cases until now; of them 259 were found to be illegal migrants; of this lot, only 116 could be deported because the rest absconded before the police could get them. The AGP and AASU feel that the act has, in fact, been deliberately designed to fail because Bangladeshi migrants form a solid vote bank for the Congress(I).

Meanwhile, reports that the Centre has conceded an amendment to the act to give it more teeth have made the minorities nervous. They fear that they may be harassed and forced out under the guise of expelling foreigners. Says G. Osmani, MLA and an UMF leader: "How can the Centre think of giving wide powers to expel foreigners to such a racial government?"

The foreigners' issue is, of course, the major one but the fact that other clauses of the accord have not been executed hasn't helped matters either. Because the Centre failed to provide the additional forces it had promised, to detect foreigners, the state has had to spend Rs 18 crore from its meagre resources to recruit 3,000 policemen.

Then, the state had wanted 18 officers appointed to register the names of foreigners. Though the Centre first insisted that all of them must be from outside Assam, it later made no move to fill the posts. Recently, it said however, that the state could appoint 10 officers and eight would be appointed by the Centre.

The accord had said that constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards would be introduced to protect the identity and heritage of the Assamese. A report chalked out by the AGP and AASU on how this could be done, however, has yet to receive a response from New Delhi. Similarly, an Indian institute of technology was to have been set up in Assam. Though land has been earmarked in Missa in Nowgong district, there is no move to fulfil this promise.

Another sore point is the treatment of government employees who had taken part in the prolonged AASU-led agitation. The cases were to be reviewed sympathetically. While the state Government says it has taken back all the cases against its employees, Central government employees suspended during the agitation are yet to be reinstated. Moreover, the state Government has paid Rs 30,000 to each of the 819 people killed during the agitation. But the Centre's share of Rs 20,000 per victim is yet to materialise. In addition to all this is the fact that the construction of the border fence also remains almost at a standstill.

Though the general mood in the state is one of bitterness, AASU President Keshab Mahanta and General Secretary Atul Bora blame not only the Centre but also the state Government which, they feel, has not been adequately aggressive. Says Himanta Biswa Sharma, general secretary of the All Guwahati Students' Union: "We will not rest until the accord is implemented."

With the AASU announcement, the AGP Government is clearly under pressure. But caught as it is between the angry students and an indifferent Centre, it finds itself with limited space for manoeuvre.

—RAMESH MENON

Signing the accord: bitter memory

PIB

After 24 months of peace, the All Assam Students' Union plans to renew its agitation—this time to demand the implementation of the accord.

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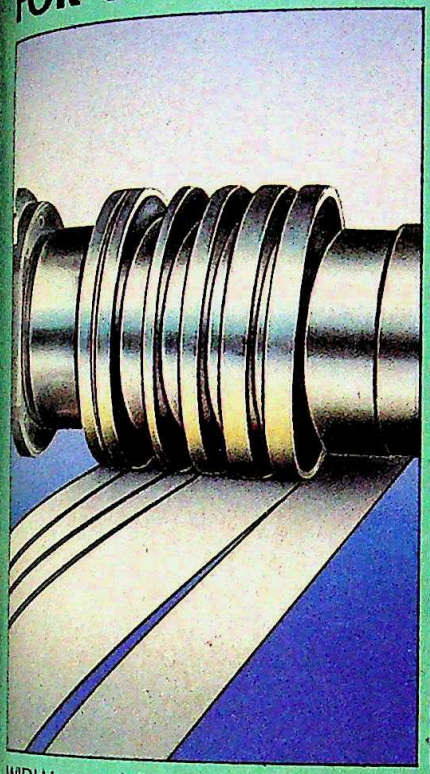

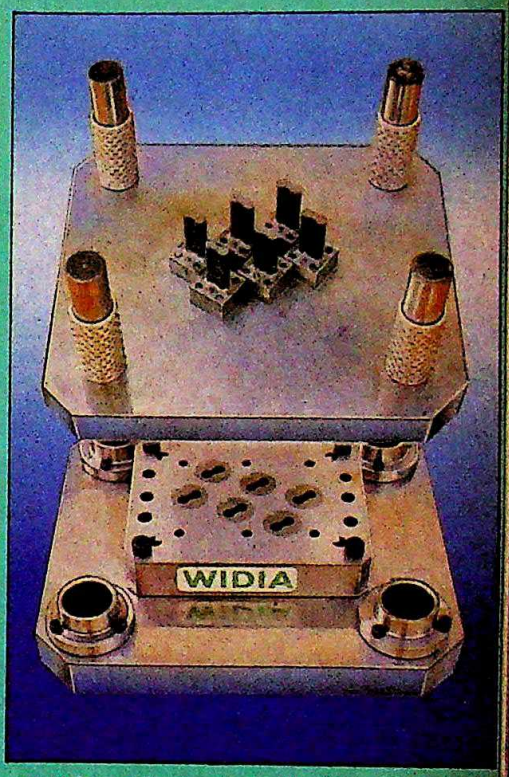

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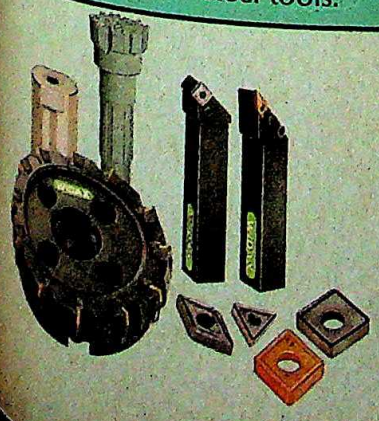

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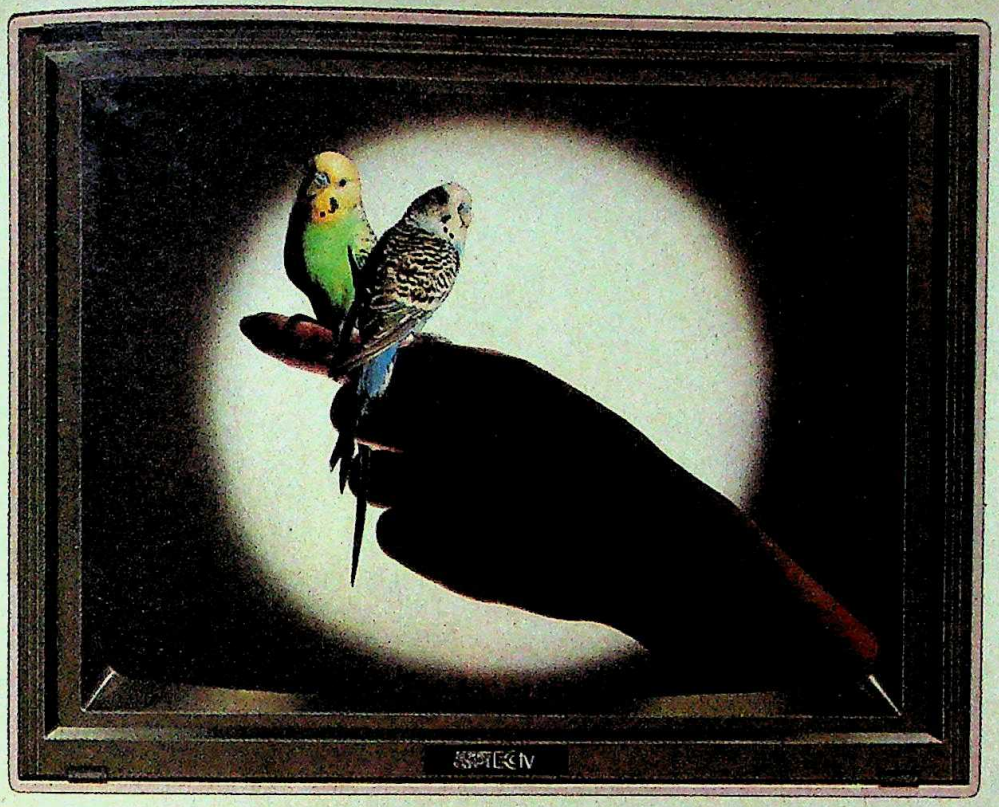

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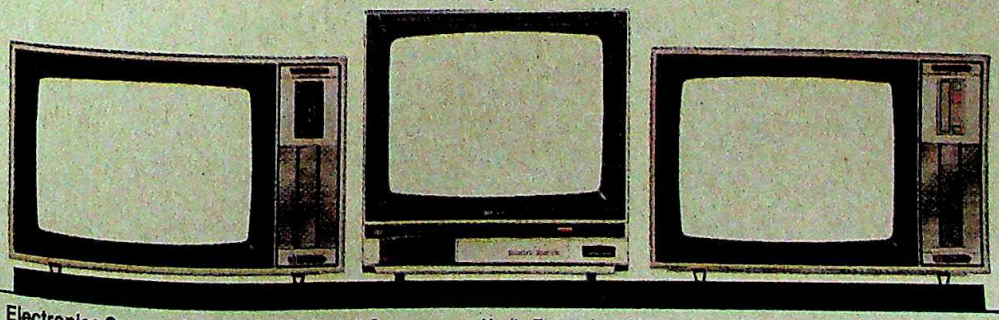

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UTTAR PRADESH

Poor Choice

Controversial leaders emerge

THE V.P. Singh factor has proved to be a windfall for some Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) leaders. The choice of MPs Naresh Chandra Chaturvedi and Kedar Nath Singh as the new AICC(I) general secretaries, and of Bachcha Pathak, Gulab Sehra (both former MLAs) and parliamentarian Ranavir Singh as the general secretaries for the party's state unit suggests that a strong anti-V.P. Singh bias has become the primary criterion in considering a promotion.

The resignation of state unit President Mahavir Prasad on September 6 had raised hopes of a transformation of the state leadership. But when the new line-up was announced the next day, Prasad was back in the saddle with leaders who had been sidelined during Rajiv Gandhi's cleansing drive soon after he came to power. Sehra and Pathak in particular have reason to dislike V.P. Singh because he was the state party chief when they were denied assembly tickets in 1985.

So tarnished are their reputations, however, that their choice could assist V.P. Singh. Chaturvedi is still embroiled in an income tax case following a raid on December 18, 1980, in which unaccounted cash (Rs 50,000) and jewellery (worth Rs 65,000), besides three gold biscuits, were found. Officials have issued Chaturvedi 42 summons since then but he turned up only last month, after his recent elevation. Chaturvedi's tension with V.P. Singh dates back to the 1985 assembly elections when he tried to sabotage the election of two supporters of the former Union minister.

Chaturvedi's image has also been besmirched by his links with brothers Ashok and Anil Kumar Sharma, who, along with members of their gang, have about a dozen murder cases against them. Anil Kumar is an office-bearer of the Yuva Kalyan Prakostha, a Kanpur youth body founded by Chaturvedi last year. Police officials were dismayed at an August 15 function this year when, because of his political links, Anil Kumar—released on parole on medical grounds—stood prominently on the dais along with several VIPs, including Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh.

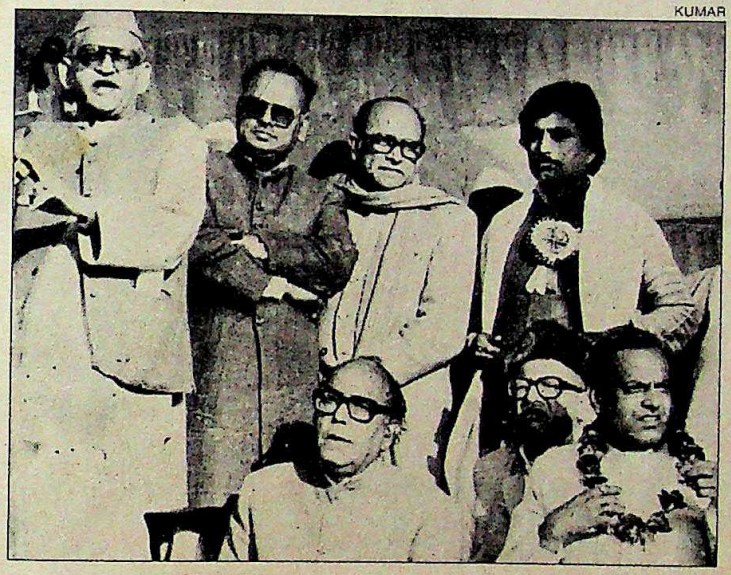
Similarly, there is little to suggest that K.N. Singh is a good pick. The manner of his raising funds in the '70s as a Union deputy minister, for the Kamla Nehru Institute of Technology—which he runs at Sultanpur—calls his character into question. He staged several film star nites and not only were cash receipts not fully accounted for, the organisers also issued cheques that bounced.

But these escapades pale before the exploits of Bachcha Pathak. When V.P. Singh was chief minister, Pathak, as minister of state for cooperation, tried to slyly overrule his boss' order in making an appointment. The chief minister fired him for this. Later, when Sripati Mishra was chief minister and Pathak was back in the same post, there were allegations that the manner of his conducting transfers was not always fair.

But the most scandalous case occurred on March 10, 1985, when a contractor staying with Pathak, filed a police complaint that Pathak's servant, Hansraj Tewari, had stolen Rs 6 lakh. The contractor claimed that Rs 2 lakh was his and the rest Pathak's, who was then the party's state general secretary.

But Tewari, in a statement in court, said that he had been falsely implicated. Tewari claimed that he had paid Pathak Rs 10,000 in return for the promise of a job and much to the leader's chagrin, had demanded a refund when it didn't materialise. He also alleged that Pathak had sodomised him. An inquiry ordered by the state police chief showed that no theft had indeed taken place. Pathak was later removed from his party post.

KUMAR



Gangster Sharma (with rosette), Chaturvedi, and Bir Bahadur (with garland); (top) Pathak; (above) Sehra

The criterion of selecting the new Congress(I) office-bearers, most of whom have colourful pasts, seems to have been their strong anti-V.P. Singh bias.

The charges against Sehra too have been serious. As Harijan and social welfare minister, he was accused of accepting money to appoint mukhya gram sewikas. So great was the anger, that an aide of Mrs Gandhi had visited Lucknow to conduct an inquiry. Sehra was later denied an assembly ticket though his son, Ashok, secured it in his place. Local papers have featured Sehra in a number of scandals regularly, and one of them related to the extravagant presents given by officers at his daughter's wedding when Sehra was briefly Uttar Pradesh's transport minister.

Chances are that far from assisting in containing party rebels, these new office-bearers, with their colourful pasts, will only provide the V.P. Singh group ammunition with which to attack the ruling party.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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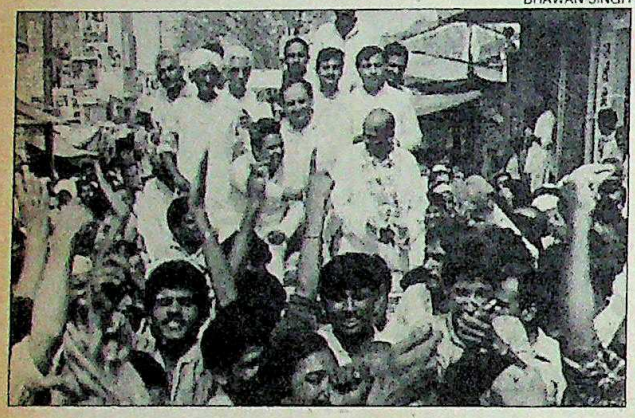
Snooping on Rebels

EVER since V.P. Singh brought waves of dissidence to Uttar Pradesh politics, intelligence sleuths have gained in importance. When some Congress(I) MLAs called on Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh early this month, he told them to get a favourable local intelligence unit (LIU) report as there would soon be a cabinet expansion. An LIU clearance before an MLAs induction into the Cabinet was a formality till recently. But now it is a major document certifying loyalty to the leadership.

BHAWAN SINGH



Crowds at a V.P. Singh rally: causing dissent

The LIU has also been upgraded to cope with the task of snooping on MLAs sympathetic to the dissidents. Only about a dozen state intelligence bureau men were on the political beat until May this year, but now 52 of them, including two DIGs and four SPs, have been put on the job. While the effectiveness of the sleuths in curbing dissidence is debatable, these strong-arm tactics certainly give weight to allegations of former ministers Sanjay Singh and Zafar Ali Naqvi that their phones are tapped and they are being shadowed round the clock.

Naxalite Trouble

THE People's War Group (PWG), a Naxalite organisation in Andhra Pradesh, is facing bad times: along with dwindling cadres, it is also losing its hold over students. This became evident last fortnight when the results of the college students' union elections in Hyderabad and neighbouring districts were announced. To the dismay of the PWG and its student wing—the Radical Students' Union (RSU), the BJP student wing—the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), had shot into the lead.

Reddy: hapless victim

In retaliation, the PWG gunned down Krishnavardhan Reddy, 26, a key ABVP organiser, in broad daylight on October 1. Reddy, a research scholar, was having tea with a friend in a restaurant in the Osmania University campus, when three PWG gunmen arrived and killed him in cold blood.

Though the BJP-called bandh the next day did not evoke much of a response, said party General Secretary Vandaru Dattatreya: "The terror tactics of the Naxalites confirms they can no longer find recruits and sympathisers among students."

Dravidian Divide

THE leading opposition party in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), had a virtual parting of ways with the Dravida Kazhagam (DK)—a social reform organisation of which the DMK is a political faction—for the flimsiest of reasons last month.

The Organising Secretary of the DMK, Neela Narayanan, issued a circular asking partymen to have no truck with the DK: "We are constrained to observe that recently the DK General Secretary, K. Veeramani, has been consistently ridiculing us," the circular read. The "ridicule" was Veeramani's accusation that many DMK youth were members of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh.

Karunanidhi: angered

But the real reason for the rift was quite different: a few months ago, the DK had organised a statewide rail roko agitation on the same day when DMK President M. Karunanidhi's granddaughter was getting married. Apparently, Karunanidhi considered it a personal affront that the DK should hold an agitation on this "auspicious" day. Veeramani further angered Karunanidhi by saying that the bride and groom should not have fallen at the feet of former Kerala governor P. Ramachandran as it "went against the tenets of Dravidian social reform".

A Severe Power Crisis

IT was the unstable power equation in Bihar's ruling party that sent AICC(I) Treasurer Sitaram Kesari flying to Patna last month. But on arrival he encountered a power crisis of a different dimension: he had to spend a whole night without electricity in the state government guest-house. Though most residents of the state capital have been suffering lengthy power cuts, Kesari did not take kindly to it—within days of his return to Delhi, the state Government transferred Bihar State Electricity Board's (BSEB) chairman I.C. Kumar to another post.

Kumar was first told by Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey and Power Minister Ramashraya Prasad Singh to restore the power. Though he spent a whole day supervising engineers, he was relieved from his post. Even as his ouster created a furore, Singh claimed that Kumar himself had sought a change.

Kumar (left) and Kesari: electric move

In fact, in 29 years, BSEB has had 25 chairmen and Kumar had just taken over in March this year. It remains to be seen whether the new chairman—J.C. Jaitley, a senior IAS officer—will survive any longer in the ailing undertaking.

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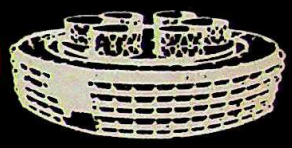

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The New Millionaires

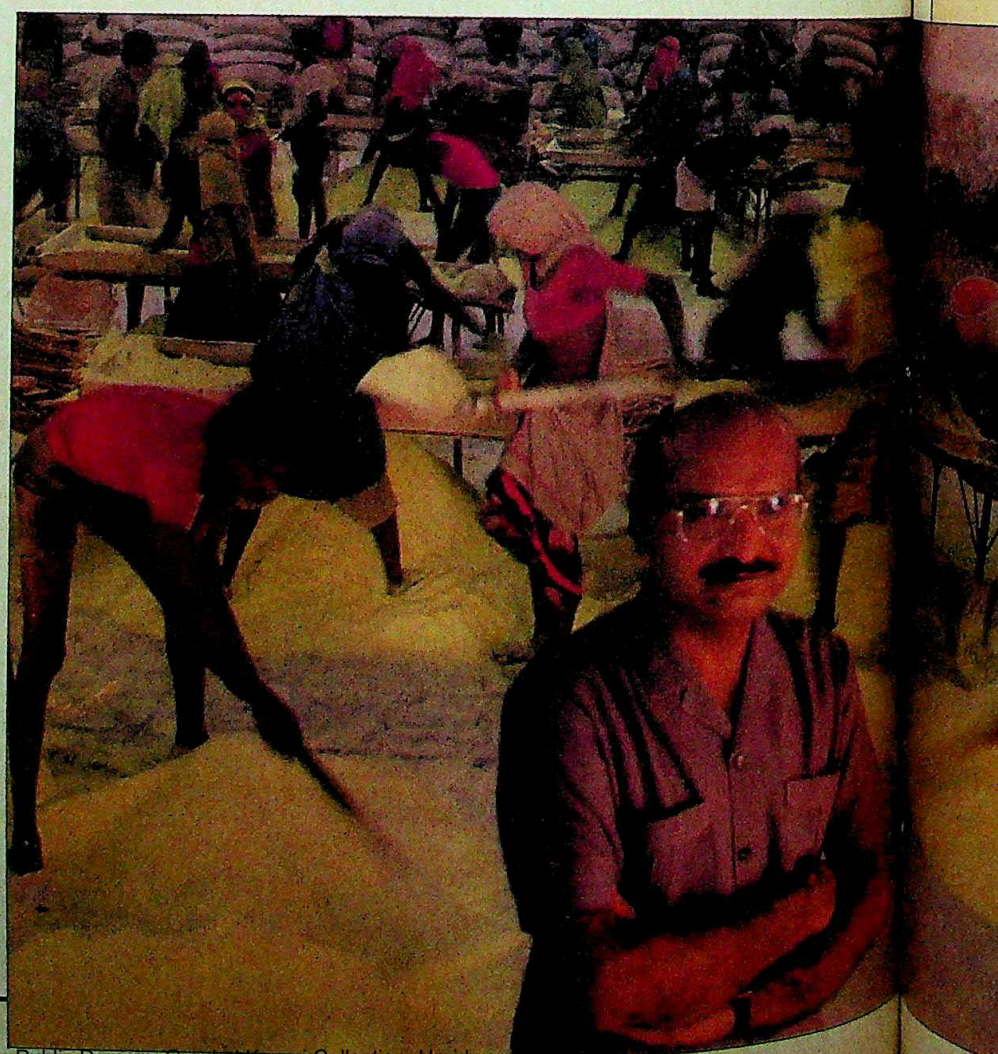
INDIA became the land of abiding socialism in 1976. Parliament decreed in that somewhat traumatic year that India was a socialist republic—like Vietnam, North Korea and Castro's Cuba. Coming on top of a host of socialist legislation and extortionate tax rates, this didn't seem like fertile ground for new millionaires to sprout every spring. Let alone billionaires.

When some of the socialist laws were being written into the statute books, the young son of a small farmer in Gujarat was making his living in Ahmedabad as a chemist, on a modest state government salary of Rs 450. The money wasn't enough, so Karsanbhai Patel decided to do some moonlighting.

On Sunday mornings, he bought some chemicals from the local market, mixed a yellow concoction and sold it to friends as a cheap detergent. When the sales circle grew a little, he gave the detergent a brand name, that of his daughter: Nirma.

Today, Patel's Nirma is a Rs 350-crore business; next year he expects it to be Rs 600 crore, which will make it among the 10 biggest companies in a land replete with the Tatas, Birlas, Singhanias, Thapars and Shri Rams. Indeed, Nirma could soon be bigger than any single company in the entire Birla group.

The laconic Patel and his family now



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KARSANBHAI PATEL

NIRMA

Cleaning up the Cleaner Market

THE manufacturing method is primitive, the product is very down-market, and the marketing effort is minimal. Yet it is the most sensational success story of the decade. An insignificant farmer's son takes on the biggest multinational in the country, and becomes a multi-crorepati in next to no time, with investment worth over Rs 50 crore.

The man who did the impossible—Karsanbhai Patel—is as home-grown a genius as you can get anywhere. And in an era of fancy management jargon, he has shown what stunning results can be achieved with a simple product (washing powder) and a simple idea (steady quality at an affordable price).

Nirma washing powder was not even a planned product. What Patel was really aiming at, when he started his backyard operation in Ahmedabad in 1969, was a liquid detergent. But the 26-year-old government chemist in search of pin money found this was too new a concept for his clientele, and that washing powder was easier to market. The powder was also simpler to make, since all it needed was some buckets and plastic sheets. It didn't even need electric power, since the process was by hand.

RAGHU RAI

Patel first sold the powder to his friends and relatives, because the shops would not stock a product for which there was no demand. It took him three years to finally take the plunge and go in for proper marketing of his powder. He then appointed salesmen to sell door-to-door on a commission basis, and managed to sell 500 kg a month. By 1977, he was advertising on the radio, and then on TV. Finally, he was into the big league.

We have the maximum number of consumers in India for any product, any company. No country in the world has such large sales for one detergent brand.

His methods of making the powder are still primitive (even today, hundreds of workers on the large factory floor mix the yellow powder and pack it by hand), and there is no profound marketing concept involved. Yet Patel's business has grown 50 per cent annually for the last 14 years. In 1984, the business was Rs 100 crore, in 1985, Rs 150 crore, and last year, Rs 200 crore. This year, the figure will be Rs 350 crore—helped along by the diversification into Nirma detergent cake.

Next year, with the launching of Nirma soap and toothpaste, it will be Rs 600 crore. And Patel is shooting for the Rs 1,000 crore mark by 1990. Given his track record, no one will be surprised if he gets there.

In his main line of business, Patel tells you proudly, the volume of his sales is many times that of Hindustan Lever's Surf—once the obviously unbeatable giant in detergents. Even in detergent cake, his newly-introduced product has given Lever's established product a run for its money. And as Patel says proudly: "We have the maximum number of consumers in India, for any product, of any company. In no country anywhere in the world does one company sell so much detergent under one brand name (500 tonnes a day)."

Of course, Nirma's manufacturing process is different from the more expensive washing powders: using no power, staying a small-scale unit by keeping down the investment in plant and machinery in each unit to less than Rs 35 lakh. But Patel has also learnt to keep his costs down, operating on thin margins. He has barely half a dozen people in his sales department, and all they do is check on the agents in each district, each of whom reports sales monthly to Patel's Ahmedabad headquarters. He has no separate purchase department, and is confident of launching new products on a national scale without any test-the-water market surveys. "I will be cheaper than Colgate, so my toothpaste will sell. Why should I have a market survey?" he asks.

Patel believes he is successful because he has provided what the common man wants, and because he is feeding a mass market for basic goods at a basic price. When most other producers have gone for up-market segments with their fat margins, he has opted for low margins and huge volumes.

Now, he plans to go in for a Rs 150-crore 50,000 tonne project to make linear alkyl benzene, a raw material for detergents. A Rs 250-crore soda ash project is also on the cards. The 'small-scale' businessman is entering 'big' industry.

Quiet, almost phlegmatic ("I feel neither tense nor relaxed," he says, about the approach to his business), Patel is nevertheless an ambitious man. He delights in comparing his sales figures with Hindustan Lever, and talks of becoming as big as the biggest in Indian business. And he knows that he is on to a sure-fire business philosophy: Give quality at the right price and whatever you make will sell on its own. And, incidentally, make a millionaire out of a modest government chemist.

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command capital worth a staggering Rs 50 crore. He has made this extraordinary sum while fighting the giant multinational Hindustan Lever (once taking them to court), and building his rapidly growing empire by pricing his product down to the affordability of the common man.

A hundred other millionaires have bloomed along with Patel, because India was also, in the mid-70s, seeing the slow beginnings of some dramatic changes: in products, technology, middle class aspirations, overall economic growth. Socialism or not, markets were opening up, the business environment was presenting new opportunities.

Thus, television was state-controlled, dull, and black and white, but gradually making its presence felt; computers were being introduced gingerly—in the face of stiff opposition from the big trade unions.

NAMAS BHOJANI

And little garage entrepreneurs were hawking cheap cheese-cloth shirts and blouses for summer wear in Europe: the beginnings of India's garment exports.

For some reason, the big noises in Indian business left these fields alone, or didn't make much out of them. And the nascent entrepreneur moved in.

Satish Kaura was then an engineer who had gone from Kanpur to Canada, before returning to build a business by hawking re-conditioned TV picture tubes. Overcoming the initial problems—at one stage the business nearly collapsed—Kaura's clutch of firms. (Teletubes, Samtel India and others) now commands 62 per cent of India's picture tube market. And Kaura himself is a crorepati.

Three years after Kaura got going,

DILIP KULKARNI

A Courier Takes Wing

CARS sometimes matter more than money. And Dilip Mahibal Kulkarni loves cars. He drives around in a Honda Accord, and owns two Peugeot 404s, a Mercedes 230, a Maruti deluxe and a Maruti Gypsy. He has driven in car rallies, and clearly likes being in the fast lane.

Out of engineering college in 1974, Kulkarni decided that being in someone else's employ was a mug's game: you would always be paid less than your worth. So he went into business, and ran into repeated failure. As an agent for textile exporters, he found the margins too low. Engineering exports were no better. And a unit he set up in Goa to make pilfer-proof caps was shot through with holes because aluminium was in short supply.

Finally, real opportunity presented itself. DHL had just come to India, and Kulkarni was keenly aware of the vital importance of speedy communications. He flew to Singapore, with a friend Dinesh Arya, to persuade DHL's rival Skypak, to strike a deal for India, arguing that "we have no other interests, so we'll give this all we have".

Till two years ago, they worked out of a 500-sq ft Bombay office, and the business was mostly international. No one had realised there was a vast domestic market available. Then

> We've just scratched the surface. I tell my people that we're like Columbus, charting a new course.

Kulkarni and Arya turned inward, opened 20 new offices in the country (in Moradabad, Ujjain, Bhilai and Erode, for instance), and the turnover shot up from Rs 45 lakh in 1983-84 to Rs 15 crore this year. Just five years ago, the business was only Rs 5 lakh.

"And yet, we've just scratched the surface. I tell my people that we're like Columbus, charting a new course," Kulkarni says in childlike excitement. He has had his set-backs in the courier business too, of course: an arrangement to charter four Vayudoot aircraft every night for inter-metro runs—for a nightly bill of Rs 4 lakh—kicked up a storm from rivals and didn't work because, says Kulkarni, Vayudoot missed too many flights and the service became unreliable. But he has recovered from that set-back.

Still only 36, Kulkarni says: "I don't see Skypak merely as a point-to-point delivery system. I look around this immediate function to see what else we can go into." That's straight out of Harvard Business School. So he is already running a Rs 4-crore travel agency, and arranging visas for clients outside Delhi. Using 8,000 sq ft of new commercial space in north Bombay, he will soon provide companies with archives space away from expensive downtown areas. So the millions are now his; and quite clearly, he isn't getting less than what he is worth.

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SATISH KAURA

Riding the TV Wave

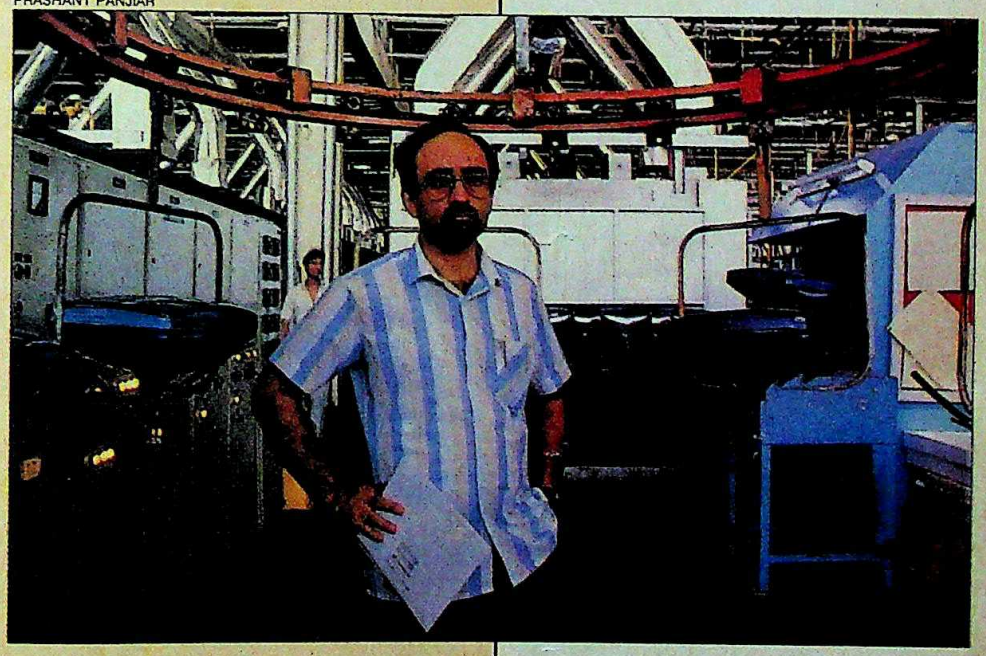
HIS father worked in an ordnance factory. He studied engineering, worked abroad, and returned in search of business opportunities. In 1974, just 30, Satish Kaura broke into an area reserved for the public sector: making TV picture tubes.

Today, his Rs 70-crore business accounts for 62 per cent of the national market. If his first unit cost Rs 7 lakh (only part of it Kaura's), his latest colour picture tube plant has an investment of Rs 68 crore. He recalls that his technology in the old days "was a joke". Today, his partners are Mitsubishi and Corning.

Kaura is the middle class boy who became a millionaire before your eyes, who drives a Mercedes, is building a Rs 15-lakh house, and who is recognised as the king in his field of enterprise.

He got off the ground with a novel scheme: import defective picture tubes, recondition them and sell them in India. The Government agreed because he argued that he would save the country foreign exchange. Kaura, of course, knew nothing about making picture tubes, and went abroad to try and learn. Coming back, he set up Teletubes. But in six months, suppliers abroad were on to Kaura's game, jacked up prices, and nearly put him out of business.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Kaura split with his partners, and got into regular picture tube production. That didn't save the country the promised foreign exchange, but he soldiered on and, by pricing his tubes lower than the public sector Bharat Electronics he forged ahead. The market was growing, and profits were "obnoxiously good", says Kaura. But life was tough: no salaries for two years, no dividends for seven years, not a day's holiday for the first 10 years. And work seven days a week. "It was very very committed living. The road down enterprise is a tough one," he says.

> I don't need to be flashy. Though on paper I'm a multi-millionaire, I have no money unless I sell my shares.

Kaura is now integrating his business from the basic stage of glass components to the glass shell and the picture tube. This will save costs and help him survive in a market readying for cutthroat competition. And he also plans to export to the US. The wheel is coming full circle.

The fruits of success are now there: the Mercedes, the house.... But the money seems unimportant. "I'm happy with a comfortable middle class existence, I don't need to be flashy. And though on paper I'm a multi-millionaire, I have no money unless I sell my shares." But there's a price to be paid too. "I've become very organised, and I don't like it. As a person, I've changed; many of the dimensions are suppressed. You're stuck in a wheel and have no time for other facets of life."

Shiv Nadar was marketing manager in India's pioneering computer firm: DCM Data Products. Nadar, then 30 years old, decided he could make a better go of the business on his own and, along with five others in their 20s who were also in DCM, walked out one fine morning to set up their own little shop, called Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL).

Today, HCL is a Rs 100-crore group (far bigger than DCM's computer division), India's leading computer company, and Nadar (the district judge's son who owns some 25 per cent of the total stock) is at 42, worth about Rs 3 crore on paper. If he hawked his HCL shares on the stock-market, he could get Rs 15 crore or more.

Then there is B.P. Singh, an army officer who found his career as a soldier stunted owing to a riding accident, and decided to go into the garment export business. He happened to meet a representative of the giant C&A group of Europe, which quickly appointed him as their man in India and gave him a million dollars to start work. Singh today runs a Rs 70-crore business and is one of the most prominent figures in a garment export business that has grown from nothing to Rs 1,800 crore since the early '70s. And if he is worth anything at all, it can be judged from his luxurious 20-acre farm on Delhi's outskirts, complete with tennis courts, swimming pool, and 120 horses—a passion from his army days.

Karsanbhai Patel of Nirma, Satish Kaura of Samtel, Shiv Nadar of HCL, B.P. Singh and several others are India's new millionaires. Yesterday's nobodies who have ridden the wave of business opportu-

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nity in socialist India, men who in their youth were ambitious enough to track the rainbow, and who were lucky or perseverent or brilliant enough to find their individual pots of gold.

There are others like them: Nindrajog Singh, who saw a future in cheap photography and developed the QSS chain of colour photography stores; Dilip Kulkarni, who as an unheard of nobody went to Singapore to negotiate with Skypak and become its Indian agent, offering the Skypak overnight courier service; Dev Ahuja, who left a plum job in Citibank and launched himself on the high seas of commercial finance with a leasing company: Twentieth Century Leasing. Growth for these men has been as dramatic as it has been for the super-successful Patel or Nadar. Kulkarni's courier business, for instance, has grown from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 15 crore in five years—a business that is truly airborne.

Millionaires have cropped up in unlikely places, in even more unlikely areas of endeavour. Like M.M. Kothari, the streetcorner bidi salesman whose son suggested they sell pan masala, and whose wife took the formula from their landlord in Kanpur, to launch the Rs 34-crore Pan Parag (now advertised by Shammi Kapoor and Ashok Kumar). And there is James Frederick in Madras, who made his first riches selling tea as a nine-year-old, then became an agent for Hindustan Ciba-Geigy before launching his own Rs-70 crore pesticide business, Coromandel Indag; and Ramaswamy Udayar, the whispered about liquor baron in Tamil Nadu who emerged from nowhere to buy the prized Binny Ltd. Finally, there is K.V.K. Raju, who a decade ago was an unassuming manager of the Union Carbide plant in Hyderabad. Today he heads the wide-ranging Nagarjuna group of companies, and is now launching the Rs 600-crore Nagarjuna Fertiliser project in Andhra Pradesh.

How did new millionaires flourish in a socialist clime? What was special about these men who grew from modest situations to extravagant wealth in unbelievably short spans of time? And what do their stories say about what's really been happening in India and Indian business?

M.M. KOTHARI

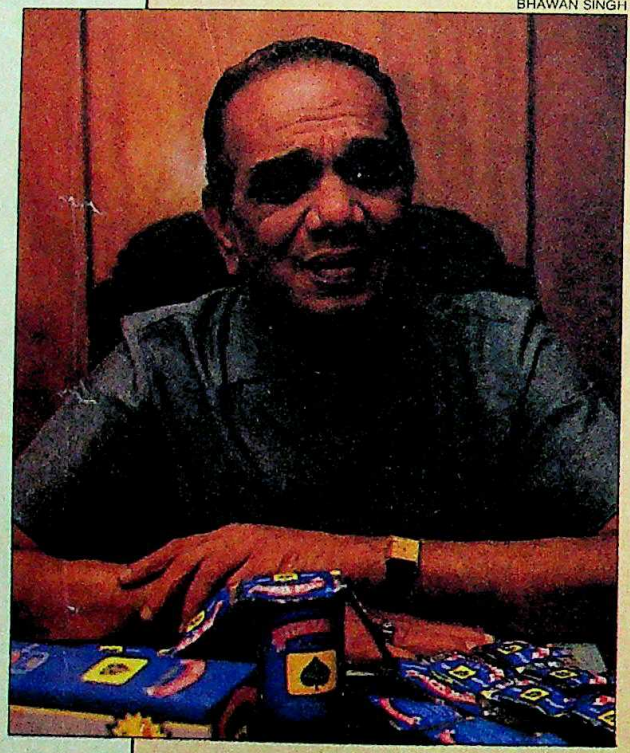
Encashing Ethnic Chic

YOU can be in business for decades without making a million. And then overnight, the shekels can come pouring in. As M.M. Kothari will happily tell you.

Starting in 1948, when he was 22, he sold hair oil shop-to-shop, and bought cigarettes in Calcutta to sell them in Kanpur at a profit. Then he began making bidis while another unit packed coconut oil in tins. It was all very small-time.

In 1973, Kothari's son Vikram suggested they get into pan masalas. "We got the inspiration from our landlord, who used to make pan masala at home," says younger son Deepak. Wife Sharda got the all-important flavour from the landlord's household. And in 150 sq ft of space, with an investment of Rs 12,000, Kothari launched Pan Parag. The sales graph took off in 1985, when Kothari introduced the Re 1 pouches as an alternative to the bigger Rs 20 tins. Sales this year will be Rs 34 crore—three times the level two years ago.

BHAWAN SINGH



If someone is willing to work day and night, I'll teach him to be successful in business. There's no easy way to money.

Kothari is of course the industry leader. He now makes a million pouches every day, yet can't cope with demand. Complains Kothari: "If we got good raw materials, we could sell Rs 100-crore worth of pan masala in a year."

As in almost any other story, Kothari's meteoric rise owed itself to luck (pan masalas were just coming into fashion) as much as to business acumen. He introduced pouches first, and he took to massive TV advertising. Also, Kothari has perfected a special flavour for his product. And even now, he manually prepares the concentrate once a week, at night. "It's a personalised business," he insists.

Inevitably, he is a workaholic; on the annual pilgrimage to his native Gujarat, he is busy checking on how his product is moving in the market. He has no salesmen, operating with a staff of just 20 and a further 80 workmen in the factory. That is fewer than 100 people for a Rs 34-crore business. Businessmen like Kothari and Nirma's Patel seem to know how to run lean organisations, keep costs down, simplify the complex business of marketing a consumer product to a level where the business seems to run itself.

The money does not seem to matter much to him. He continues to live in a modest house, and till a couple of years ago, used to drive around on a scooter. And he believes he has succeeded because of hard work. "Anyone can start a business with Rs 15,000 or Rs 20,000. If someone is willing to work day and night, I'll teach him to be successful. There's no easy way to money."

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S.J. FREDERICK

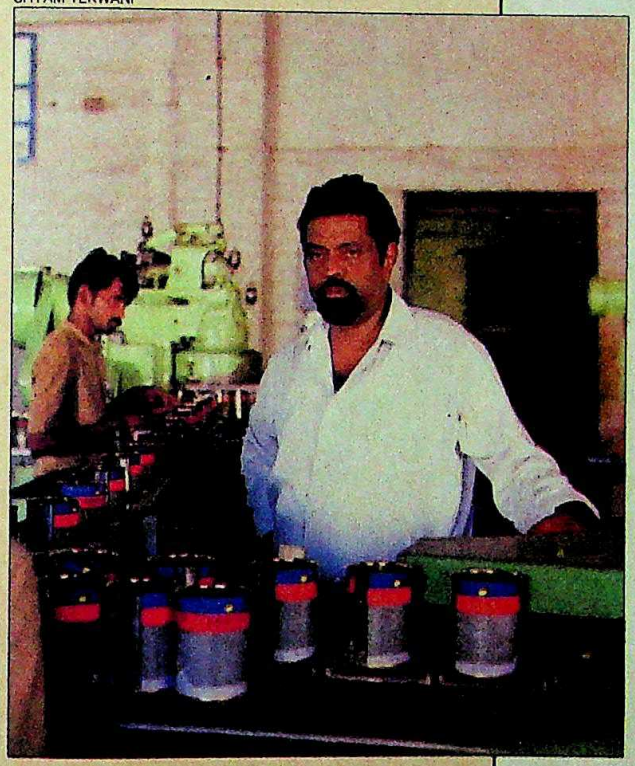
Agri-Business Tycoon

HIS corporate slogan sounds like the man himself: "Anything is possible under the sun on this earth." And he is into almost everything under the sun: pesticides, drip irrigation, seeds, bio-technology, electronics, publishing, garments.

Samuel James Frederick sounds as though he was born in brash, fast-talking America. In fact, he was born in a Tamil Nadu village. And he made his first money at nine years, selling tea and bidis. At 12, he started a stationery shop. After working his way through college with a scholarship and another tea shop, Frederick joined Cyanamid, the drug company, as a salesman. That was 25 years ago.

Seven years later, he left as district manager and shifted to Ciba-Geigy, promising to double its sales in a year. Life quickly became a "jumble of various things" as Frederick also started a pest control outfit, spraying fields on contract (200 acres a day, Rs 2 per acre), and spraying Connemara Hotel and Buhari's restaurant in Madras after 2 a.m. His friends thought he was a fool for chucking up a good job.

SHYAM TEKWANI



After a point of time, money has no sense. Working for me is a game, and I continue to play the game.

But Frederick was looking for the vital break. And a stringent new law on insecticide manufacture was forcing small pesticide companies to close down. Frederick took one on a lease, then bought another, and quickly spread his wings.

His Coromandel Indag group (sales last year: Rs 70 crore) now has 4,000 dealers country-wide, and Frederick has moved into all manner of unrelated areas in his typically grab-a-chance fashion. But he has also tied up with Dow and du Pont. And he now plans to set up companies abroad.

Despite the haphazard diversification, Frederick has made his mark by sticking to the business he knows (agri-business), and by having the foresight to buy up companies that were going cheap. These units were in the markets he wanted to tap, the locational advantage saved costs, and the foreign collaborations helped introduce new pesticides.

He attributes his success to "urgent determination", has a reputation for exaggerating, and for being helpful. He says he wants to give back to society some of what he has got from it. His mother was a teacher, so he has instituted 12 scholarships for the children of teachers. For the poor rural boy who sold tea and bidis, money was always a primary motivation. But he now admits: "After a point of time, money has no sense."

In a fundamental sense, the success stories are triumphs of human endeavour. In India's business climate of 1987—with economic opportunities opening up in an increasingly self-confident economy buoyed up by a thrusting middle class—it is not very difficult to think of making one's way, to dream of success and quick wealth. Open a chain of fast-food joints, sell mutton to the Arabs, do a screwdriver assembly job on any of a variety of consumer electronic items: the options are available, the means can be found, and the system is wide open enough to support the achiever. But in the early and mid-70s, when the sense about the economy was problem-ridden, when the prevailing climate was anti-business, and when the big business houses pre-empted most industrial licences that New Delhi issued, it took vision, courage and perhaps some foolishness, to be intent on entrepreneurship. In a fundamental sense, you had to beat the system. And how was some guy whose father was a farmer or teacher to have the savvy and wherewithal to go about doing that?

Remember that the bright guys in those days put on a tie and went to work for somebody else and made sure of their leisure on week-ends. But as the success stories have multiplied, attitudes towards business have changed. The Horatio Alger epic works in India too.

Common to all the new millionaires is a basic optimism. To a man, they are also workaholics, working seven days a week, 12 to 17 hours a day, their horizons often confined to their business world. It's not the millions they're really after, but the achievement. So, long after the millions have been made and a swank house built, a luxury farmhouse acquired or a foreign car parked in the garage, the dedication to business and success continues.

The millionaires have also shown the grit to overcome the stiffest hurdles. Kaura's entire strategy of hawking reconditioned TV tubes collapsed when prices changed, but he began a completely new production strategy. Nadar saw his firm's name become an almost hated word in the computer world, but he addressed the problems that had brought this about, and bounced back. Raju

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SHIV NADAR

HCL

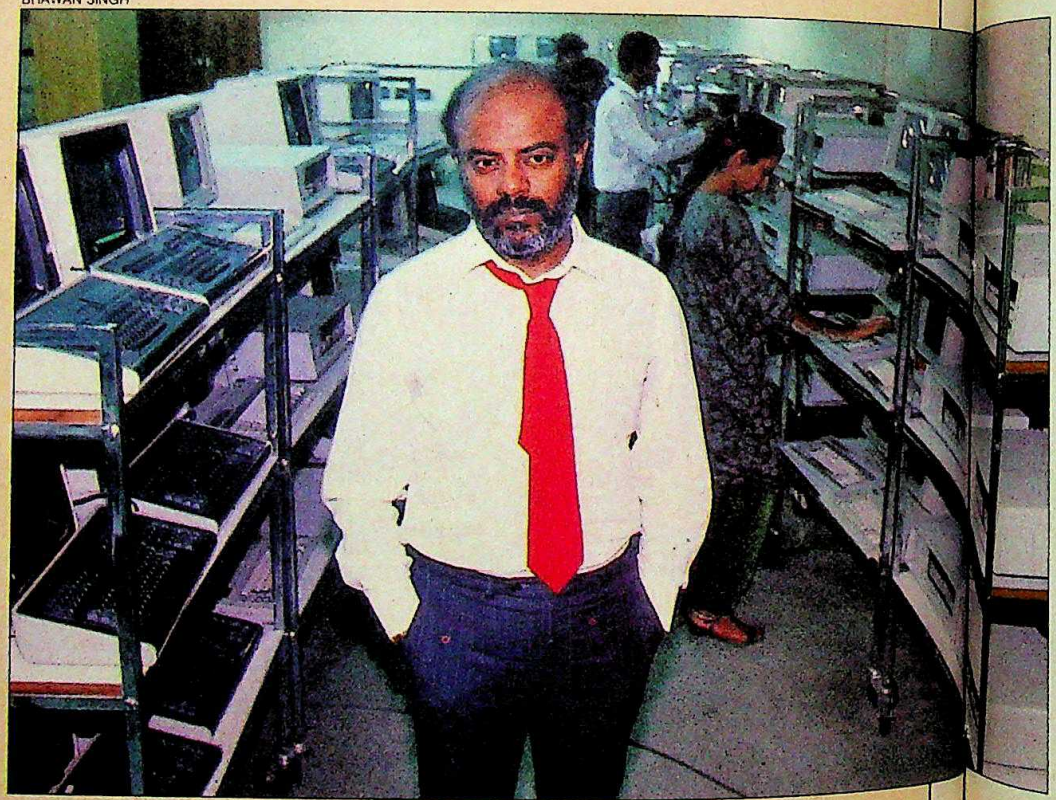
Marketing Wiz and High-Tech

SIX bright young people quit a fancy company in 1975, pooled the money they had, and with loans from their provident fund accounts, managed to put together Rs 1.75 lakh. They started with hired furniture, in somebody's grandmother's house. To raise enough money to get into the computer business, they started by selling electronic calculators.

Shiv Nadar led the six into the brave new world of computers. Today, he heads the Rs 100-crore HCL, India's largest computer group. And he is personally worth several crores of rupees.

At 42, he is the marketing man who straddles a technology-intensive industry, the judge's son who has become a mega-millionaire. The bearded, soft-spoken Nadar is not quite India's Steve Jobs; in fact he isn't even computer literate, finding it difficult to type in a simple computer command. But in a sunrise industry, both he and HCL are the shining stars.

BHAWAN SINGH



It was a young industry, we were young. Soon after we started IBM left India. This created a vacuum, and we were right there.

Nadar's company was one of the also-rans in the business till 1981, when it launched a still remembered ad campaign that shattered several myths about the industry: that computers were expensive (prices had just been slashed), that computers were for big companies (the personal computer had arrived), and that it needed experts to run a computer. Aiming at volume sales by reaching out to a new kind of customer, HCL quickly became the front-runner, and ran headlong into problems.

The company couldn't service its machines because sales grew too quickly, customers were disillusioned, and HCL became a bad word in the industry. But Nadar and his men picked themselves off the ropes and did a remarkable salvage operation. They diversified into new fields (electronic typewriters, photocopiers), grew technologically stronger, mushroomed under new corporate umbrellas and, a few months ago, came together again under the HCL banner as a Rs 100-crore group that has set its sights on becoming a Rs 1,000-crore company—partly by going into exports of computers and software. "Our real growth starts now," says Nadar.

His plans include getting into computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD-CAM) and data communication (including Fax). The effort will be to do in CAD-CAM what the company did in computers: slash prices and broaden the market base. And a company known for its micro-computer now plans to go in for mainframe machines, building on the strength of an organisation in which, out of 2,600 employees, 1,700 are engineers and trained professionals.

Looking back, Nadar says: "It was a young industry, we were young. If we fouled it up, we could have got back to a job. Today, we may not have been so fast on our feet, our responsibilities are wider." And he mentions the good fortune: "Soon after we started, IBM left India. This created the sense of a vacuum, and we were right there. IBM also left behind a pool of exceptionally well-trained people."

The company is almost committed to being unconventional, challenging shibboleths, going after its goals aggressively. HCL may not be an Apple Computer-clone, any more than Nadar is an Indian Jobs. But there are the similarities too. For without HCL or Nadar, the computer scene would have been as incomplete as Silicon Valley without Apple.

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bagged the prized Nagarjuna Fertiliser project in the face of stiff competition from no less a giant than Larsen & Toubro.

Many of them were, of course, lucky to be in the right place with the right idea at the right time. Pan Parag came along when the chic were going ethnic, so that it became as fashionable to offer a pan masala as a Dunhill. Nadar launched HCL just before IBM decided to leave India; he moved into the vacuum IBM created. TV has been the media event of the last decade, and Kaura—rather than go the common route of assembling TV sets—aimed at being behind the assemblers, supplying the picture tube that is the heart of the TV set. And B.P. Singh moved into garment exports just as the European textile industry was becoming uncompetitive and the market was turning to imports for cheaper substitutes.

Very often, the millionaires were not planning big at all. A million was the furthest thing from Karsanbhai Patel's mind when he began mixing washing-powder in his backyard. But he eventually saw that Lever and the others were concentrating on a high-priced, value-added, upmarket segment of the population when there was a much larger market waiting to be tapped with a broader base. And he went for volume. So it was luck, in a manner of speaking, that quite by accident he saw a vast business opportunity that no one else had tapped; but then again it wasn't.

The classic rags-to-riches story moves from mud hut to palatial bungalow, imported cars, holidays in expensive watering holes abroad, a taste for costly paintings and other objets d'art, perhaps a five-star culture. And it is true enough that many new millionaires now enjoy comforts that are beyond the reach of the middle class from which most of them sprang: Kulkarni has a Mercedes, so do Kaura and Singh, and Frederick has a Nissan Cedric. Ahuja has a large flat in Cuffe Parade that would cost Rs 70 lakh today, Nadar (who drives a Standard 2000 due to a "middle class aversion to imported cars"), has just bought a large house in a millionaires' enclave in New Delhi, and Kaura is building a Rs 15-lakh mini-mansion in the same enclave.

Yet it is amazing how much of a difference the crores could have made to these men's life-styles, and how in most cases, that difference isn't really there. Nirma's Patel drives around in a Premier 118 NE when he could have a fleet of Mercedes; and for a man worth several crore, he lives in a house on a relatively modest 500 sq yd plot of land in Ahmedabad; some of the rooms are air-conditioned, but salaried executives in several large firms would live just as well. Patel had not even gone abroad till three months ago, to look at some business opportunities. And he doesn't really take any holidays either.

Obviously, what drives them is not the desire to spend money but to acquire it or perhaps to make their mark. "Wealth is not something I'm terribly excited about. Recognition is much more important," says Kaura. Frederick was driven by plain money ("the urge to earn money was the primary thing," he says frankly) but then admits that beyond a point money has no meaning. "Working for me is a game. I continue to play the game," he says. And for B.P. Singh, it was a question of not working for anyone but himself.

THE rise of the new titans of business also reflects broader social and economic changes. Every one of the new millionaires started out as a small-scale businessman, whose tribe has grown from barely a lakh to eight times that number in the last two decades. Clearly, they represent a flowering of Indian business. As small industry establishes itself more firmly in the coming years, still more success stories can be expected in even more diverse fields.

Curiously, government policy has helped too. Small business was actively promoted by the Government, several areas of industry were reserved for small-scale enterprise, and preferential tax treatment offered. TV sets, for instance, were reserved for the small sector and has seen the rise from nowhere of Prem and Sunder Vachani (Weston), S.R. Jiwarajka (Dyanora) and Ved Luthra (Televista).

After the big commercial banks were nationalised in 1969, loans to small-scale industrialists got an extra thrust. Indeed, the banks were told that a minimum percentage of total lending had to go to small business. Till then, the banks were owned by big business, which also used most of the banks' money. Now the money became available to a much wider circle of businessmen. As Kaura says: "The banking system in India took a guy from the street. It put money on me as a horse. That to me is very satisfying." Seed capital was provided by other government-owned financial institutions. And K.V.K. Raju of the Nagarjuna group says he is proud of the fact that he was the first recipient of a loan from the Industrial Finance Corporation of India under its seed capital scheme.

But the new tribe of millionaires also represents a sharp upward swing in aspirations. Engineers are no longer happy working on someone else's shopfloor; they want to start their own factories—like Kaura. People who a generation earlier would automatically have considered themselves part of the salaried class, are crossing the bridge to become entrepreneurs. Whether it is Nadar, Raju, Ahuja, Frederick or any of a host of others, members of what would normally be considered the middle class, no longer look on business as 'dirty' and 'not in your blood'. Why should only the Marwaris, Sindhis or Banias be good at business? Indeed, among the most successful new millionaires, only Karsanbhai Patel comes from a traditionally commercial caste (Patel) and state (Gujarat).

The new businessmen haven't flourished due to the rash of MBA programmes either. None of them has the university stamp of a management expert. People like Patel and Kothari are home-grown.

The explanation could also be sheer greed. On the one hand, there is the chance to spend more and buy more, even as greater awareness of the world shows that luxuries can't be aspired to on an Indian salary, no matter how good. Yet, the increasing expense of city living, the sky-rocketing of land prices and the pressure to keep up with the Joneses have added their own pressures and incentives.

Thus, Kulkarni realised that being on a salary was a mug's game. Patel too was driven by the limitations of a salary. Nadar moved to entrepreneurship because he saw a chance in a familiar field. Ahuja saw an opening in a familiar but still fresh field, of leasing finance. And Singh saw a wonderful opportunity in colour photography, to which a growing middle class was suddenly turning.

Success stories are always buoying to a society. They encourage hope (and emulation) even when problems abound. And as the Indian economy grows and diversifies, there can be few things more encouraging than the broadbasing of Indian entrepreneurship, the birth of a new generation of business achievers.

—T.N. NINAN with PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI and SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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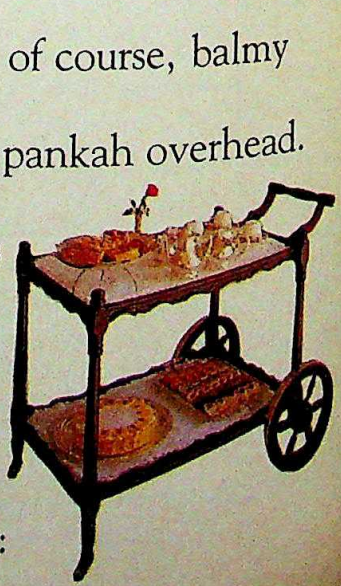
At the Windsor Manor, only the pankahwalla is conspicuous by his absence.

It was an age of leisure and luxury. An era of unhurried splendour.

There was polo. Cricket with the boys. Garden tea parties. Balls. Banquets. And of course, balmy afternoons with the drone of the pankah overhead.

The good news, Ol' Chap, is



iat Welcomgroup turned the clock back and re-created that orld at the Windsor Manor Sheraton, Bangalore.

Here, everything is reminiscent of the Imperial way of life:

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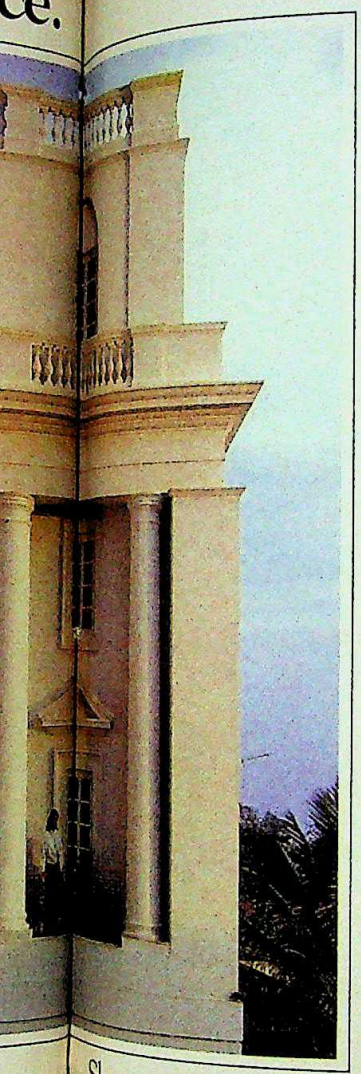
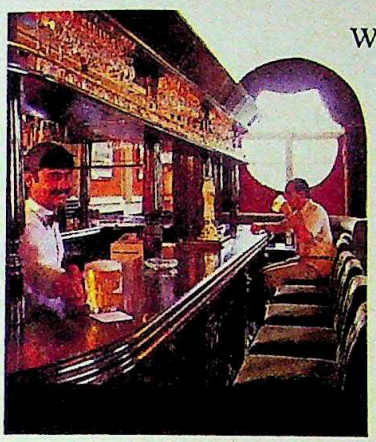
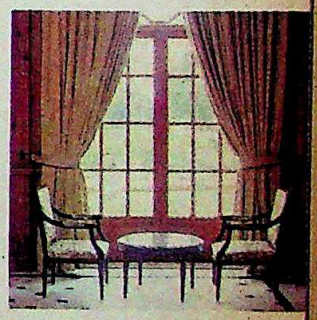




wrought-iron lamps, ceilings touched with gold. Hunting prints. Queen Anne chairs. The Royal Derby bar, like the Regency pub back home. The Nelson Room, in Chinoiserie style. The East India Company, a unique trading post that will amaze any memsahib. And the exclusive Manor Club for sahibs travelling on business.



Like the Windsor Manor Sheraton, other Welcomgroup hotels echo the art, the architecture and the cultural ethos of a bygone era. The magnificence of the Maurya Sheraton, Delhi. The regal splendour of the Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur. The elegance and romance of the Mughal Sheraton, Agra.

And wherever you are, one thing is certain. You'll appreciate the judicious combination of luxury, 'propah' service and hospitality with which the people at Welcomgroup win you over. These are only too conspicuous by their presence.

WELCOMGROUP

The wonderful world of Welcomgroup

Ⓢ Sheraton in India, exclusively with Welcomgroup.

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Enterprise/D/W

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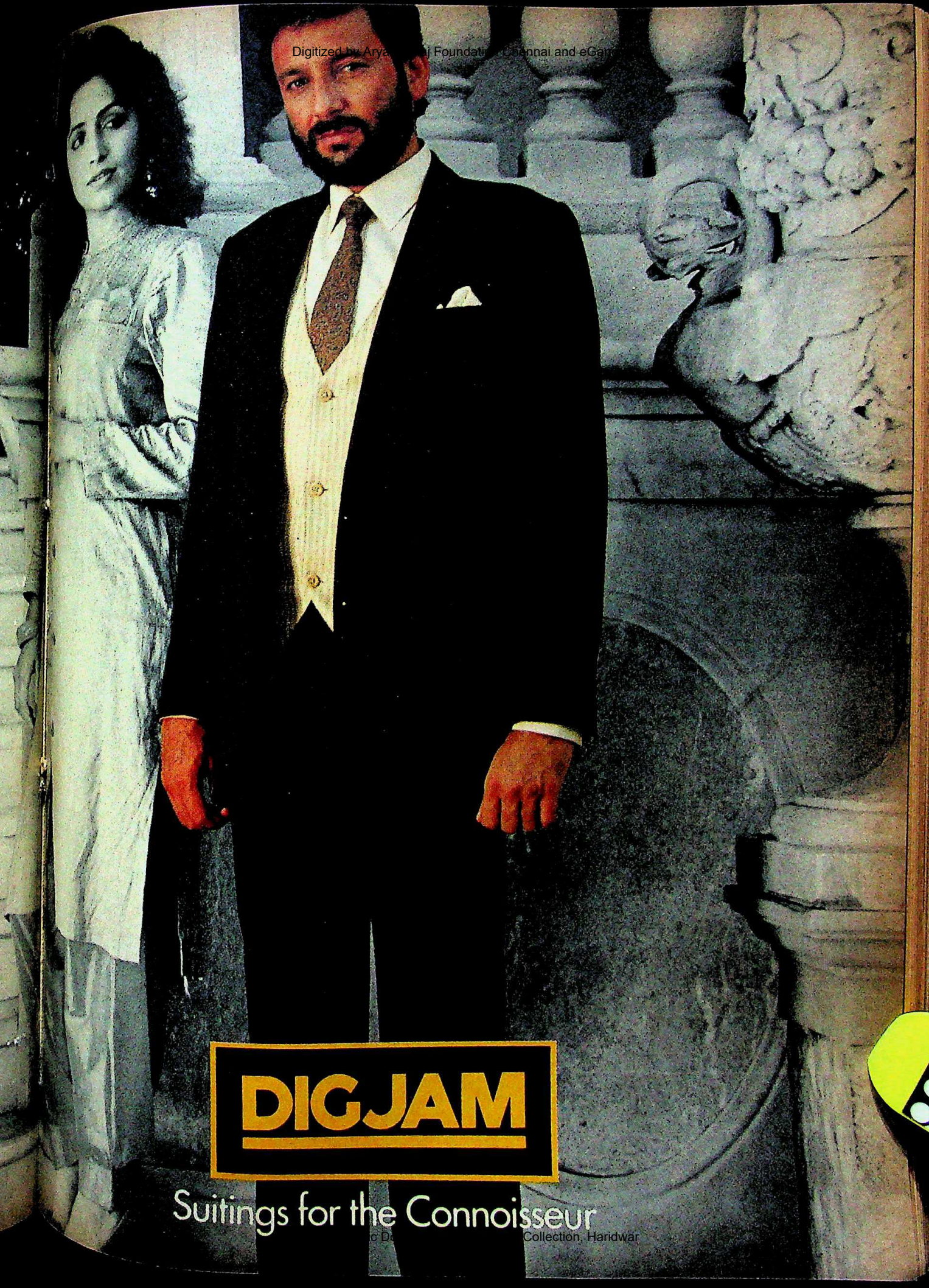

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WHAT VISIONS IN THE MIND MAKE SOME MEN LEAD A DOUBLE LIFE?

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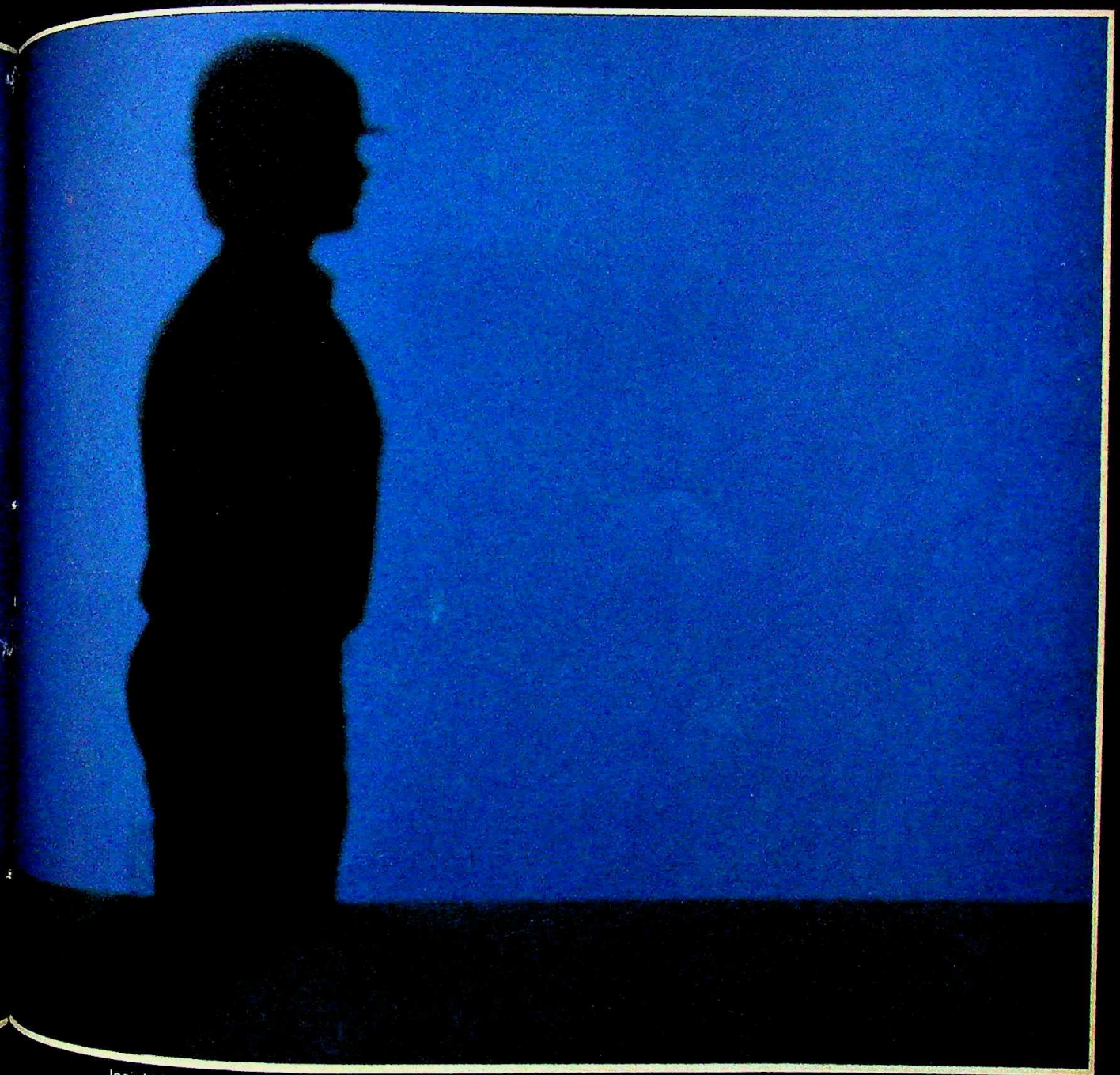
Insight and empathy ... faculties that turn our marketing engineers virtually into extensions of a customer's operations. Our high-calibre marketing force is able to both think like a customer and respond like a supplier. Often meeting the toughest schedules, despite the obstacles of time and distance.

In response to a customer need, we supplied steel tubes within 3 weeks, when other sources could deliver only in 7 weeks.

When a major shock absorber manufacturer encountered an increased rejection rate, our response was developing the 'fin rolling' process in our tubemaking to combat the problem in the end product.

We have been adhering to the 'Kanban' concept, even before it was popular jargon in Indian industry, supplying 'just-in-time' to Hero, the leading two-wheeler manufacturer. Our reliable supply of precision products enables Hero to carry the



Insight helps our marketing engineers 'become' the customer's representative – the key to meeting challenging customer needs.

inimum inventory in its streamlined operations.
We anticipate. We respond. Always endeavouring
o keep close to the customer. In the process we
ave established solid 'partnerships' with such
espected industrial names as Bajaj, Kinetic, Hero,
VS, Escorts and Enfield.
TI Engineering, a division of Tube Investments of
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trengths. Process knowhow backed by the
esources of TI of the UK. Application engineering skills. Innovative Research & Development. And committed customer service.

For years, TI Engineering has been meeting challenges on behalf of customers, with rare experience, expertise and insight.

You can also rely on these resources in the years to come.

TI ENGINEERING

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RELIANCE CUP

Upsetting the Odds

India's defeat exposes chinks in their armour

ONE over-enthusiastic spectator at last fortnight's encounter between India and Australia at Madras spent much of the first session waving a banner that read: "Australians get the runs in India." They did, and one more than the Indian eleven to give them an upset victory and kick-start the Reliance Cup into throbbing life.

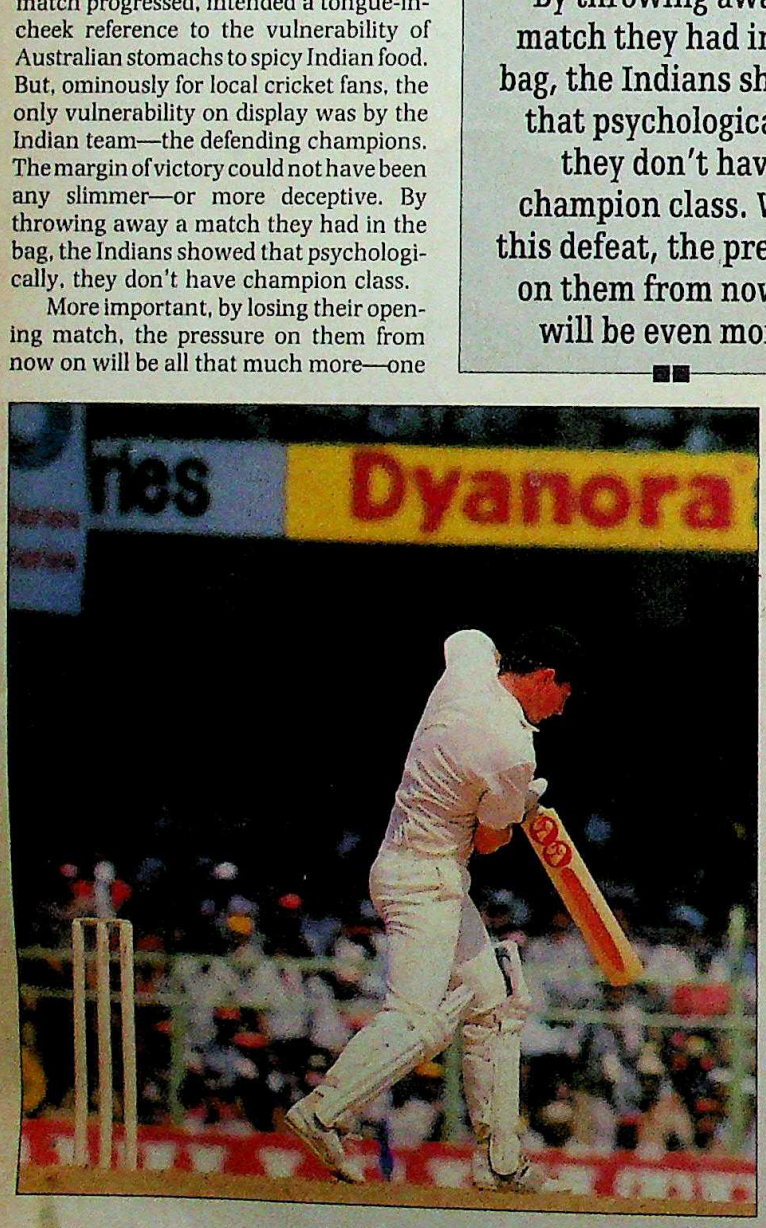
The spectator, less in evidence as the match progressed, intended a tongue-in-cheek reference to the vulnerability of Australian stomachs to spicy Indian food. But, ominously for local cricket fans, the only vulnerability on display was by the Indian team—the defending champions. The margin of victory could not have been any slimmer—or more deceptive. By throwing away a match they had in the bag, the Indians showed that psychologically, they don't have champion class.

More important, by losing their opening match, the pressure on them from now on will be all that much more—one more loss in the remaining five preliminary matches of the Indian pool could endanger a place in the semi-finals. Kapil claimed after the match that the inclusion of the injured Chetan Sharma would have made the difference. He had a point. But to the 50,000 fans at the Chidambaram Stadium, and the millions watching on television, it was obvious that the more important missing element was the motivation that earned them the sobriquet 'Kapil's Devils' in the last World Cup in 1983. Only debutante Navjoth Singh Siddhu showed the potential to set the Reliance Cup on fire.

By throwing away a match they had in the bag, the Indians showed that psychologically, they don't have champion class. With this defeat, the pressure on them from now on will be even more.

There was some consolation in that, with the tournament barely into its first week, the Reliance Cup is suddenly wide open. Across the border, Pakistan's narrow shave against the gritty Sri Lankans, the close encounter between Zimbabwe and New Zealand, and England's shock win against the West Indians has made a mess of the pre-tournament odds. The fact that the two finalists in 1983, India and the West Indies, crashed to defeat in their opening encounters is not just poetic irony but an indication that this could be the most engrossing World Cup ever, and with very little to separate the eight teams when the crunch comes.

While Pakistan Captain Imran Khan said he was not happy with his team's winning performance in its opening outing, what was amply in evidence in most of the teams was the grit to hang in there even when the going was tough. England won with rear-guard action, so did Australia, and Sri Lanka nearly did the trick



(From below left) Man-of-the-Match Marsh; jubilant Australians; and Sidhu: over-confidence about wickets in hand was India's undoing

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two against fancied Pakistan. Even lowly-rated Zimbabwe has shown that it cannot be taken for granted, producing a centurion in its first match.

In contrast, the only spell during which India showed a fighting temperament was when it contained the Australian batting in its final 10 slog overs while grabbing four wickets.

In the opening matches, it was Australia's Allan Border who showed what leadership is all about. His gamble to bring back his medium pacers early in the Indian innings rather than at the end was what won him a crucial match. Craig McDermott, who had been blasted off the firing line after his overly-expensive first three overs, came roaring back to make the crucial breakthroughs by scalping Siddhu, Vengsarkar and Shastri. Said Border: "The wickets of Siddhu and Vengsarkar were really what turned the match our way."

With most of the teams showing a fighting temperament, every match will be vital, every run scored or saved can spell victory—or humiliation. At Madras, when Kapil walked out of the pavilion to congratulate Border during the prize-giving ceremony he was loudly booed fom the packed stands above, an indication that the volatile Indian cricket fan has a short memory and an even shorter fuse.

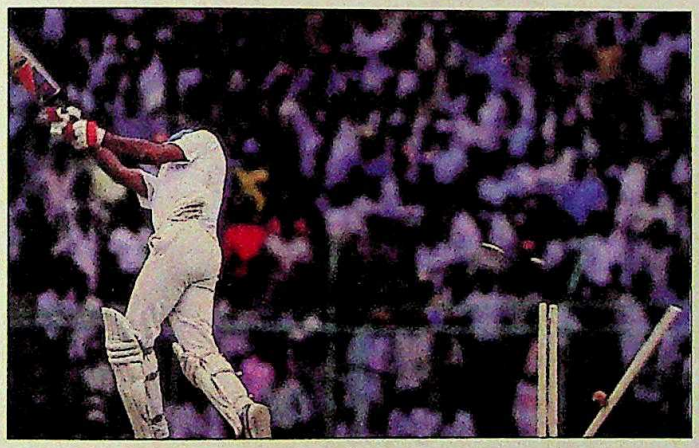
For the Indians, that message has already sunk home. Instead of returning to their hotel, the Indian team stayed on at the stadium till late into the night for a post-mortem of the one-day match. Says team Manager Man Singh: "We spent a lot of time discussing the game and what went wrong."

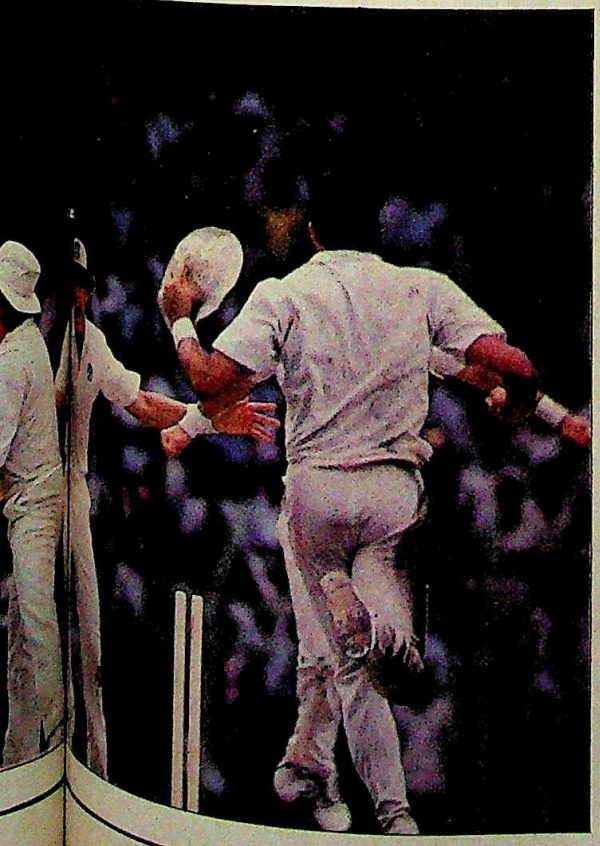
But that was something that anybody watching the Madras match could have willingly done. Though clearly a batting wicket, the Indian bowlers were never on top, and they look incapable of bowling any side out in the stipulated overs. Apart from Kapil, the other medium pacers, Manoj Prabhakar and Roger Binny were erratic and expensive—the first wicket fell when the Australian openers, David Boon and Man-of-the-Match Geoff Marsh, had piled up 110 runs.

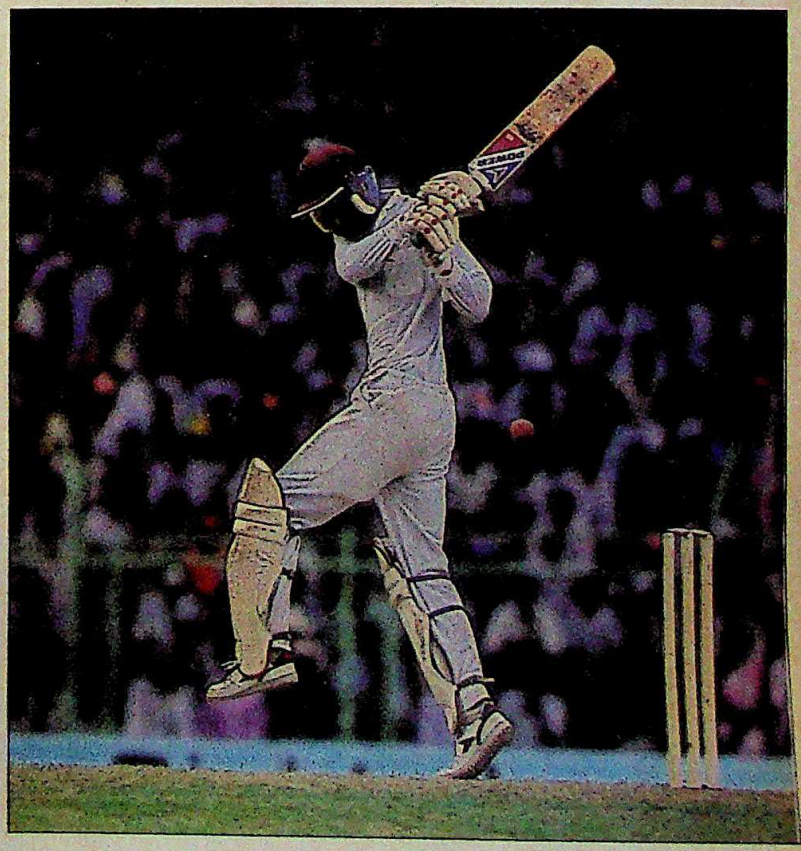
The lack of a fifth bowler could prove decisive for India if Chetan Sharma does not return to the team, specially with Shastri and Maninder lacking penetration and bite in their opening appearance, and Sivaramakrishnan still an uncertain quantity. In fact, the earlier conviction that the spinners would rule the Reliance roost has been literally slogged for a six in the first week of the cup; only Pakistan's Abdul Qadir has been among the early wickets.

India's Achilles heel is obviously going to be its bowling attack. At Madras, against Boon, Marsh and Dean Jones, a challenging total was always on the cards. The final Australian tally, 270 for six, was in fact the highest score so far in what promises to be an unusually high-scoring tournament—there have already been three centuries so far (Miandad, Marsh and Houghton). If the

Maninder bowled: panic reaction







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Give the devil his due.

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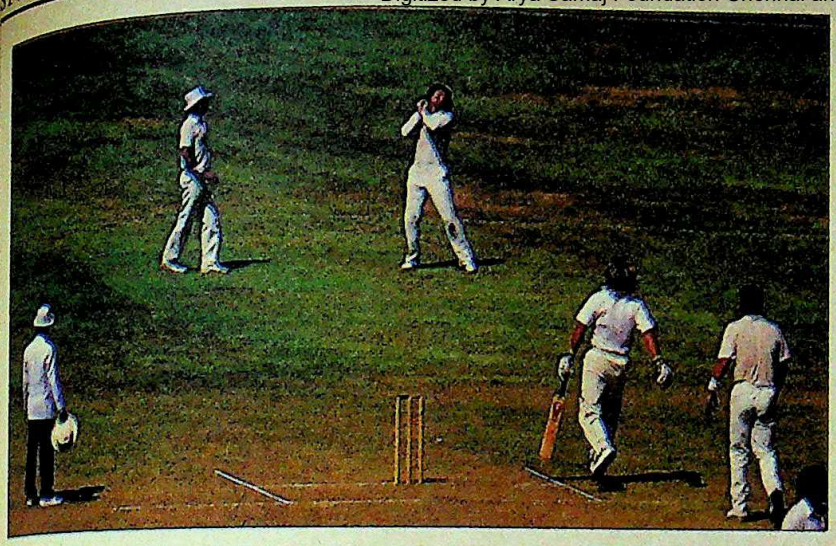

The New Zealand-Zimbabwe match, and (below) Houghton

pitch at the Chidambaram Stadium is representative of the rest of the playing centres, tight bowling and tight fielding are going to be the keys to success.

The Australians, though obviously worse affected by the muggy heat of Madras, were streets ahead of India in the fielding department. Said Captain Allan Border: "Despite the energy-sapping heat today, we fielded well and that was an important contribution to our win." Only two Indian players, Azharuddin and Maninder, made that extra effort in the field while the rest clearly lacked the edge, Vengsarkar and Binny being the biggest liabilities. The Australians, in fact, showed how it should be done by staying cool on the field when the pressure was sky-high. Border's run out of Prabhakaran in the last ball of the penultimate over was a classic example; he waited till the last minute before throwing down the wicket, giving himself time to ensure accuracy and lessen the risk of an overthrow.

India's greatest strength is its batting, on its day, among the most formidable in the tournament. Gavaskar, Srikkanth and Sidhu looked capable of winning the match on their own and, in fact, between them they contributed 180 out of the total of 269. But over-confidence about wickets in hand was India's undoing at Madras. Commented former cricket star M.L. Jaisimha: "It was the old uncertainties that came to the surface just when we all thought they had disappeared."

As they have been prone to on the big occasions, India's middle-order is still dangerously vulnerable. Both Shastri and Azharuddin have been through a bad batting patch and are under tremendous pressure to regain form. Even Vengsarkar showed none of the class that has given him the ranking of the world's greatest contemporary batsman. After Gavaskar, Siddhu and Srikkanth had put India in the driving seat, the middle-order not only slowed down the run-rate but managed just 57 runs between the four, Kapil, Vengsarkar, Shastri and Azharuddin. Siddhu, with five towering sixes, was clearly the man of India's hour but the pressures on the debutante to maintain that standard will be enormous.

The role-reversal between Gavaskar and Srikkanth now appears an established fact. Gavaskar's quick-fire 37 in the match against Australia, proved that he is now committed to what he calls "bang, bang cricket". That could bring dividends—or disaster. In his current mood, Gavaskar's steadying influence in the face of India losing early wickets can no longer be counted upon.

Srikkanth is no longer Srikkanth, and perhaps the pressures of playing to the gallery are starting to tell. The fireworks now come in fits and starts, and though his 70 was valuable and confidence-building enough, he no longer displays the breath-taking audacity that succeeded so admirably in demoralising the opposition.

That, tragically, seems to be what is restricting Kapil's free-flowing strokeplay as well—the pressures by the home crowd. Everybody expects Kapil to blast every ball and the mighty roar that builds up each time he faces a delivery is an unnerving sound. But that kind of expectation seems to have him trapped in two minds, whether to play his naturally aggressive game or tailor it around the fact that there is no recognised batsman to follow him.

India's tail, as the Madras match showed, no longer wags as merrily as it has done in the past. Maninder's ungainly swipe at the second last ball of the match, with India needing one run to tie the score, was pure panic when a cooler approach was clearly the need of the second.

What was equally obvious was that the Indian team has not really sat down and worked out a set of strategies and alternatives. Even team Manager Man Singh admitted after the Madras match that "no change in strategy was discussed". But even if the strategy remains the same—if India wins the toss, put the other side into bat—it can only work with some inspiring captaincy on the field.

Instead, there seems to be an awkward relationship between Kapil and his deputy Vengsarkar. Partly because he isn't the nippiest fielder around, the Indian vice-captain was banished to the outfield for most of the Australian innings, but he was hardly ever consulted—nor did he come forward to offer advice. Obviously, the relationship between him and Kapil is not as smooth as it ought to be for such a vital tournament.

Thus, Kapil's wry comment in Madras that "it is just one game" is going to be cold comfort for Indian cricket fans. Clearly, the chinks in the Indian armour still exist. But one defeat does not make for a cricket winter, and with the gaps between the eight teams not as wide or visible as most people expected, it is still anybody's guess who will finally emerge as cricket's Top Gun.

—DILIP BOBB in Madras

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A Wide Open Field

NOBODY expected us to win in 1983 and few expect us to do so in 1987. Four years ago, the bookies placed us at 66 to 1. Today, the odds are much less, at 7 to 2. Funnily, even if we retain the World Cup, it is going to be an upset!

This suits us as the Indian team is always under pressure when it is playing at home. We can do without the pressure of being favourites as the fact that our bowling strength is not what it was four years ago, and that our medium pacers are not going to get the kind of help they received in the heavy English atmosphere weighs heavily on our minds.

Though we have been able to find replacements for Balwinder Sandhu and Madanlal in Manoj Prabhakar and Chetan Sharma, there are some slots which have not been filled. For instance, we will miss Mohinder Amarnath and Kirti Azad this time, who could be relied on to perform, irrespective of what situation arose. They made all the difference in the semi-finals last time.

Besides, we don't have an off-spinner to count on. However, Abdul Qadir has emphasised the fact that good leg-spinners can be equally effective in one-day cricket. In my opinion, L. Sivaramakrishnan falls in that category as he showed in the 1985 Benson and Hedges World Championships.

Another factor which must have influenced the bookies is the lopsided way in which we have gone about preparing for the World Cup. It has been a free for all in the last couple of months: the Cricket Control Board wanting the heads of the national selectors to roll; some journalists who feel that only the West Zone is entitled to have the skipper crying hoarse for my head; and then the last-minute selection of the probables.

We could have done without this drama. I have from the columns of some "well-informed" journalists that the idea behind changing the selection committee was to sack me. Now that they have not, I don't see why the last committee could not have been allowed to complete its term. But then, logic is not the strong point of our administrators.

In fact, I was told by a senior official that he had to walk out of a recent Board meeting in disgust when it transpired that the meeting had not been called to discuss matters related to the World Cup but to settle disputes. "I had been sitting there for three hours and not even once was the word 'cricket' mentioned," he told me.

Yet, the Board does not lose an opportunity to discipline the players or define a code of conduct for them. The conditioning camp, I am told, was held in Udaipur to prevent the boys from indulging in late nights. If that was the reason for Udaipur, the next lot can be expected to go through their paces in Timbuctoo.

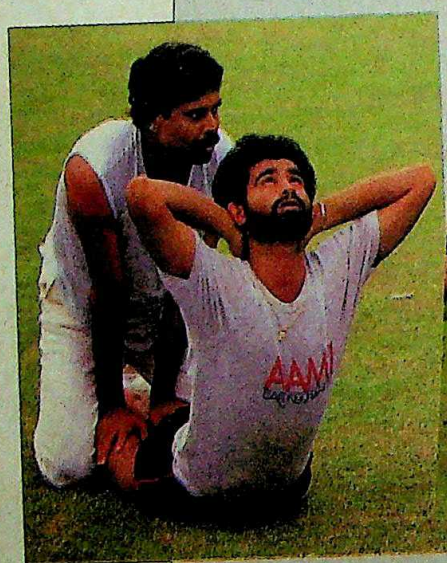
Anyway, the reason why I mentioned this bit about the conditioning camp is that a lot of time was lost in moving the camp from Udaipur to New Delhi. These eleventh hour irritants are something any team getting ready for a major competition like the World Cup can do without. But this kind of thing always happens.

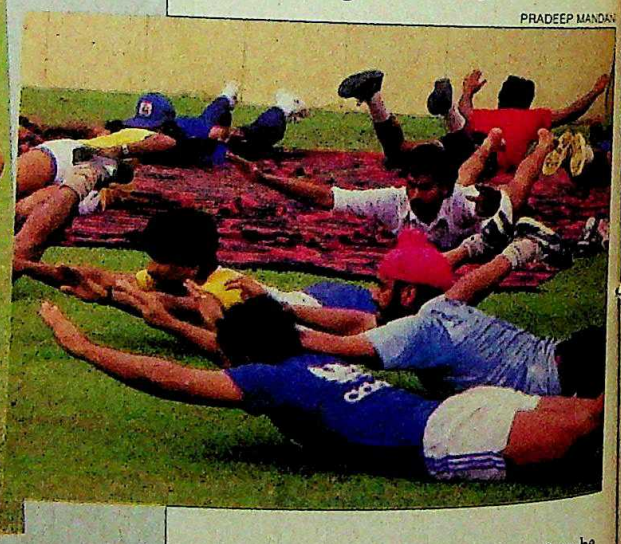
Even our official dress was stitched just before the opening ceremony on September 30. Then, the contracts for the World Cup were given to us at the last minute. Some of the clauses, like displaying only the sponsor's logo and movement of wives, and the like, were not acceptable to us. So we rejected them. These issues could have been settled earlier. But we must thrash out our problems only after the whole world has arrived here.

These are points to ponder during the off-season. Right now, only the World Cup matters. If nothing goes drastically wrong, we should make it to the semi-finals. Last time I had a gut feeling that we would reach the last four stage only after we had beaten the West Indians in a preliminary match.

That was the time when 90 per cent of the critics would have picked the West Indians to win any one-day tournament. But now things have changed. The West Indies are not the team they used to be and, moreover, the other countries have made a lot of headway in the game. Perhaps, cricket in the subcontinent has progressed most of all. Not only are Pakistan and India co-hosting the Cup, but they are in the running for the title as well.

In our group, we have New Zealand, Australia and Zimbabwe. In fact, by the time this article appears in print we should have played a match against both Australia and New Zealand, our main rivals in





PRADEEP MANDAN

Some critics are writing us off but when it comes to the big occasion, we are capable of putting our act together. Temperamentally, India is the strongest team.

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BHAWAN SINGH

RAGHU RAI

The Aussie success will depend on the way in which skipper Allan Border pushes the run rate and handles his bowling, which is not very strong.

the group. So I'd better be sure about how I assess our chances. And though I am aware that I might be sticking my neck out by stating that India has a better chance than them, I am inclined to do so.

The best thing about India is the batting line-up. There were problems in the initial stages but gradually everything seems to be falling into place. The most heartening is the emergence—or should it be the re-emergence—of opener Navjot Sidhu. As I pen this column, the team has not been decided but I feel Sidhu has a very bright chance of playing in the World Cup. Ideally, Sunil Gavaskar and K. Srikkanth should open and Sidhu should come in at number three.

Considering that the games will be of 50 overs duration, it will be important to build up the innings steadily, without any breaks. Here, a third opener should come in handy. Invariably, the problems start when the opening wicket falls cheaply. But in our case we have a back-up, so we will have to lose openers on successive balls to run into some real problems!

Besides, Sunil has suddenly shown a streak of aggression which he never did in his early days. Maybe it is the recent influence of Srikkanth, about whom I can't say anything. He can wreak havoc on his day. Then we have got two very stable bats in Dilip Vengsarkar—who is, according to me, one of the most accomplished batsmen in the world today—and Mohammed Azharuddin, who is now working his way back to peak form.

My initial fear was that we would not have anybody for rear-guard action in the concluding 10 slog overs. But with the kind of line-up we have up-front, Ravi Shastri and I should be able to knock up some quick runs towards the end. And if either—or even both of us—fails, there will always be somebody like Manoj Prabhakar or Roger Binny to chip in with the bat and add to the score.

Our fielding is good and the only problem we might have is with our bowling. Unlike the last World Cup, this time we will be dependent on our spinners to deliver the goods. In England, the atmosphere is heavy and our medium pacers utilised well the movement which it offered. In India, only genuine pace bowlers can succeed.

RAVI and Maninder have matured tremendously in the last season. They gradually picked up in the last season at home against the Australians, the Sri Lankans and the Pakistanis. Finally, the stint in England this summer should help them both. I feel that both of them should be able to restrict the run rate quite efficiently. The young Siva is close to his form of 1985 and should assist them. Besides, Siva's presence in the close-in cordon will fetch us some extra wickets.

Frankly speaking, I am very happy about our fielding too. Maninder and Azhar are outstanding in the outfield and Srikkanth and Siva are good close to the wicket. Besides, everybody else is in fine shape after the truncated conditioning camp in New Delhi.

The Pakistanis, a vastly improved team, have a tremendous belief in themselves and in their ability to win. I don't think they will lose a semi-final berth.

In the pool matches, our main opposition will come from the Aussies and not from the Kiwis who, in any case, are half a side without Richard Hadlee. We hold an advantage over the Australians in the sense that they have been through far too many changes in the last couple of years. They have not been able to find replacements for players like the Chappells, Dennis Lillee, Rodney Marsh or even Kim Hughes. In fact, they have never really recovered from the raids by Kerry Packer, and later, the South Africans.

Despite these problems the Aussies should not be treated lightly as they can compensate for their drawbacks by sheer doggedness and tenacity. This team's success would depend much on the way in which skipper Allan Border pushes the run rate and handles his bowling, which is not very strong.

Another batsman who can create problems for us is Dean Jones, especially as Madras is his favourite hunting ground. The last time, in the tied Test that is now a part of cricket history, he scored a double hundred and got out due to exhaustion and dehydration rather than good bowling. The Aussies' attack will have to be spearheaded by Bruce Reid, who is not

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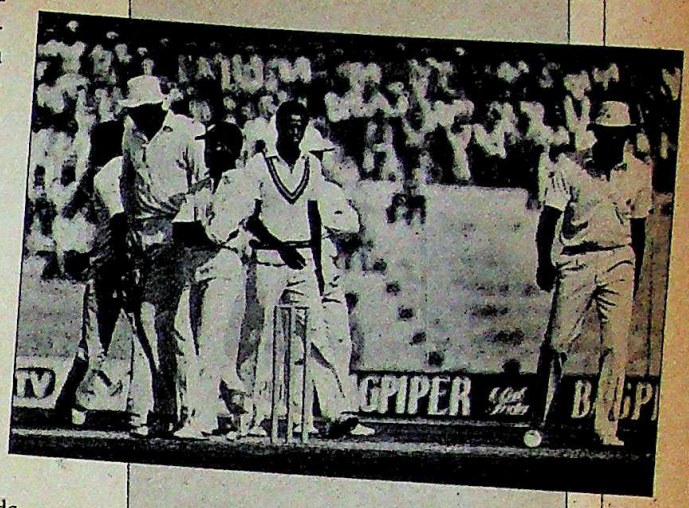
BHAWAN SINGH



...very quick but is an intelligent bowler. The Kiwis will have problems beating either us or Australia. To begin with, their bowling is very weak in the absence of Hadlee. Now, Ewen Chatfield will have to lead the attack and I don't think he has the right arsenal to accomplish the task. He is primarily a swing bowler and England is the country where he can be effective. There is not much batting depth either. Only Martin Crowe is an exceptional bat. But as against him, we have a Gavaskar, Srikanth, Vengsarkar and Azharuddin. Crowe will have to depend on his brother Jeffery and opener John Wright to assist him in keeping the Kiwi score-board moving.

Zimbabwe, the fourth team in the pool, may well end up in that slot. However, considering the run they gave us in 1983, I am not willing to take them lightly. Their major shortcoming is that they hardly ever play any international cricket and whenever they do, it is against grade B teams.

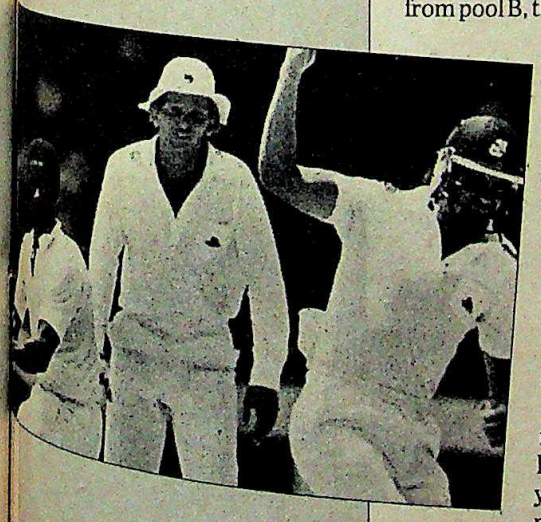
In pool B, Pakistan, England and West Indies have an equal chance of making it to the semi-finals. Imran's Pakistan is among the most improved teams in recent years. They have a tremendous belief in themselves and, consequently, their ability to win. Their bowling combination is right—a left arm-right arm bowling duo (Akram and Imran), good change bowlers like Mudassar Nazar and spinners Tauseef and Qadir.

The batting is also reasonably good though the only star is Miandad and, to some extent, Imran himself. In the last series, what helped them most was the exceptional performance of one individual or another in each match. Besides, the lower order is capable of some good clean hitting. As a result, Imran can successfully change his batting order whenever the situation demands.

It doesn't really matter whom we play in the semi-finals. But I would certainly like to avoid coming up against Pakistan. Only for the reason that we will have to play at Lahore. Somehow, Indian teams come in for the worst in Pakistan. Not only is the crowd partisan but people resort to all kinds of gimmicks to distract us. On the last tour, I remember a 'fakir' sitting in the stands, trying to psyche us. And of course, as hosts, it is a good idea that we play at home.

Though the normal tendency would be to back the West Indies in view of their awesome record, this is not their best side in the last couple of years.

If I have to pick the two semi-finalists from pool B, then it will have to be a toss up between the West Indies and England. I don't think Pakistan will lose a semi-final berth. Though the normal tendency would be to back the West Indies in view of their awesome record, I would not write off England. They are a very professional side and used to giving off their best under the most trying circumstances.



The West Indies side is not the best the Caribbeans have had in the last couple of years. They will certainly miss Gordon Greenidge, Malcolm Marshall and Joel Garner. The younger lot is also good but lacks the experience which is so necessary when you are playing in India or Pakistan. The West Indians play most of their cricket at home or in England where the conditions are very different from those in the subcontinent. Viv Richards is a capable captain and should be able to draw the best out of whatever talent is available with him.

Similarly, England will miss Botham and Gower, but only to a certain extent. The team has tremendous depth because of county cricket. And it is always difficult to ascertain who is better than the other. The batting order led by Mike Gatting and Chris Broad is quite strong. England also have a useful spinner in John Emburey.

England will miss Botham and Gower but only to a certain extent. The team has tremendous depth because of county cricket.

Lanka is undoubtedly a good one-day side but against these three teams it would be unwise to give the Sri Lankans even an outside chance. They will be a dangerous side in the sense that on a given day they can upset one of the front-runners and send them crashing out of the tournament.

Lastly, I would like to repeat that India has as good a chance of winning the World Cup as any other team in the tournament. Some critics are showing the inclination of writing us off as in the last season we have not done particularly well. But the manner in which we beat Pakistan in New Delhi on September 30 is an important pointer—when it comes to the big occasion, we are capable of putting our act together. Temperamentally, India is the strongest team in the World Cup.

This is the first half of a two-part guest column written by Indian cricket Captain Kapil Dev exclusively for INDIA TODAY. The second part will appear after the Reliance Cup in the issue dated November 30.

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ADVERTISING

The Flannelled Stars

Cricketers make hay while the Reliance sun shines

WHO will be the big scorers in the coming cricket extravaganza? Well, Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri, Srikkanth and Dilip Vengsarkar for sure, and perhaps Azharuddin. That definitive prediction is not based on a newly-invented cricketing crystal ball but the number of modelling assignments the sextet have signed up to time with the Reliance Cup that began last week. The runs they finally pile up may be open to conjecture but it will certainly pale before their scores in the advertising stakes.

In fact, most of the Indian cricket stars will probably have more visual exposure between the pages of glossies and during TV commercial breaks than on the cricket field itself. The little master heads the pack, having signed up for seven ad campaigns, some along with his wife and son. Kapil Dev's famous one-liner '*Palmolive da jawab nahi*' will now take a well-deserved break as five new campaigns he features in hit the small screen. The Indian side's glamour boy Ravi Shastri follows with four, and the dashing Srikkanth, with the unassuming Dilip Vengsarkar, have bagged three each.

Considering that the stars will earn between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh per campaign, they will be making mountains of hay while the Reliance sun shines. Gavaskar and Kapil (estimated ad earnings during the Reliance Cup: Rs 10 lakh each) will probably earn more in the next month than they have by playing cricket in the last 10 years. And why not? For the next month, the flannelled stars will be the focus of all eyes, the toast of every town, the conversation piece in every office and home. In short: tailor-made models for an ad campaign.

But more significant than the money is the breakthrough. For years, the only cricketers figuring in commercials apart from the evergreen Pataudi have been Gavaskar and later, Kapil and Ravi Shastri. The role of sportsman as model has, thanks to the Reliance Cup, been firmly established as witnessed by the non-sports-related products they will be plugging—toiletries, shoes, car tyres,

Thanks to the Reliance Cup, the cricketer-turned-model is the focus of all eyes, the toast of every town, the conversation piece in every office and home.

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toothpaste, shoe polish, tea, textiles and TV sets. Admitted Inderjit Singh Bindra, convenor of the Reliance Cup Organising Committee (RCOC): "There is lot of money in cricket now because there is a craze for cricketers, and companies have realised that they can push their product faster in the market if a cricketer endorses their product."

In fact, for Power Shoes' new advertisement, as many as 16 Indian probables posed in front of a giant shoe. Srikkanth has signed on for Toshiba Anand, the battery makers, and a popular soft drink. Azharuddin models for sports goods while most of the Indian team are being paid an estimated Rs 10,000 each for sporting the Power logo on their equipment. However temporary the phenomena, sports stars have broken into the big league of advertising—without batting an eyelid. Said Kapil: "Is there anything wrong in featuring in ads? It benefits both parties: a player gets more money, and companies boost sales. I am happy that more players are taking up ad campaigns. Let people not believe that we are good only in the field. We are equally good outside it." Adds Ravi Shastri: "Who doesn't exploit his image for money? Cricket is my bread and butter and I will try to make maximum money out of it."

Nor are advertisers complaining. The kind of mileage their products will get in the highly-charged Reliance Cup atmosphere will be unprecedented. One south Indian company delayed launching its new colour TV till the World Cup began and two major textile firms have just introduced a new range of suitings—modelled by cricketers.

Even without the Reliance Cup, the sportsman-model concept was an idea whose time had come. One television manufacturer proudly points to the fact that his sales have gone up by 10 per cent after Gavaskar endorsed his product. A leading soft drinks producer saw sales inflate by over 20 per cent after Gavaskar and Imran Khan publicly endorsed his product. Reliance, the World Cup sponsor, expects to sell a million metres extra of Vimal suitings with Ravi Shastri as their new model. Says the senior manager of a Bombay ad agency: "During the cricket season, you can push in any copy for your client if you are able to rope in one of the stars." Even a major tyre firm expects increased sales with Kapil endorsing its new line.

The Indian team's win against Pakistan in the inaugural match earned them a cash prize of Rs 1.6 lakh.

Maninder with man of the match award; and Gavaskar with Contessa

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

In fact, Kapil and Gavaskar will earn bigger bonuses than any of the established male models. Both will get more income from their syndicated columns—Kapil's under his own company and Gavaskar for the Professional Management Group, in which he has a stake. The going rate for their byline is Rs 10,000 per article. To cope with the boom in business, both their wives have become virtually full-time company managers.

And the commercialism is catching. When the RCOC insisted that all players wear the Reliance logo, 10 out of the 14 Indian players refused and informally demanded hefty payments for doing so. Said one player: "If Reliance gains commercially from us then it must share the profit with us."

Apart from endorsements, the cricketers will earn unprecedented playing fees. For the Reliance Cup, the fee per player has been raised to Rs 7,000 per one-day match as against Rs 3,500 earlier—a minimum of Rs 48,000 from the series. Combined with the number of cash awards announced, each player will wind up earning close to Rs 1 lakh by the series' end. Already, the Indian win in the inaugural match in aid of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund earned them a cash prize of Rs 1.6 lakh shared by the 14 players. Gavaskar was also presented a Contessa car. "Earning money outside the field makes us financially independent of our sports organisation. Our lifespan as players is short and we have to live after our sports career is over," he said.

Despite their Diwali bonus, Indian sportsmen are still in the small league compared to the commercial earnings of their counterparts in the West. Says a player, who requested anonymity: "Indian sports stars have a limited market in India. No international corporations will sign us up though we are world-class cricket players." But they should have little to complain about if they manage to retain the World Cup, as the golden shower they will be deluged with then won't be limited to champagne.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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CRICKET BOOKS

A Literary Barrage

The offerings on display have something for everybody

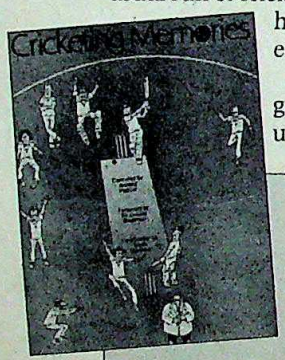
LIKE the best cricketers, the better book publishers survive on their sense of timing. And, with cricket fever about to afflict the Indian population like a pestilent plague, their World Cup runneth over. Not content with having the real thing on view, the Indian public has been hit with a barrage of literary bouncers coinciding with the start of the Reliance Cup.

Like facing the opening overs from the West Indians, the challenge lies in picking the ones to duck and the ones to have a bash at.

Fortunately, the mini-library of cricket books currently on sale offers the reader a less difficult choice than facing Marshall or Garner. Whether by design or merely the flip of a mental coin, the offerings on display have something for everybody. For the nostalgia buffs, there is the exquisitely produced *Wills Book of Excellence*, the latest in the series of coffee-table type sports books financed by ITC. For the less literary types, Jyotsna Poddar's *Cricketing Memories* is ideal for flipping through between overs at a dull cricket match. For the historians, N.K.P. Salve's *The Story of the Reliance Cup* laboriously erects the backdrop to the World Cup's debut in the subcontinent. For the statistical-minded, there is Dr Narottam Puri's *World Cup Cricket*, which, coincidentally, is also the title of Ravi Chaturvedi's book. And, for the die-hard "cricket junkies", Surjit Bhalla has come up with his own computerised ranking of the game and its exponents.

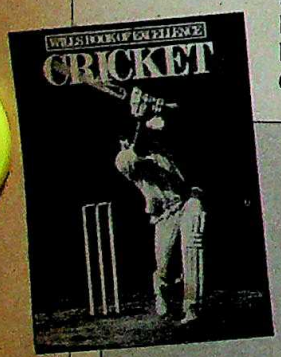
What is surprising, considering the penchant of modern-day cricketers to get into any act where money is involved, none of the authors belongs to the flannelled breed. And none, except perhaps Salve's in a limited sense, is the usual run of cricketing biographies that have dominated the literary scene.

Whether that is a good or bad thing is, unfortunately, debatable. Apart from the ITC offering which stands out for its superior printing quality, or Bhalla's for its unique approach, cricket lovers will find the current crop a disappointing match for their upbeat mood.



CRICKETING MEMORIES
Rupa & Co (distributors)
Price: Rs 145;
Pages: 110

The overall result is somewhat contrived. The umpire's verdict: bad book, good cause.



WILLS BOOK OF EXCELLENCE
Orient Longman
Price: Rs 130;
Pages: 208

Statutory warning: this book is addictive for cricket buffs.

■ **The Story of the Reliance Cup** is perhaps the most disappointing of all, mainly because of the tremendous potential it has for a best seller. The real story of the Reliance Cup had all the right ingredients—the underdogs battling the powerful international cricketing establishment, the behind-the-scenes drama, fiercely fought legal battles, the nail-biting suspense as the Reliance Cup hung in dangerous balance, the unique cooperation between two sworn enemies.

Unfortunately, the cook has spoilt what could have been Michelin-rated literary broth. Salve, like most first-time authors with a political pedigree, cannot resist weaving his personal biography into what could have been a fascinating cricketing story. As he admits, rather tortuously, in the preface: "The story of the Reliance Cup has been woven round the Himalayan fortitudinous struggle, inter alia, of the author." That line gives the entire game away.

THE STORY OF THE RELIANCE CUP
Vikas
Price: Rs 35;
Pages: 261

Salve's contribution to Indian cricket is immense, but not so to cricket literature.

He then makes matters worse by kicking off the opening paragraph with the words: "The story of the Reliance Cup started in reality over 55 years ago." He does not explain exactly why but the unfortunate reader is left with the distinct impression that Salve was born with the light of World Cup battle in his eyes and a silver bat in his mouth.

In fact, the *real* story of the Reliance Cup starts exactly halfway through the book, by which time the reader has been lulled into soporific slumber by Salve's lullaby to his youth, his lineage, his political qualifications and his mentor, the late Indira Gandhi. And by then, the story has, like death, lost its sting. As a cricket administrator of long-standing and the main architect of India's bid for the World Cup, Salve's contribution to Indian cricket is immense. Tragically, the same cannot be said about his contribution to cricket literature.

■ **Cricketing Memories** symbolises yet another unusual literary debut, not just because women compiling books on cricket are as rare as a duck by Bradman

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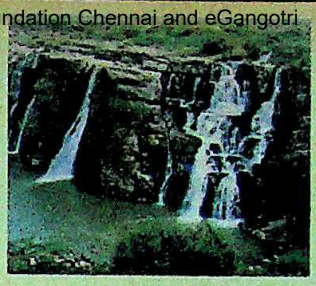

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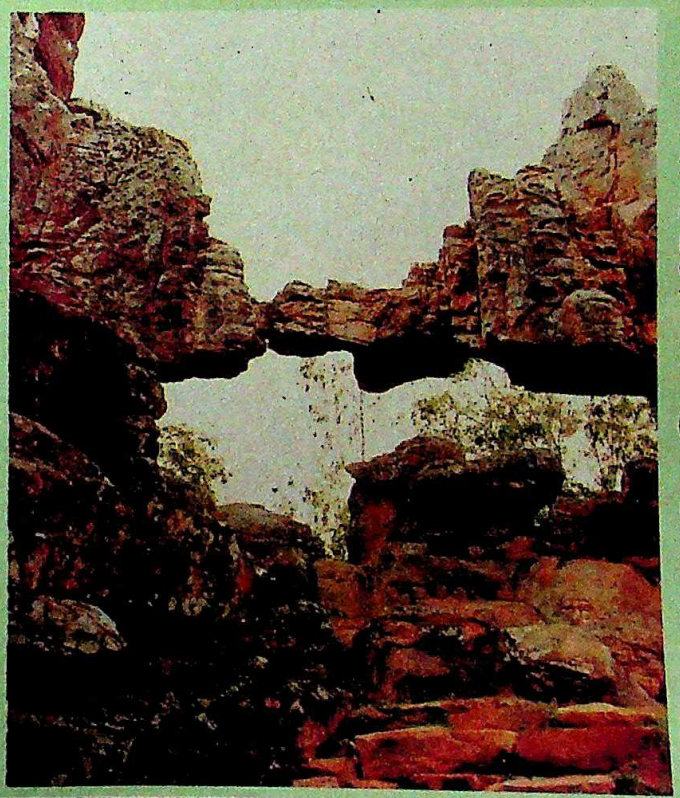

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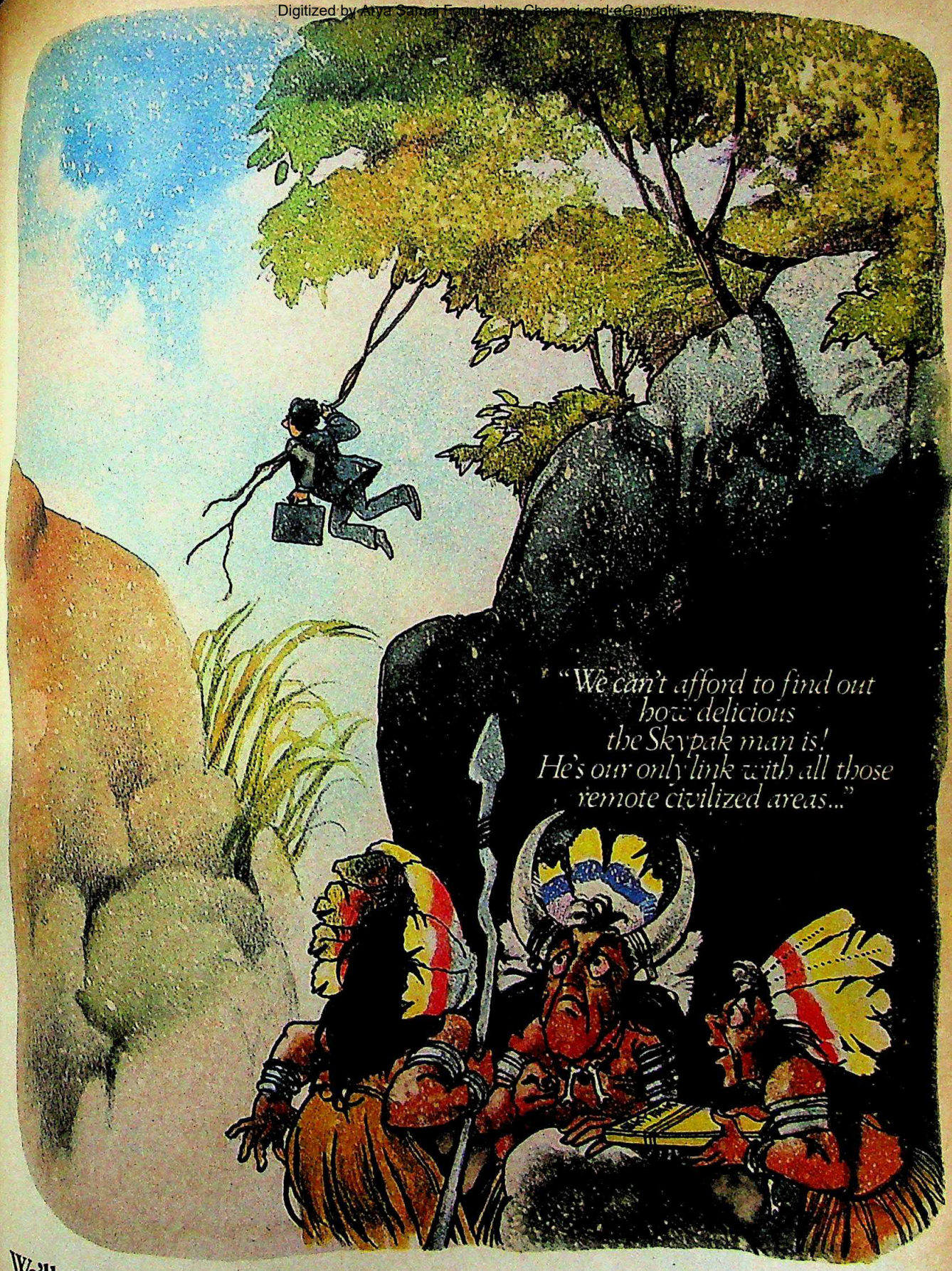

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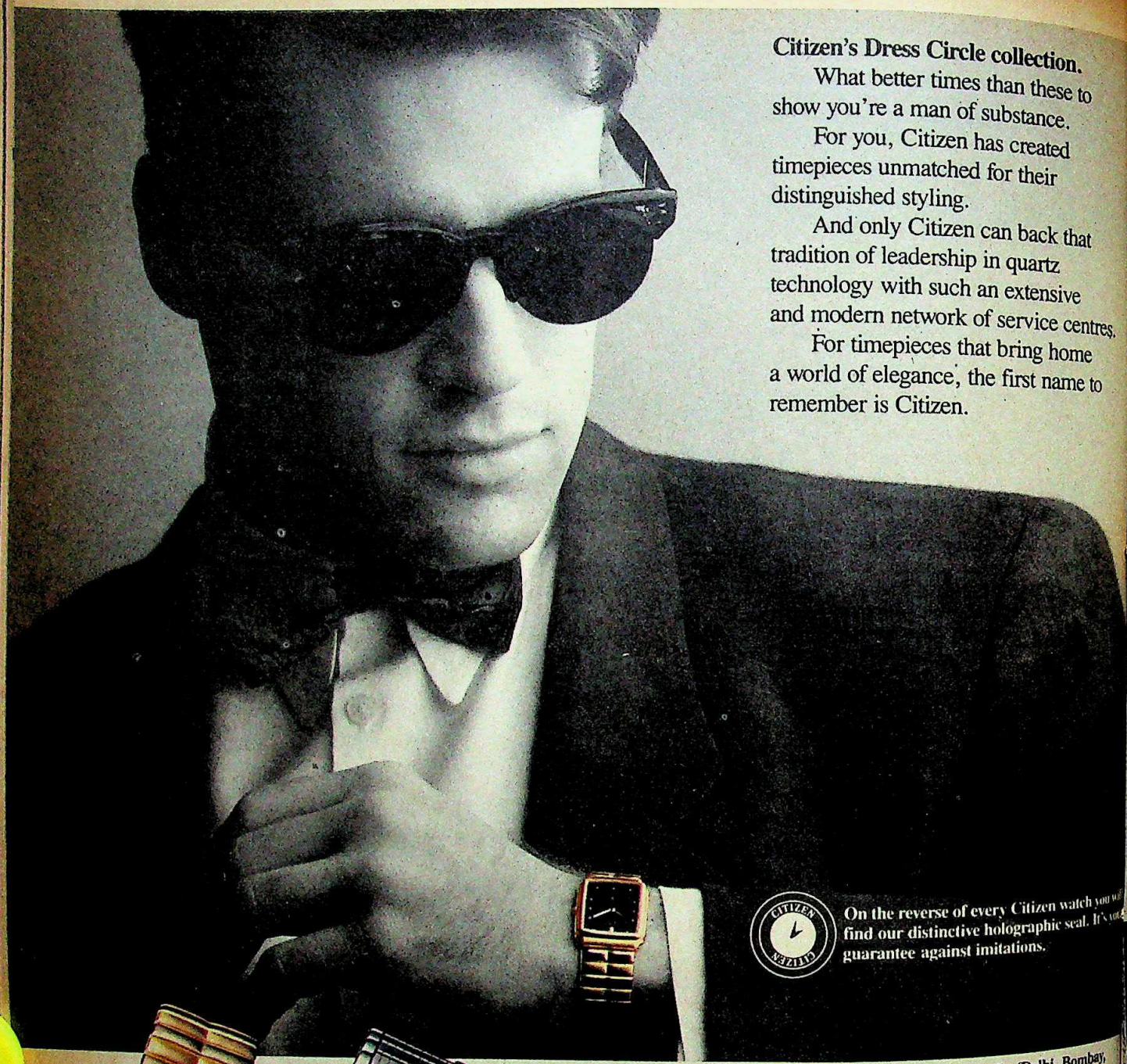

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but because of Jyotsna Poddar's lineage. She is a scion of the Birla clan which is generally associated with totting up its millions rather than cricket scores. Thus the urge to view this book as the fancy of a dilettante is irresistible. But if it is, she can be forgiven since the effort is in a commendable cause—profits from the enterprise will be donated to a retired cricketer's benefit fund.

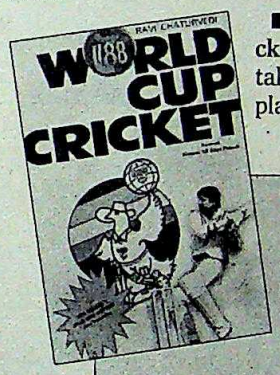
The size of the book is deceptive as the actual reading matter is meagre. But Poddar has scored something of a cricketing coup by getting Sir Donald Bradman to write the foreword. Her idea was to get prominent cricketers to write about their most interesting memories and the list of contributors is impressive.

Where the book falls rather flat on its cover is the urge in most cricketers to equate their most interesting moments with their greatest individual performances and to embellish it with some unnecessary—and unfunny—sidebars. The overall result is somewhat contrived. The umpire's verdict: bad book, good cause.

■ Wills Book of Excellence, on the other hand, lives up to its title. The superlative printing, the photographs, and the painstaking research makes this easily the pick of the litter. This is the fifth book in the Wills Book of Excellence series and ITC has maintained the high standards set by the previous ones.

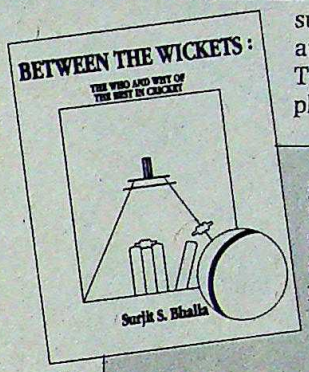
Written by Mudar Patherya, a young cricket writer from a sports magazine and edited by former Indian cricket captain M.A.K. Pataudi who, incidentally, is editor of the same magazine, the book, though somewhat expensive by Indian standards, is well worth the investment. The attempt is to essentially put together a historical survey of the sport and relive some of its greatest moments through some of the game's greatest exponents from 'Doctor' W.G. Grace to Sunil Gavaskar.

Though much of the contents may be unfamiliar to the present generation, no genuine cricket fan can afford to miss out on the electric evolution of the game and the characters who gave it its greatness. And, without really attempting to, it explains the undefinable element that makes cricket such a unique sport and the way that it has adjusted to the jet age. Cigarettes and sports have very little in common, but ITC is to be complimented on its commitment to the game. Statutory warning: this book is addictive for cricket buffs.



■ Between the Wickets, by Surjit Bhalla, takes cricket out of the playing field and into the computer. It is, admittedly, a unique, if academic exercise, but somewhere along the way, the fun goes out of the game. The art of computerised statistical analysis, or sabermetrics, is designed to rank individuals and come up with the age-old question of who is or was the greatest. Sabermetrics was first applied to cricket last June by an English accounting firm, Deloittes. But while Deloittes stuck to current performances (1981-1987), Bhalla is more ambitious in his endeavour(1877-1987), embracing 1,800 players and 12 million bits of information.

What gives Bhalla's book the extra edge is the surprises he comes up with in his rankings. Deloittes ranked Dilip Vengsarkar as the greatest contemporary batsman, Hadlee the best bowler and Imran the greatest all-rounder. Bhalla's computing ranks Bradman the best batsman and Gavaskar, surprise, surprise, is way down at number 34. Though Bhalla explains the methodology used, Gavaskar fans will not find it easy to accept. Similarly, Harold Larwood who played just 21 Tests, tops the best bowler list, with Kapil Dev at a poor 40, just below Imran who ranks 38. Among the all-rounders, Bhalla's table ranks Sobers number one with Imran 8th and Kapil 9th.



BETWEEN THE WICKETS:
The Who and Why of the Best in Cricket
Living Media

Bhalla's book takes cricket out of the playing field and into the computer.

That is precisely what makes Bhalla's book interesting reading. He has employed a variety of variables to back up his findings which are difficult to fault. But having been brought up on a diet of computer programming, econometric modelling and data analysis, Bhalla's effort is largely esoteric. Purists will find it a difficult meal to digest—it's not quite cricket.

■ World Cup Cricket by noted Hindi commentator Ravi Chaturvedi is obviously a hastily-put-together effort which largely covers the three World Cups held so far, making it a valuable enough reference book as is Narottam Puri's statistical work by the same name. Chaturvedi, however, has the advantage of having covered the tournaments from the commentator's box and with his personal involvement, does make some incisive comments on the one-day game and its future. But more comment and less history could have saved this book from being an also-ran.

—DILIP BOBB

WORLD CUP CRICKET
Star
Price: Rs 16;
Pages: 153

More comment and less history could have saved this book from being an also-ran.

WORLD CUP CRICKET
Konark
Price: Rs 15;
Pages: 168

Puri's statistical book on the last three World Cups is purely a reference book.

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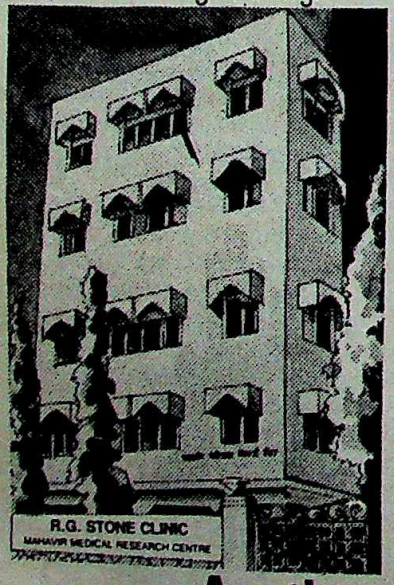

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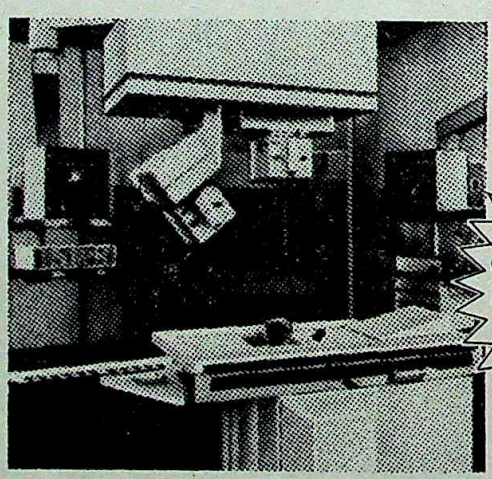

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DEATHS IN ORISSA

Starvation or Sickness?

The Government, the Opposition and the press have all twisted the facts

THE figures are devastating. Nineteen dead in one village because of starvation, 17 in another, 14 in a third. A total of 200 in the block, 600 in the district. Another 600 have died of starvation in the next district. Altogether, 1,200 people have starved to death in Orissa in the last few months. At least, that is what the state Government's critics say.

Executive Editor T.N. NINAN *and Principal Correspondent* FARZAND AHMED *travelled through Kalahandi and Koraput districts in Orissa last fortnight to investigate the charges. Their report:*

A single starvation death would be a blot on the country. And in Orissa, the figure is said to be 1,200. Is the state becoming another Ethiopia?

The horrifying answer is yes, if you believe journalists, opposition politicians and Congress(I) dissidents. A local official has listed specific starvation deaths, and a committee of the Orissa Assembly has submitted a detailed report on the subject. Inevitably, a government which stoutly insists that not a single person has died of starvation is disbelieved and ridiculed.

What is the truth?

One answer is available in the remote mountain fastness of Kashipur block in Koraput district, at the village of Podapadar, which has reported the maximum deaths. Getting there is an ordeal, but living there is worse. In a setting of breath-taking beauty, amidst green hills, Podapadar is a picture of squalor and miserable poverty, an array of mud hovels where some 350 semi-clothed tribals and Harijans live a subhuman existence, surviving habitually on roots, jungle leaves and mango kernels, occasionally maize, rice and ragi. In this hell in paradise, 19 children have died in the last few months. Of starvation, say the journalists for whom this village has become a new pilgrimage spot. Of measles, says a defensive government.

And what do the parents of the dead children say?

Dameng Majhi's three-year-old daughter Kemeldei died in July. She was sick with measles for eight days, they fed her mango kernels, the doctor wasn't called because he was 15 km away, and you had to walk there and back.

Sanu Majhi's year-old daughter Hunadei died in August, after suffering for 15 days. She wasn't taken to the doctor either, and fed mother's milk in her illness.

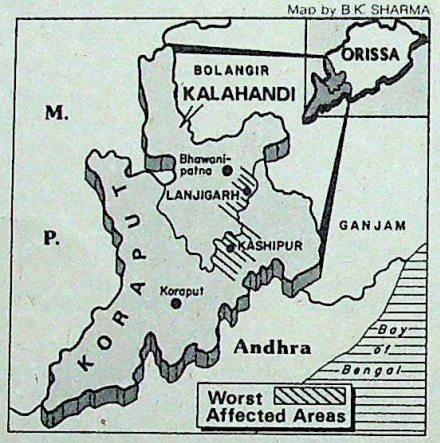
Kalana Majhi's 30-year-old son, Dongor Majhi, came down with diarrhoea and dysentery. When he was sick, he had his normal diet of ragi gruel and mango kernels. He died after eight days.

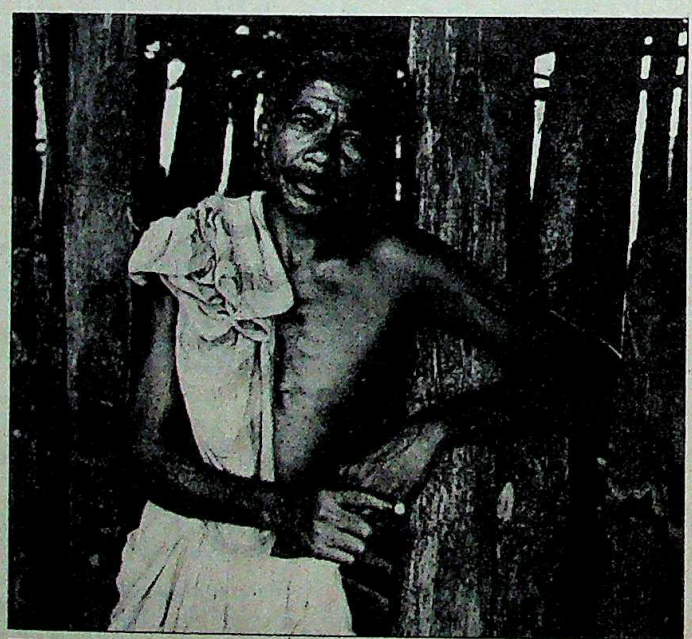
In case after case, the child or adult who died had fallen sick, some kind of food was given and no doctor called. When the uproar resulted over the deaths in Podapadar, the administration bestirred itself and set up a special medical camp there to treat the measles epidemic and post-measles complications. Journalists predicted further deaths, but they stopped at the end of August. And the medical team left the village.

Was there a single case of death unrelated to illness? The *gauntia*, or headman, pondered, then mentioned Chandrika. But the dead three-year-old's mother, Taravati, said her daughter had suffered from fever. And now Chandrika's five-year-old brother Dhaneswar was sick too. In fact, he was a terrible sight, with infected genitals and a black paste plastered on one side of his face—probably a tribal doctor's brew.

Didn't the mother want to save the son by taking him to the doctor? "We are poor people, what can I do, I have no money?" The father is away, at the local weekly market. Getting to the doctor is a round trip of 30 km on foot, carrying a sick child. Uphill and down valley, it could be seven to eight hours of walking. Any woman would be daunted, especially a poor, ignorant creature who is frightened of the doctor anyway. So Dhaneswar has been sick for days, but he is denied medical attention. If he stays

Map by B.K. SHARMA





Sundar Majhi lost both his son and daughter. They were fine in the day, had ragi gruel at night and died in a few hours. Was it starvation or meningitis?

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Yogesh is a picture of starvation, and also has malaria. His mother has not taken him to the doctor despite 11 days of fever. Without medical care, he could be a 'starvation' death.

in this condition, he will probably die, like Chandrika. And perhaps become another name in the lists of 'starvation' deaths.

Nearby stands three-year-old Yogesh, the classic picture of starvation: a painfully thin body and large eyes telling their own tale. His body is hot to the touch, his mother says he has had fever for 11 days, and he cries pitifully but weakly. There is little strength left, the mother does not even have the sense to cover the hot body with the end of her sari.

Both children are taken to the doctor in a jeep. Dhaneswar is diagnosed as suffering from venereal scabies (probably inherited from his parents) and prescribed antibiotics. Yogesh has malaria. If the mothers follow the doctor's advice, both will survive. If they don't, both could die.

The doctor, a pleasant young man called C.V.S. Rao, does not think they are starvation deaths. When the measles was treated, the deaths stopped. Can't people die from living for so long on mango seeds, especially when there is sickness? He thinks they die because the mango seeds are not stored properly, get fungus and when eaten cause dysentery, which if not treated quickly causes death.

It is easy to go to a desperately poor community, look at the half-naked bodies, the cold hearths, the empty granary bins, the malnourished children and quickly conclude that a sudden increase in the number of deaths in a drought year is because of starvation. Screaming the bad news and calling for action by the Government also salves the conscience. And of course, it is sensational news in a country proud of its self-sufficiency in food, and a wonderful way to pillory the Government. Anybody can do all that, and still be off the mark.

Governments lie to cover up their failures. But opposition politicians lie too, or exaggerate. And journalists are often eager to believe the worst. Because bad news is really 'good' news, because uncovering disaster at the end of an arduous journey makes the trip journalistically worthwhile, because everyone is talking of starvation deaths anyway and these people certainly need more and better food. And perhaps journalists are unwilling to accept that even a guilty government may have a point.

Yes, the wretchedly poor of the two poorest districts in India's second poorest state have been dying in droves. Yes, they do not have enough food to eat, and what they do eat even in normal times would not be considered fit for human consumption. Yes, this makes them weak and susceptible to disease and quick mortality.

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Simadri Naggalu ate dinner with his son Nimalu. Early next morning, Nimalu complained of chest pain and was soon dead. He is listed as having died of starvation.

And yes, they are ignorant, superstitious and do not have proper access to medical care. But there is a difference between malnutrition and starvation. And though measles and diarrhoea are often associated with starvation, they strike those who are not starving too. And what the patients need first is medical care. The point quite simply is that the truth is more complex than plain starvation.

Nevertheless, the Government's record is black enough if the people of Podapadar have to live in the conditions that they do 40 years after Independence; journalists and politicians do not have to distort or simplify the truth in order to lambaste those in power. Podapadar, unfortunately, exposes the journalists as much as the Government.

Muskapadar is another new pilgrimage spot for journalists (and for Rajiv Gandhi, who went there last month). A beleaguered Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik says sarcastically that it is now an internationally famous village. Seventeen people have died this year in this hell-hole in Kalahandi district. The cause is starvation, say the journalists. Meningitis, says the Government.

ASK Sundar Majhi about the death of his son and daughter (both in their early 20s), and he will tell you that they were all right during the day, ate ragi at night and died in the morning. The speed of death suggests meningitis.

What about the others? Yes, Sana Majhi died without food. His widow Rukkedei, a ragged woman with matted hair, missing teeth and a dirty once-white cloth to cover her nakedness, says there was no food in the house. How many days did he go without food? One. Was he sick? Yes, with fever for a day. Was it starvation, or something else? It is difficult to say.

So when the Government says there was an outbreak of meningitis in the village, and that lumbar punctures of patients confirmed this, it has at least as good a case as the journalists and politicians who insist that all the people in this roadside village died of starvation. The CPI(M) had set up a relief camp in the village, and a local party activist confessed that though the party claimed the deaths were from starvation, he knew they were caused by meningitis.

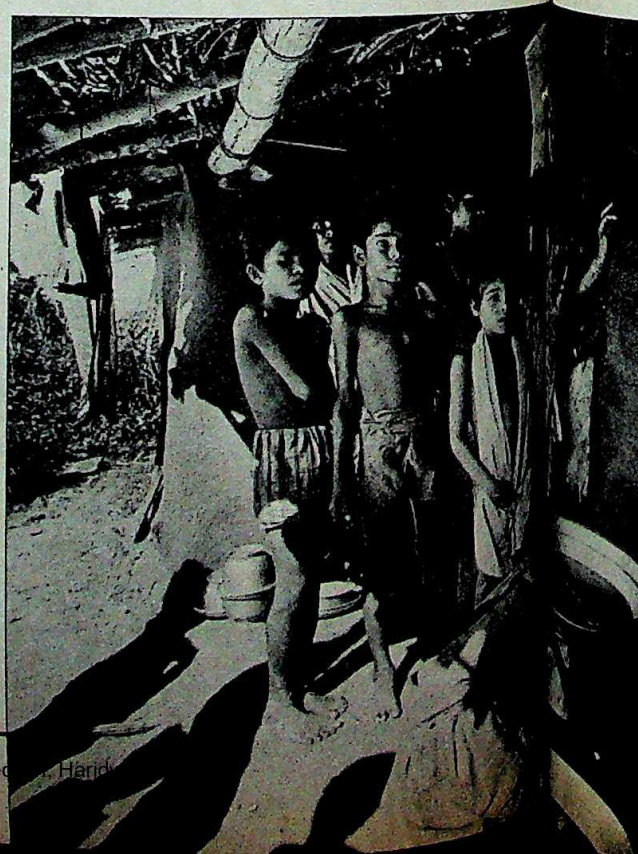
From village to village, in one block after another, in the two now infamous districts, the quest for starvation deaths yields a more complex picture of disease, lack of safe drinking water, unhygienic habits, ignorance, absence of medical care. To talk only of starvation is misleading, just as there is in fact a strange new disease, starvation fever.

At Palampur village in Kalahandi's Khariar block, Jaladhar Tandya complained in writing to the local police station that he has not eaten any food for 10 days, and that he will die in another 10 days if he does not get food. The petition was submitted on the September 27. The police made a noting in the case diary and referred him to the local block development officer.

Ten days later, Jaladhar Tandya is hale and hearty in his village; there is paddy drying outside his hut; he says it is borrowed, and in any case it disappears when your back is turned. He says he has no cooking oil, no salt, no vegetables. The other villagers begin to demur. He shuts them up.

Tandya's petition to the police, warning of his imminent death, was drafted by a well-meaning social worker in the area, K.N. Tiwari, who has even filed a petition in the Supreme Court about the Government's heedlessness on the starvation deaths. But the simple truth is that Jaladhar Tandya is far from starving.

Samaj, Orissa's leading newspaper, reported last month that an old woman had died of starvation right in the middle of Bhawanipatna, headquarters of Kalahandi district. A picture of the dead woman, Bedadei, accompanied the report and showed her lying dead on a Bhawanipatna street. But last fortnight, the Kalahandi district administration escorted a very alive (but mentally unbal-



Mid-day meal being readied in a Kalahandi village: feeding a quarter of the population free

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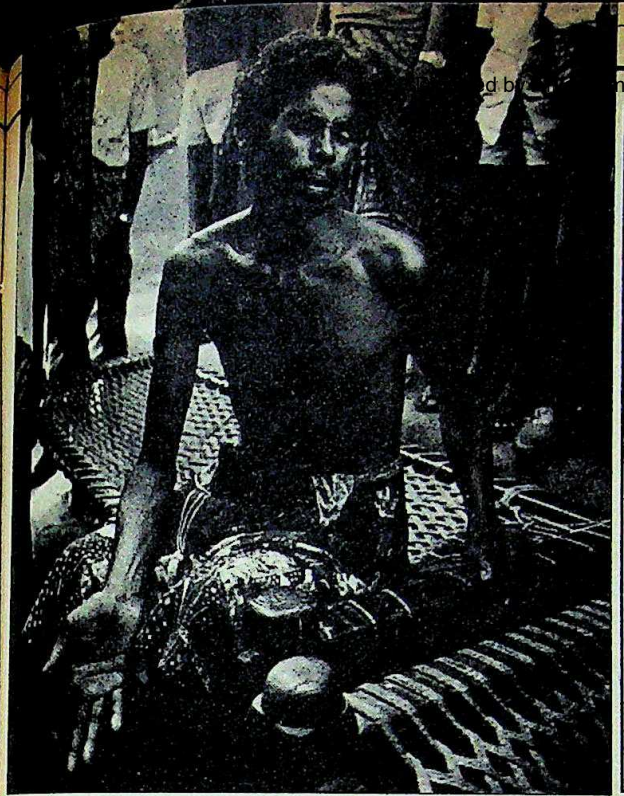

Jaladhar Tandya formally complained to the police that he would die of starvation. But the villagers murmur dissent when Tandya says he has no food.

anced) Bedadei back to her home in the neighbouring Bolangir district.

A.M. Dalavai, a young and idealistic IAS officer toured several villages in Gunupur subdivision of Koraput district and submitted a detailed report of several deaths by starvation. He methodically listed the name, age, family and cause of death. That list is now public property, and Dalavai has become the darling of the pro-starvation lobby.

His list includes Prem Bibhar of Chatikona village, who by Dalavai's account died of starvation, malnutrition and diarrhoea, and was living on wild roots and leaves. But Prem Bibhar's mother Rukhni said last fortnight that her daughter used to eat lentils and vegetables, apart from rice. She had eaten a meal a few hours before she died. And she had suffered from diarrhoea and vomiting.

Dalavai, who has been transferred somewhat summarily to an obscure posting in Bhubaneswar and whom the chief minister has threatened with penal action, could not be traced in the state capital for his comments. But several other names on his list of deaths by 'starvation, malnutrition, diarrhoea and living on wild roots and leaves' turned out to be equally illuminating. In Barriguda village, teen-aged Nimalu Naggalu died in February. His father Simadri said last fortnight that Nimalu had eaten dinner at night. Father and son then went out to sleep in their field (to protect the crop). Early in the morning, the son complained of a chest pain, went into the house, and soon he was dead. The father does not know why his son died, but he knows it is not because of starvation.

Could he or the surviving relatives of other dead be underplaying or disguising starvation, because the Government has frightened them into doing so? But even after you assure the villagers that you are not from the Government, that you are from the press, and they can speak the truth, the answers remain the same. And they seem to tell the truth.

That does not let the Government off the hook. Because the deaths have taken place. And men, women and children would not have died if they were not so poor, so ignorant, so undernourished, and beyond the reach of modern medical care.

They would have withstood sickness better if the Government's scheme of giving 15 kg of subsidised rice to every family was being implemented. But a ration card in any villager's home will show that the rice is usually not available. Chief Minister Patnaik boasts in Bhubaneswar that every single village in the state now has a tubewell. But go to almost any block in either Kalahandi or Koraput, and the local official will reel off the large numbers of villages without safe drinking water. Posts of doctors are created but lie vacant. Even when they are filled—as was done recently with the help of generous special allowances—one doctor is assigned to 80 villages in mountainous territory, as in Kashipur block.

FINALLY, when there is a tremendous drum-beat about the starvation deaths and the prime minister comes visiting for the second time in two years, what results is a cruel joke. Rajiv Gandhi didn't go to the right villages in Kashipur, the state Government stage-managed his programme to hide the worst cases, and the areas he visited were showered with goodies before his arrival. In Kalahandi's Pratappur village, a nationalised bank suddenly gave out loans of up to Rs 3,500. Kuber Sahu got the first instalment of Rs 1,000 under a scheme for rehabilitating bonded labour, and promptly bought some gold. His wife was given another Rs 1,000 to start a small business selling rice. In Hariharpur village, a new tubewell was drilled in record time and the approach road repaired. In Nangalbeda and other villages, old tubewells were freshly painted. One village got a slide for children.

In Dumermunda, a minor irrigation project was started a couple of weeks before Rajiv's visit. In Champadepur village, a colony of houses built by the Government under the Indira Awas programme, was given electricity a day before Rajiv's visit. And fresh ration cards

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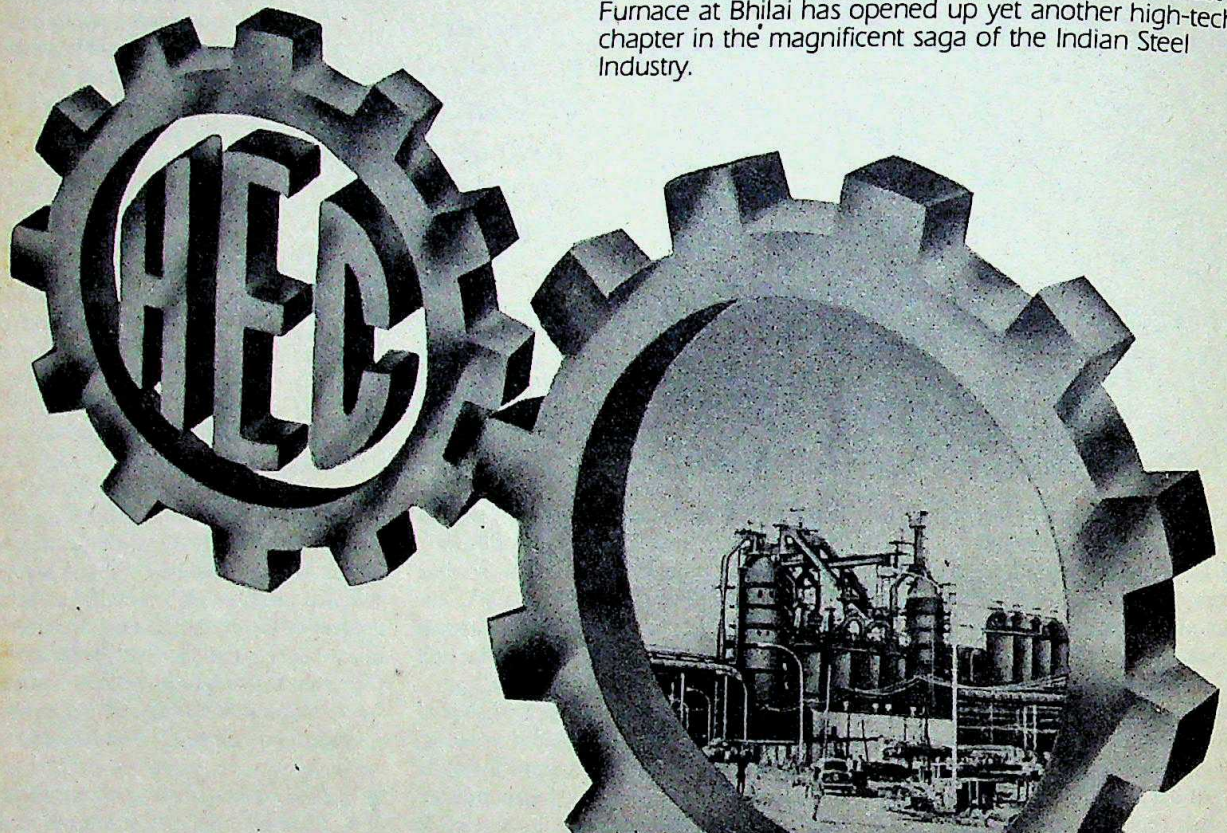
HEC: a mighty moving force behind Bhilai's massive 7th Blast Furnace

The recent commissioning of the 2000 cu m 7th Blast Furnace at Bhilai has opened up yet another high-tech chapter in the magnificent saga of the Indian Steel Industry.



HEC takes legitimate pride as manufacturer and supplier of this giant Blast Furnace.

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were issued five days earlier. Along the prime ministerial route itself, new street signs sprung up and the road was repaired. But perhaps worst of all, instead of going to hapless Podapadar in Kashipur, Rajiv went to Maikanch village, which is complete with pucca houses, a grain bank, solar energy installation, residential school for tribal boys, and well cultivated fields. If all that weren't enough, the Harijans in the village were given free rice the night before Rajiv came visiting—presumably so that Inspector Rajiv, on checking the house granary, would find grain there.

Understandably, the prime minister's visit has impressed no one, especially when relief work started was in some cases stopped immediately after his departure. Two years ago, when he came to see the truth for himself about Kalahandi and about penniless Phanas Punji selling her sister-in-law to raise money, his stock rose sky-high. This time around, the critics are very vocal: he wasn't serious about the visit, the chief minister pulled the wool over his eyes, the state Government fixed the whole show. At least some of that seems to be true. And it is not what two districts in the grip of terrible poverty need from a prime minister.

The state Government has also stirred itself to more honourable pursuits. It has, after all, been rapped on the knuckles, been laid siege to in the Assembly and hounded by the press. The food rations have been increased, grain prices on ration cards slashed, special feeding programmes started, more doctors posted, and budgets increased for employment-generating public work programmes. In some blocks of both districts, the difference can be seen.

In Kalahandi, every fourth person in the district is now being fed free by the Government: 3.5 lakh people in a district of 13 lakh. In 71 villages in Dharmgarh block, every village is given free food by the state, and practically every one of the 170-odd villages in Narla block are being fed free. In each gram panchayat, which has 4,000-odd residents, work is being provided for at least 300 people through government programmes: the bread earner in 40 per cent of the families is assured of employment. Those are the official figures. There could be occasional slip-ups here and there, but there was activity aplenty to be seen, at work sites, in feeding centres.

J.B. PATNAIK

"Medical problem"

Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik has faced enormous flak for the spate of deaths in Orissa. Excerpts from an interview with INDIA TODAY:

On the starvation deaths:

There is no question of starvation deaths. Officers, ministers and MLAs confirmed this. These were deaths due to meningitis, diarrhoea, and post-measles complications. Special medical camps dealt with them.

On the widespread malnutrition:

Is this only in Orissa? A starvation death was reported in West Bengal's Midnapore district.

On the affected people eating non-nutritious food like mango kernels:

They are traditionally accustomed to these, and take rice only as a substitute.

On why reports of starvation deaths were not inquired into within the stipulated 48 hours:

We can't have an inquiry on the basis of motivated reports. There has to be a prima facie case to investigate.

On the prime minister's tour of Orissa being stage-managed:

No matter where we would have taken him, these critics would have said the same thing. No special measures were taken for his visit.

On the poor availability of foodgrains on ration cards:

There may be loopholes in the system, and the system is being tightened.

On the lack of medical facilities:

We are posting more doctors.

But the critics are not satisfied. Bhakta Charan Das, the young Janata MLA in Kalahandi who has done more than anyone to publicise the issue of starvation deaths, demands that 1,000 people should be given work in every gram panchayat, and others charge that Rs 84 crore earmarked for anti-poverty programmes remain unspent.

Some of the money is in fact unspent, which in the given context is unforgivable. And what has also not helped are unfeeling and corrupt officials (and there are plenty in the area), plus a Koraput Collector, R.N.Senapati, who when confronted by INDIA TODAY, slipped into one room and scurried out into a car that drove him off. Far too many local officials sound positively unsympathetic about the problems of the people. The least the Government can do is to post its best officials in these troubled districts. And a smug Patnaik should at least visit Kalahandi and Koraput more often than he visits New Delhi.

But more important than all this, perhaps, is the need for the politicians, voluntary organisations and activists of various hues to pay direct and concentrated attention to the area's genuine problems. There may not be a ration shop in the village, but there will be three liquor shops doing a roaring business. And men on empty stomachs will be drunk through the day. A temperance drive is essential.

Voluntary organisations can also provide supplementary doctors, or help drill more wells for drinking water. Politicians who want to be constructive can camp in the area, keep a check on leakages of official funds and materials, and begin a campaign to educate the tribals, or spread literacy. Education is, after all, almost non-existent in the area. Two decades ago, when parts of Bihar began turning Naxalite, Jayaprakash Narayan saw that the basic problem was lack of development and launched his own action plan in the area. There should be men in India's public life today who can pay similar attention to Koraput and Kalahandi.

Orissa is in crisis. While the administration is on the defensive, the system itself is on test. Because whether people are dying of starvation or because of other reasons, they are dying when they should not be, and those who live do so in a manner that should shame the country as a whole into urgent action.

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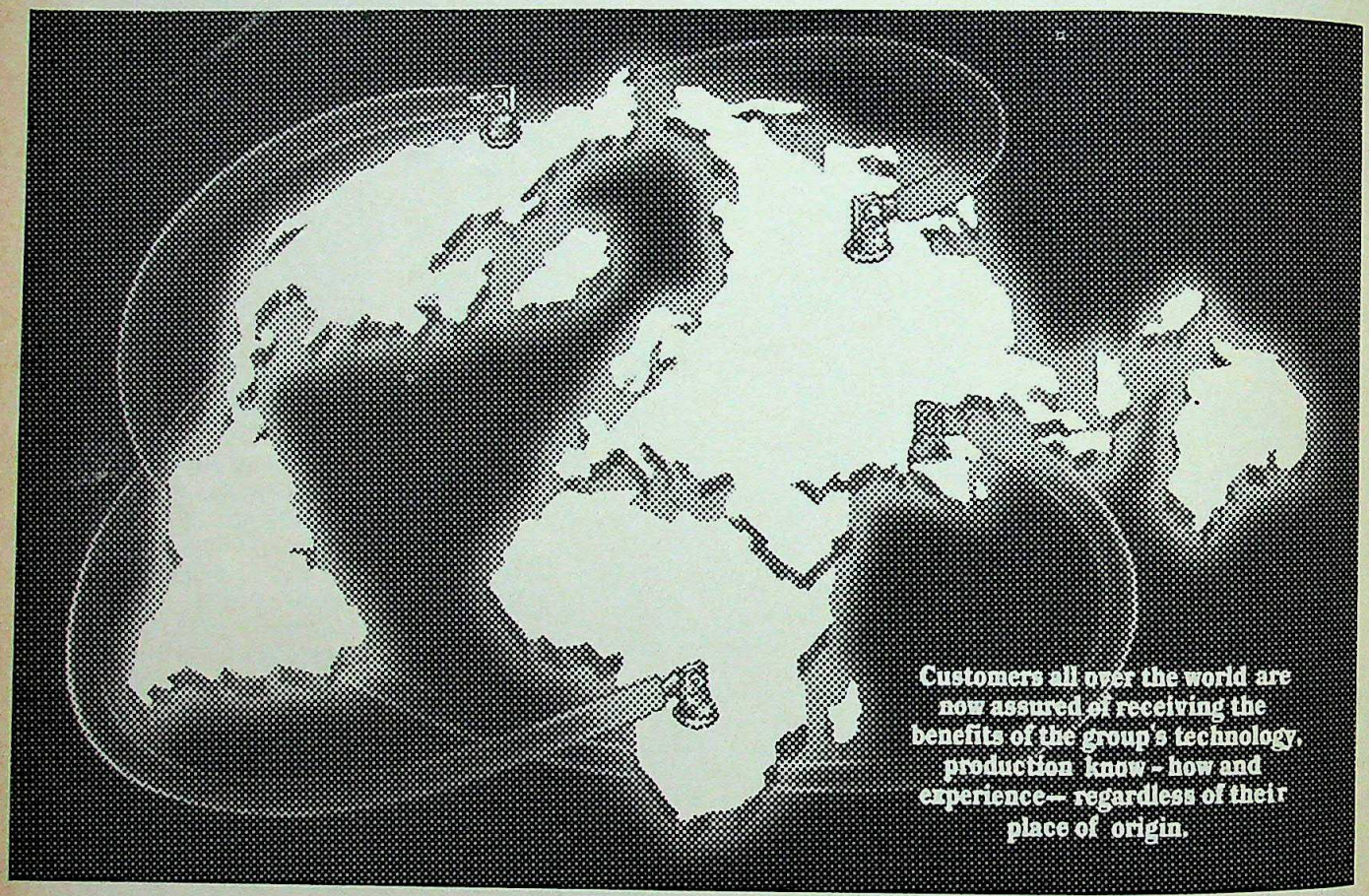

The global strategy adopted by the Chloride group calls for Strategic Business Units linked across five continents. In R&D, Chloride India's recognized talents (we're the centre for Solar Research for Chloride worldwide) will continue to receive support services from all sister set-ups. We have in store a whole range of innovative products for the burgeoning electronics market. With prospects for new collaborations. And a zillion opportunities for growth.

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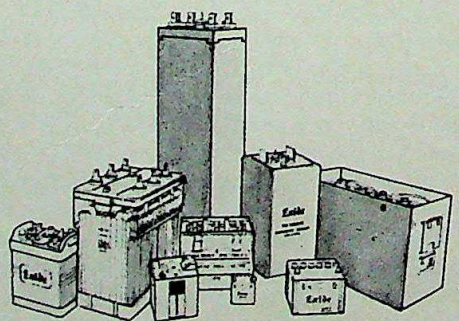

In Energy... Electricals... Electronics(E^3)

WORLDWIDE WE'RE ONE

CHLORIDE

ARTIG414A

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TRIMMING SAILS

THE heavily losing Scindia Steamship and Navigation Company (turnover: Rs 104 crore) is trimming its sails as never before. In what may be one of the biggest auctions in Indian shipping history, Scindia's new board of directors is putting 17 of the Scindia fleet's 22 ships on the auction block this month. The ships are expected to net some Rs 50 crore for the company, but the sum will only partly help clear its accumulated dues of Rs 179 crore.

However, some doubt whether the auction will be finally held, believing that it is meant to wrest concessions from the company's employees and creditors. That has to be seen, but Scindia has to offload all but 100 of its 600 shore-based employees. The company's board has cleared a voluntary retirement scheme for its employees but the unions have consistently opposed it. Many of Scindia's creditors have already agreed to accept only 20 per cent of the dues.

LIGHTNING CHARGES

SOAPS and detergents giant Hindustan Lever and Nirma, the Gujarat-based detergent manufacturer, have locked horns again, with Nirma getting the worst of it this time. The battlefield: the Advertising Standards Council of India, the advertising industry's watchdog body. Lintas, the agency which handles the account for Lever's Rin detergent cake, blew the whistle some months ago on Nirma's use of lightning to advertise its own detergent cake in television commercials. Lintas claimed that the lightning symbol had been associated with Rin since 1969. The council recently ruled against Nirma but refrained from coming down heavily against competitors comparing their wares in advertisements (both Nirma and Lever have been doing this), as had been widely expected. This could open the floodgates to comparative advertising by companies, a practice common elsewhere in the world but frowned upon in India.

DRIVING OUT

INTERNATIONAL car rental agencies are suddenly flocking to India. After Avis and Hertz, it's now the turn of Europcar, known also in Europe as National Car Rental. Five non-resident Indians have invested Rs 1 crore in bringing the third largest car rental agency in the world to the country. Europcar will initially offer chauffeured cars to corporate clients and domestic tourists in 15 cities. The agency hopes to cover 40 towns and cities later on through franchising arrangements. Also on the cards may be self-driven rental cars, but only if the law is amended to permit these.

TV TIMES

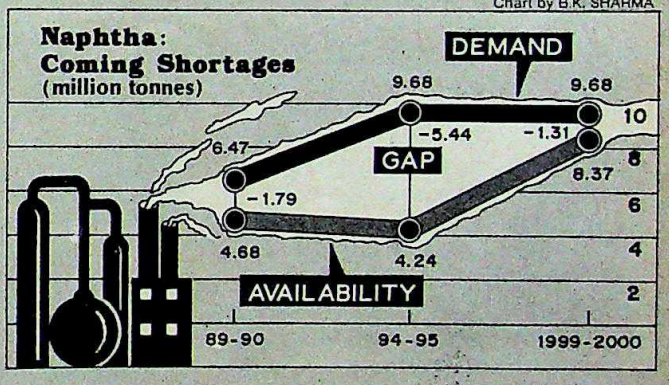
BIG business is eyeing the television industry with fresh interest. The Gujarat-based Lalbhais recently leaped into televisions, and now the Singhanias are all poised to follow suit. Meanwhile, Straw Products Ltd, a JK group company, has bagged a letter of intent to produce annually one lakh black and white television sets and 50,000 colour TV sets at Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh.

The JK group had, in fact, made an unsuccessful foray into the television industry in the 1970s, as had several other business houses. But others like the Tatas have hung on. Despite the stiff competition, the television market is burgeoning and the new optimism may not be unfounded.

BECOMING SCARCE

THE country is heading for a shortage of naphtha, used in the fertiliser and petrochemical industries and for power generation. Reason: besides the growing demand for petrochemical products, the Government has committed itself to provide naphtha for several power projects. A report

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



by Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd and the IIM, Ahmedabad, forecasts a deficit of 1.79 million tonnes by 1990 *(see chart)*. The gap could narrow later as fresh naphtha becomes available from gas. Since firms that have joined the petrochemicals industry will face problems, the Government is vetting applications for petrochemical projects more carefully than before. But the report predicts a shortage of 31.8 m.t. of petrochemical products by the year 2000. Either naphtha will have to be imported or alternative raw materials thought of.

TYRE TROUBLE

TYRES have always been a contentious issue in the market-place, but tyre manufacturers are under fire again. This time, truck manufacturers are sounding off about a tyre shortage and threatening to cut output. So vehicle manufacturers are lobbying the Government for tyre imports. But tyre companies deny that a scarcity exists. Several companies (MRF, Goodyear, Modistone and JK Tyres) were plagued by labour problems and had to close plants. Manufacturers concede that truck tyre production has dropped by 1.5 per cent from last year's levels, but say more tyres are hitting the market with firms like MRF opening shop once more. Nevertheless, several tyre firms still face labour problems and the coming months will determine how serious the scarcity is.

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THE URBAN HOUSEWIFE

Conforming to Type

Fascinating findings of a detailed survey

THE stereotype image of the Indian housewife is a long-suffering, self-sacrificing woman who devotes all her time and energy to looking after her husband and children. The reality may not be too far from the myth. A major national survey of urban housewives shows that despite changing life-styles a large majority of women remain firmly committed to traditional values and beliefs.

More than 90 per cent of the women interviewed in a psychographic survey by Pathfinders: India, the market research organisation, agreed that 'A woman's main role in life is to have a good family and bring up children.' Though more than 65 per cent of married women live in nuclear families, they are still enclosed within an age-old structure. After an early arranged marriage, they spend their time cooking, sweeping, and washing clothes, have few hobbies, pray often, rarely go out in the evenings and hope their children will not spoil the family name. Centuries after the mythical Anasuya dazzled the gods with her single-minded devotion to her husband, the Indian housewife is also likely to pass any divine test with flying colours.

This rather dismal picture emerges in P:SNAP—the first syndicated national study of attitudes using the technique of psychographics. For the survey, Pathfinders conducted personal interviews of 10,303 working and non-working women, aged between 18 and 45 years, with family incomes of more than Rs 350 per month, in 36 towns and cities across the country. "The response from the housewives to our detailed questionnaire was often very enthusiastic," says Pathfinders General Manager Pranesh Misra.

Pathfinders' focus on women reflects the perception among marketing and advertising professionals, of the increasing importance of the housewife in decisions regarding the purchase of consumer goods. Till recently, marketing messages were directed towards a model of the housewife, constructed entirely out of dry, demographic facts. "But demographic studies cannot give communicators a feel for the target audience," says Roda Mehta, director of media and research at Ogilvy, Benson and Mather (OBM), which conducted a survey of the Bombay housewife some years ago.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

Contemporary housewife: Aspires for modernity but still uses fairness creams.

Gregarious hedonist: Self-indulgent, she spends money on new products.

Psychographics came into its own in the US in the early '70s but its significance has dawned on India only now. "Even if we have lagged behind, there is no way we can do without it now," says Speer Communications President Sajid Peerbhoy.

P:SNAP analysed the vast amount of data collected from the interviews, conducted over nearly three-and-a-half months, and came up with eight identifiable types of Indian housewives:

► The gregarious hedonist: Found predominantly in the east, she is most likely to speak Bengali and is intensely extroverted and liberal. She does not believe in sacrificing her life just to keep her family happy. Self-indulgent and willing to spend money on new products, she is a marketing man's dream.

The affluent sophisticate: She lives by the motto, 'Have money, will spend'.

► The contemporary housewife: She is on the threshold of change. While she has not given up many traditional values, she aspires for modernity and is least likely to be living in north India. Though she is happier than she was five years ago, she feels the need to do something more meaningful besides housekeeping. She is fashion-conscious, but still uses fairness skin creams and her idea of trendy clothes does not go beyond the sari.

► The affluent sophisticate: She lives mainly in the west zone, and seems to live by the motto: 'Have money, will spend'. She is the highest user of all kinds of consumer products and indulges more in activities—even simple ones like writing a cheque or using a telephone—which are out of reach of most housewives. She is comfortable talking to men outside her family circle, and would not mind if her

Tight-fisted traditionalist: Leading a sheltered life, she dresses like the film stars.

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Troubled home-body: She believes her future is written in the stars.

children marry outside the community. One out of three do some form of exercise and are careful about their figures.

▸ The tight-fisted traditionalist: Leading a sheltered life, she prefers to follow the film stars in her dress habits but is particular about prices. She restricts her circle of friends to within her community and believes that girls should be educated especially to enable them to get good husbands. A majority live in north India.

▸ The troubled home-body: Neither a leader nor an emulator, she is largely illiterate and is the least exposed to the media. Her three prized possessions are watches, transistors and bicycles. Fashion takes a back seat and the future, according to her, is written in the stars.

▸ The anxious rebel: Less likely to be found in the south, she would much rather be working than staying at home. She is anxious, thrifty but discerning in her shopping, though quite willing to try out new products.

▸ The archetypal provider: Living overwhelmingly in the south, she is as satisfied being a housewife as a cat who has licked cream. She sees TV much less than the average viewer, and is disinclined towards fashion. But she is ever willing to try out new food recipes, and loves to spend on her children and guests.

▸ The contented conservative: She is extremely confident and probably the most efficient householder of all. She is a great optimist, is very conscious of the family's health and is, by and large, the advertising man's dream as she believes that ads are a great source of information.

On the whole, the Indian housewife's lot is not a merry one. More than three-fourths worry about the future and believe that life is determined by what is written in the stars. Only 14 per cent are employed and more than 90 per cent have not graduated from college. More than half do not read magazines or newspapers. Though only 0.7 per cent are divorced, 11.6 per cent say they never spend time talking to their husbands.

Archetypal provider: Satisfied being a housewife, she is the most hospitable.

Though the first three modern types represent more than 35 per cent of Indian housewives, life-style patterns outside the house remain largely traditional, reflecting the fact that nearly 40 per cent of the women are married to workers. For those going "away from home", the most popular activity was 'visited place of worship'—stated by 80 per cent. Other reasons followed way behind: 'ate out at a restaurant' (28.9 per cent), 'went on a holiday' (23.1 per cent), and 'went on a picnic' (20.9 per cent).

Otherwise, life is pretty dull for the majority. Those who have travelled by plane are just 2.3 per cent, travelled to a foreign country (0.9 per cent), been to a club (1.9 per cent), been for a swim (0.8 per cent), had wine or spirits with dinner (3.7 per cent), been to see a play (14.1 per cent), lived in a hotel (6 per cent), been to a beauty parlour (5.6 per cent), and written out a bank cheque (9.4 per cent).

Contented conservative: She believes that ads are a great source of information.

In the comparison between the different zones, it is the housewife in the east who emerges as the most modern and socially integrated. She is more liberal, more likely to have had a love marriage (7.2 per cent as against 3.1 per cent in the south, 2.98 per cent in the west and 1.1 per cent in the north), and feels she can depend on friends and relatives in a crisis.

While the housewife in the west is more confident of her ability to achieve something in life, she tends to be more self-indulgent. She is, for instance, the biggest consumer of ice cream. The southern housewife emerges closest to the popular conception of conservative.

It is the housewife in the north who comes out the least attractive. She is introverted, the least hospitable and the most dominated by her husband. But her interest in housework is the lowest, and she seeks convenience products and uses lipstick far more than housewives elsewhere. Surprisingly, only 39.5 per cent of northern housewives are non-vegetarian, as against 76.5 per cent in the south and a national average of 60 per cent.

P:SNAP confirms the view that the Indian housewife sees herself basically as a traditional provider. Yet, as Misra says, the survey reveals that a growing number of urban women are beginning to see themselves in a more modern context. With the growing popularity of psychographics, other agencies also plan to examine the psyche of the consumer. For the image makers, an understanding of the urban Indian's dreams and anxieties has become necessary to ensure that the marketing message reaches home.

—M. RAHMAN

Anxious rebel: She would much rather be working than staying at home.

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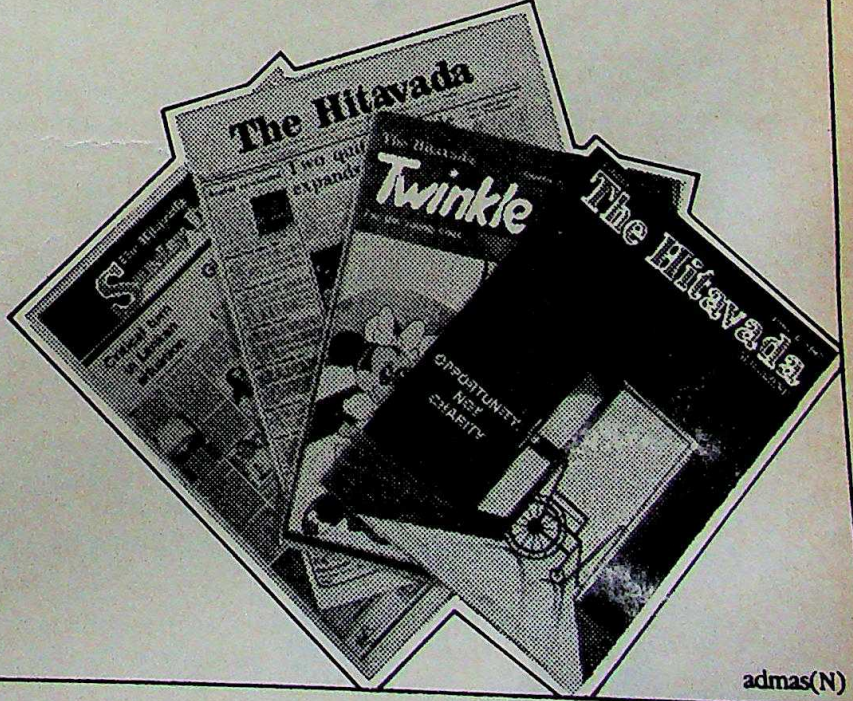

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MAHARASHTRA

Dream Project

Transforming a rural area

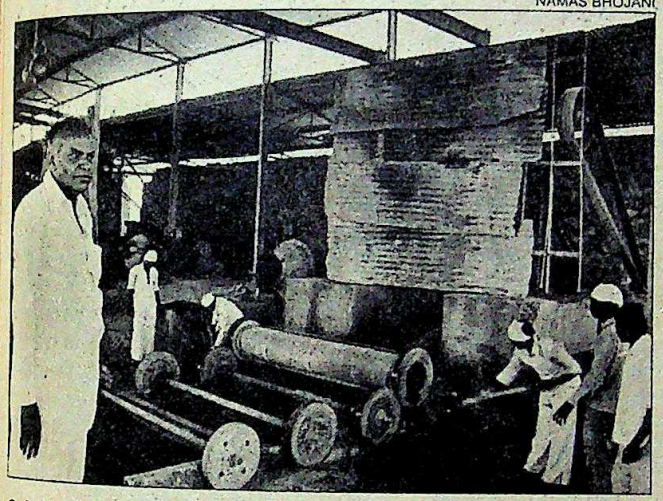
ON the highway frequented by pilgrims heading for Shirdi in search of salvation, a miracle has been quietly taking shape. About 40 km from Maharashtra's booming city of Nasik, in the heart of the drought-prone Sinnar taluka, a 260-acre industrial estate promises to alter a hopeless landscape. Already, 40 small factories employ 2,000 workers, a majority of whom were until recently impoverished peasants. And when the Sinnar Taluka Cooperative Industrial Estate (STCIE) is completed, it will provide 10,000 jobs in industries ranging from automobile parts to fibre foam and mosaic tiles.

Several aspects of the Sinnar venture stand out. True, Kolhapur has a similar, larger cooperative but, unlike Sinnar, it falls in the prosperous sugar belt. Moreover, the state Government's stake in Sinnar is just Rs 21 lakh in the cooperative's share capital of Rs 50 lakh. Amazingly, it is largely the handiwork of a determined politician, Suryabhan Gadakh, 57, a former Congress(I) MLA.

"I first got the idea when I became an MLA in 1978 and found scores of people asking for help in getting jobs," recalls Gadakh. A communist who joined the Congress after the 1969 split, he first tried to get a government industrial estate set up in Sinnar. When that failed, he got some people together and registered a cooperative in 1982. A year later, Gadakh finally persuaded the villagers of Musalgaon to sell their barren fields to the cooperative for Rs 8 lakh, a transaction made possible by a generous loan from a Nasik businessman.

Gadakh then bulldozed local government agencies into action, selling 150 plots and registering as many small-scale units in just one day. "We haven't looked back since," says Gadakh, who has been expelled twice from the Congress(I) but was readmitted again recently. He adds that industrial units with a Rs 2.5-crore investment are already functioning and larger units like Bharat Gears, Trimbak Rubber, Fibre Foam and 21st Century Ceramics—with a total investment of Rs 30 crore—are in the process of coming up.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Gadakh at pipe factory: amazing effort

One man's vision and drive have created an industrial cooperative and provided jobs in a rural wasteland.

A beaming Dilip Shinde, sarpanch of Musalgaon (population: 3,000), says that 450 people of his village are employed at the estate. The employment guarantee scheme, the economic mainstay since 1972 when drought began stalking the area, is no longer popular. Says Shinde: "Now nobody goes to work on that scheme." And Suryabhan Kondaji Gangawane, 30, whose family earned little from the 15 acres it sold to the cooperative, now earns Rs 500 a month as a precision cutter.

More remarkable, a few villagers have even turned entrepreneurs. Sitaram Chaudhri, 37, from the neighbouring Nipad taluka's Dikshi village, has set up Trimurti Enterprises, an electroplating unit, with a Rs 3-lakh government loan. Chaudhri, formerly an electroplater at Kirloskar Oil Engines, Pune, now chromeplates chair frames for a Nasik manufacturer and employs 10 workers, three of whom he has taught the skill himself.

Interestingly, the first factory to be inaugurated at Sinnar in 1984 belonged to another cooperative promoted by Gadakh. Even as he set up the industrial cooperative, he initiated a Rs 4.5-crore lift irrigation cooperative scheme to carry water 10 km from the Godavari to three hilly villages with water scarcity.

Since the major expenditure of the scheme was on cement pipes, Gadakh unconventionally decided that the cooperative should have its own pipe manufacturing unit. This would not only ensure cheap pipes for this venture but also for seven similar schemes (combined cost: Rs 22 crore) to supply water to 23 villages that are in the pipeline.

But after producing 10,000 pipes worth Rs 1.35 crore, the unit has run into trouble. With only Rs 40 lakh worth of pipes to produce to get the first scheme going, the unit has had to cease operations over four months ago because the Nasik District Central Cooperative Bank stopped loan payments. The hurdle ostensibly is differences over cost assessments but is actually due to local politics. It means that Gadakh cannot start the other schemes which would benefit 13,000 farmers.

Sinnar is, nevertheless, a successful example of the official policy of encouraging industrial cooperatives at the taluka level. Using the cooperative as the core (technically, only 50 acres come under the cooperative, which can only have small-scale units with an investment of less than Rs 30 lakh), Gadakh has shrewdly created a multi-level industrial estate with medium and large-scale units on the periphery.

Since Sinnar is industrially backward, entrepreneurs avail of greater tax concessions than nearby Nasik. Some, like Sudhakar Karandikar of Ring Gears, are engineer-entrepreneurs who decided on Sinnar to set up their maiden ventures also because of access to Nasik, Pune and Bombay, their main markets.

For Gadakh, who was orphaned as a child and ran away from his foster home to join the communists, there is no irony in his now welcoming industrialists at the impressive STCIE office. Says he: "We cannot do without industrial development, but it should not be centralised. Each tehsil should have industrial units." In the course of fulfilling his own dream, Gadakh has fulfilled those of many others by creating employment and a model of rural progress.

—M. RAHMAN

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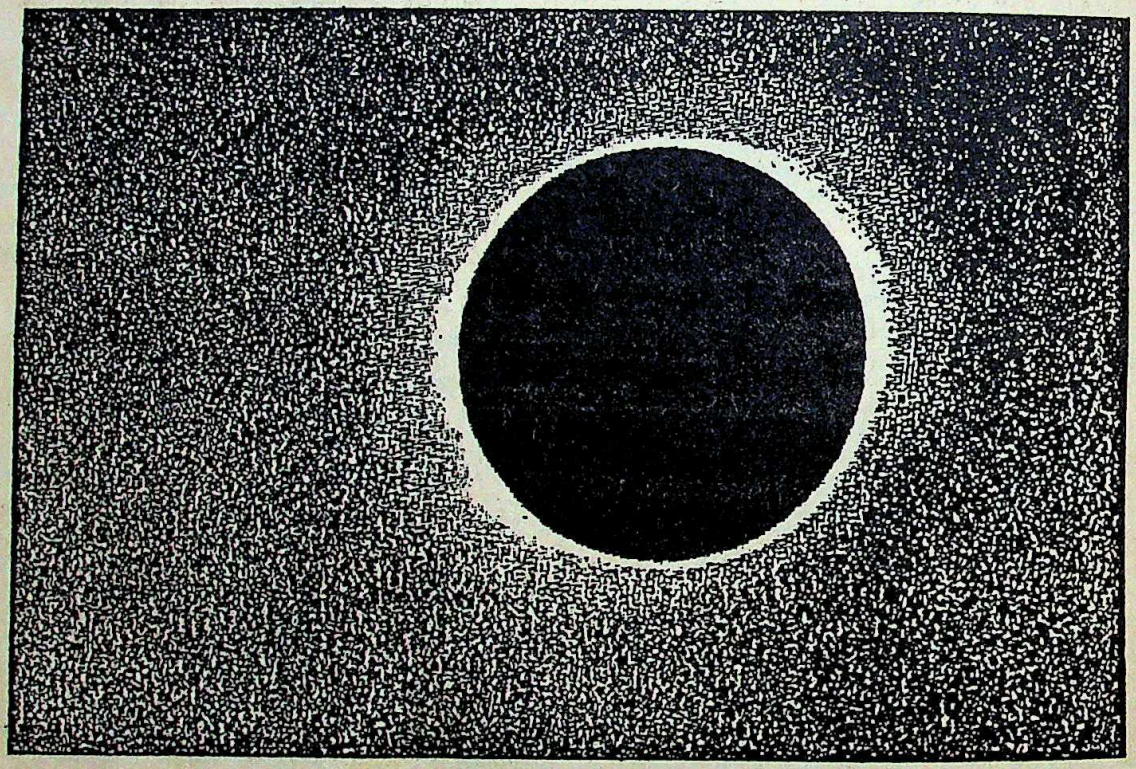

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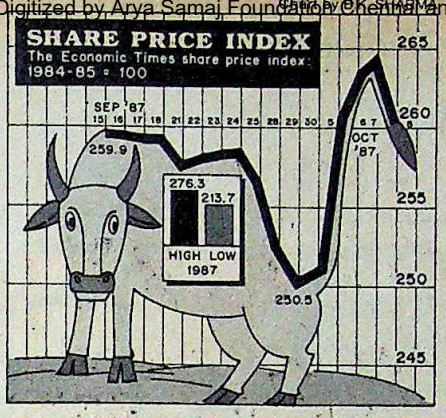
THE MARKETS

Dull Days

No action in trading ring



THE stock-markets across the country ceased to be exciting places long ago. And last fortnight they were as dull as they come. Nothing happened for a week, then there was a brief inexplicable spurt—of the kind that defies logic—then nothing again.

The institutions moved in and pulled out without making much of a difference either way. Other investors showed even less interest in the proceedings, trading volumes shrank, and a new panel of experts hummed and hawed about removing restrictions on trading. Nobody seemed to be very interested in making or losing money. Or perhaps most people saw no opportunity for either on a decidedly lackadaisical market.

Cricket was providing most of the action. And the company that promoted the cricket, Reliance, had the only notable piece of action in the trading ring as well. The share price shot up from Rs 92 to Rs 125.50, even as a Rs 200-crore rights share issue was launched.

Where there's Reliance, there's Bombay Dyeing, whose shares also went up following a forecast of another good year. Ashok Leyland—about to change hands this month—also notched up some gains (who was buying after the closing date for share bids in London?). But the two Tata giants rolled back, although TELCO successfully closed a Rs 106-crore convertible debenture issue (with some help from financial institutions). TISCO, however, decided to postpone its own rights issue for better times on the market. Larsen & Toubro, which had come in for notice earlier because of a sudden spurt in prices that seemed to signal a stock-market raid, now lost ground and fell back.

The coming weeks could see investors trying to get rid of their present holdings to raise the liquidity to contribute to the rush of new issues expected to be on offer—one calculation puts them at about Rs 700 crore in the next 10 weeks. That could depress the market further and prevent the new shares and debentures from being offered till later.

Unless the market does something completely unpredictable, there is every reason to expect that trading will stay subdued till authorities lift or ease restrictions on trading. This cannot be postponed indefinitely, and freer trading could bring about a fresh drop in share prices, especially when investors are already keen to disinvest and gain liquidity. But the panel of experts have also suggested ways of cheering up the market. Nevertheless, the bulls are panic-stricken by the prospect of freer trading. If share prices do fall, that will be the best time for choosy buyers to pick up low-value shares with high yield potential. That's not a bad prospect at Diwali time.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 8.10.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	47.25	28.00	42.25	4.75 +
Associated Cement	241.50	133.00	148.00	2.00 +
Atlas Copco	152.00	53.00	53.00	10.00 –
Associated Bearings	1410.00	500.00	1140.00	nil
Bajaj Auto	5860.00	3950.00	5525.00	150.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	145.00	172.50	5.00 –
Bata India	160.00	64.00	68.50	0.50 –
Bayer	785.00	375.00	390.00	5.00 –
Bharat Forge	140.00	63.00	132.00	10.00 +
Birla Jute	58.00	40.00	42.00	1.00 –
Blow Plast	178.00	92.50	145.00	3.75 –
Bombay Dyeing	143.00	40.50	104.00	8.00 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	97.00	105.00	nil
Brooke Bond	109.00	77.00	95.00	3.00 –
Ceat Tyres	75.00	45.00	74.00	3.00 +
Century Enka	1175.00	815.00	930.00	10.00 –
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	80.00	4.00 +
Cirargia	77.50	53.00	74.00	3.00 –
Colgate	415.00	205.00	215.00	10.00 –
DCM	47.00	23.00	27.75	0.50 –
Dunlop	101.50	71.25	86.25	1.75 –
E.I. Hotels	56.00	41.00	46.00	2.50 –
Escorts	84.00	39.00	39.00	1.00 –
Finolex Cables	380.00	114.00	371.25	3.75 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	141.25	7.75 –
Garware Nylon	36.00	20.00	22.50	0.50 –
G.E. Shipping	35.50	16.00	29.25	1.25 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	183.50	76.00	80.00	7.00 –
Grasim Ind.	118.00	80.00	109.00	3.50 +
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	115.00	3.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	212.50	1.25 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	74.00	78.00	1.50 –
Hindustan Motors	35.35	16.70	25.30	5.00 +
Hind. Dorr	407.50	152.50	182.50	12.50 –
ITC	64.75	38.00	40.00	5.50 –
Indian Organic	78.00	30.00	35.50	5.50 +
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	56.50	2.00 –
Indrol	510.00	160.00	240.00	5.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	360.00	265.00	340.00	15.00 –
ITC	78.00	40.00	51.50	nil
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	55.00	0.25 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	175.00	215.00	15.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	52.50	nil
KSB Pumps	480.00	220.00	452.50	52.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	107.00	67.00	84.00	12.00 –
Lipton	79.50	57.00	69.00	9.00 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	9.50	12.00	nil
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	53.00	0.50 +
McDowell	108.50	41.50	92.00	1.00 –
Motor Industries	695.00	317.50	580.00	55.00 –
Mukand Iron	89.50	62.00	81.50	2.50 +
National Organic	577.50	382.50	495.00	52.50 +
Nirlon	26.00	7.25	8.25	0.50 +
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	27.00	29.00	nil
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	225.00	12.50 –
Pelco Electronics	57.25	36.00	39.00	4.50 –
Ponds	405.00	222.50	352.50	17.50 +
Premier Auto	33.00	17.00	29.00	1.00 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	77.50	12.50 –
Raymond	109.00	48.00	96.00	3.00 –
Reckitt & Colman	225.50	143.00	200.00	1.00 +
Reliance Industries	277.00	92.00	125.50	29.50 +
Richardson Hind.	350.00	210.00	282.50	10.00 –
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	31.00	1.50 +
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	85.00	nil
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	85.00	6.00 –
SPIC	53.50	27.00	28.75	0.75 +
Tata Steel	1207.50	602.50	620.00	29.00 –
Telco	665.00	345.00	365.00	35.00 –
Wimco	56.50	21.50	22.50	1.00 –

*Ex dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.4107	9.3112
Austria	Schilling	1	1.0276	1.0167
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.2732	34.1688
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.8200	42.7461
Canada	Dollar	1	10.0919	9.9885
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.8818	1.8619
Egypt	Pound	1	9.3732	9.2122
France	Franc	1	2.2099	2.1505
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6876	1.6697
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0790	0.0699
Iran	Rial	100	18.1823	18.1301
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9700
Japan	Yen	100	9.15	8.95
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7900	0.7891
Kuwait	Dinar	1	48.5600	46.4900
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1747	5.1217
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9900	0.9780
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6193	0.5920
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.4238	6.3572
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7500	0.7000
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.2857	6.2207
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0971	0.0900
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4390	0.4099
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0598	2.0379
Switzerland	Franc	1	8.5401	8.5150
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2090	0.2000
Thailand	Baht	100	51.3440	50.9720
UK	Pound	1	21.5727	21.4425
USA	Dollar	1	13.1750	13.0450
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5730	3.5413
USSR	Rouble	1	20.5730	20.5200
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.3475	7.1633

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 8.10.87.

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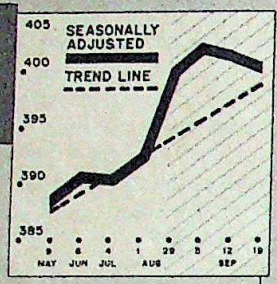
INFLATION is rapidly becoming the primary problem that the beleaguered economy has to overcome, and this is while the full impact of the drought has yet to come. In the final reckoning, however, it will be the performance of industries as well as the management of foodgrains and money supply that will determine the shape of things to come.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
8.2% p.a.

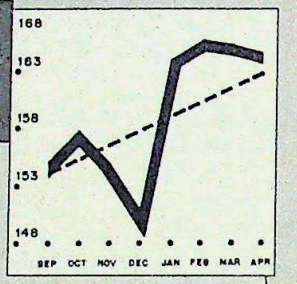


Prices have increased further. Inflation was up from 6.9 per cent in early September to 8.2 per cent this fortnight.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.5% p.a.

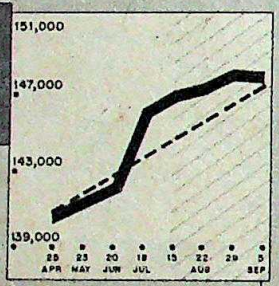


Industrial output continues to grow at over 9 per cent. But, with the drought, a recession is bound to set in.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.1% p.a.

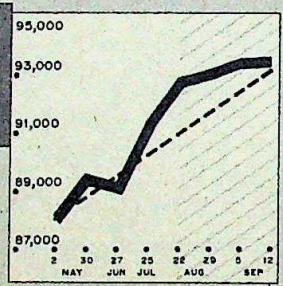


Money supply remains under control. But there is a dilemma: more money for drought relief may fuel inflation.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
16.3% p.a.

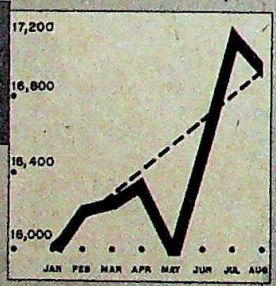


Bank credit has expanded by 0.5 per cent last fortnight—most of which has gone to the government sector.

Electricity Generation

Million KwH

Current Trend
9.5% p.a.

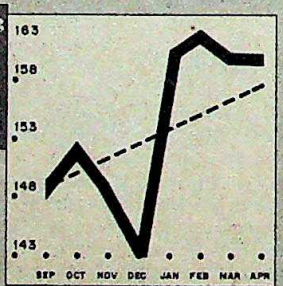


Hydel generation has fallen dramatically. Thankfully, thermal plants have, more or less, made up the shortfall.

Manufacturing Output

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.7% p.a.

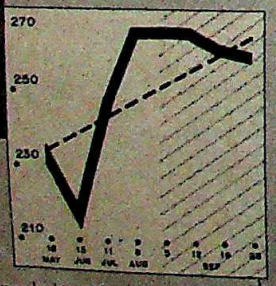


There has been a slight dip in manufacturing output in March-April, but the trend remains same as before.

Share Price Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
33% p.a.

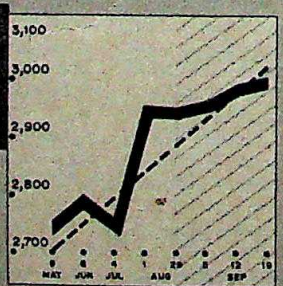


Share prices dipped a bit in the course of the last fortnight, but the overall trend is more buoyant than earlier.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
31.8% p.a.



Gold keeps increasing in value and that is not surprising in an inflationary situation. Prices were up 1.4 per cent last fortnight.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in first fortnight of September 1987

	% Growth
Maize	21.53
Gur	14.05
Chillies	12.85
Ghee	10.73
Betel-Nuts	8.24
Silk Raw	7.73
Urad	3.84
Nylon, Terene & Mixed Cloth	3.01
Milk	2.93
Rice	2.82
Tin Containers	2.68
Tea	2.64
Cotton Seed	2.61
Maida	2.60
Groundnut Seeds	2.36
Art Silk & Artificial Yarn	2.29
Bananas	2.27
Taploca	2.25
Copper & Alloys	2.02
Cement	1.84
Pesticides & Insecticides	1.79
Ragi	1.53
Turmeric	1.50
Butter	1.47
Logs, Timber & Bamboo	1.43
Cars	1.40
Zinc	1.38
Barley	1.34
Jowar	1.27
Rails	1.19
Synthetic Fibres	1.10
Polythene Moulding Powder	1.05
Khandsari	1.03
Board	1.02
Cotton Yarn	0.98
Machine Tools	0.96
Groundnut Oil	0.95
Pig Iron	0.92
Cigarettes	0.89
Furnace Oil	0.84
Jute Textiles	0.82
Skelp	0.82
PVC Compounds	0.79
Steel Structurals	0.76
Limestone	0.76
Diesel Oil	0.74

Of the 139 series considered, 79 of them with a total weight of 54.598 had a positive growth and 58 of them with a total weight of 30.708 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1988
Fertilisers Thousand Tonnes, August	571.1	597.7
Letters of Intent Issued Numbers, August	44	82
Industrial Licences Issued Numbers, August	30	32
Plant Load Factor Per cent, August	51.5	44.8
Call Money Rate Per cent, August	9.97	10.0

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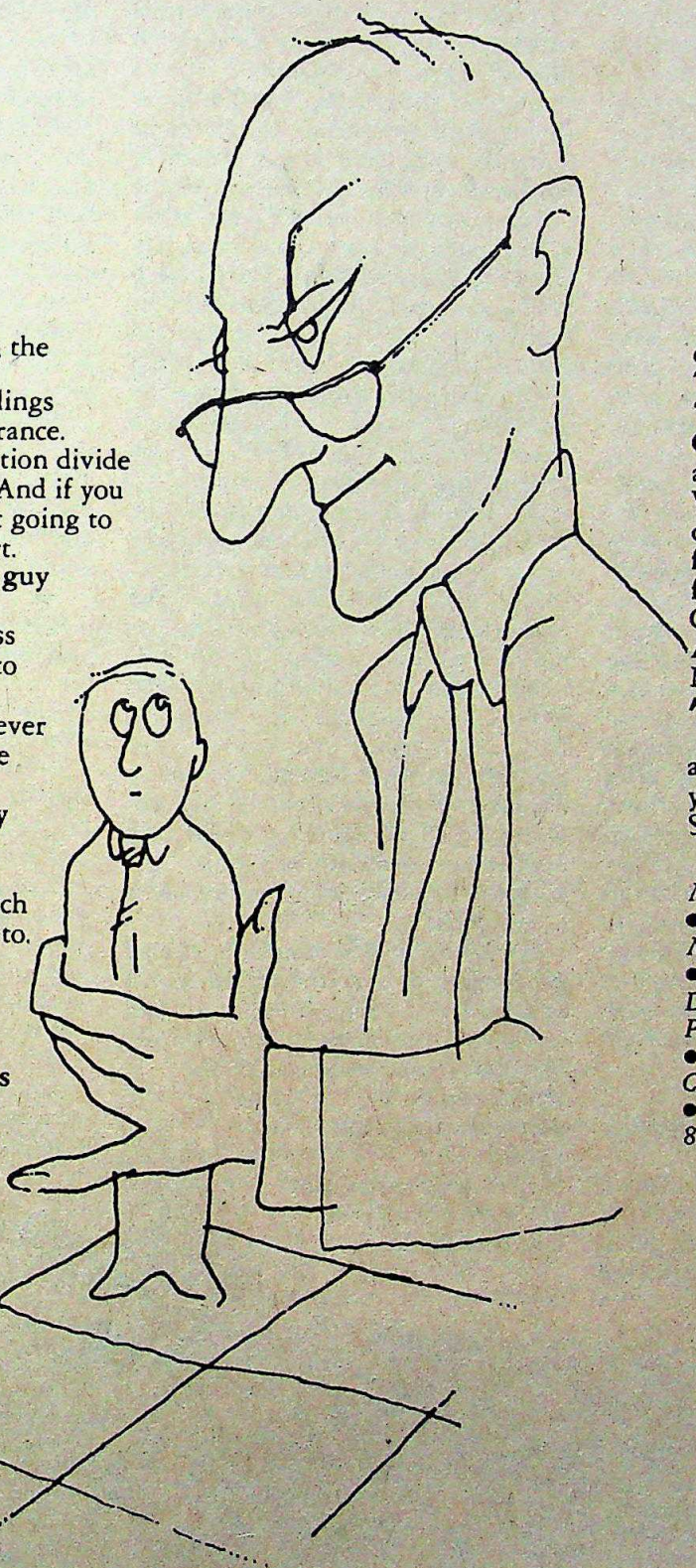

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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

MAKES YOUR BOSS THINK AHEAD OF YOU

R.KANGA/ET/5A/87

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SHRIDATH RAMPHAL

"Our influence in Fiji is limited"

SHRIDATH Surendranath "Sonny" Ramphal, 58, is the archetypal international diplomat. A member of the Palme, Humanitarian and South commissions, addressing issues ranging from disarmament and environment to development, he is one of the most avidly sought-after figures by UN forums or universities to speak on topics from dismantling apartheid in South Africa to the Third World's debt crisis.

Since he became secretary-general of the Commonwealth in June 1975, after being foreign minister and minister of justice of his native Guyana, the Commonwealth membership has grown from 34 to 49—nearly one-third of the world community of nations, embracing a quarter of the global population.

His most testing period came last year when Britain adamantly refused to go along with the rest of the Commonwealth in applying economic sanctions against South Africa. The crisis passed, which Ramphal insists, enhanced the Commonwealth's prestige. But sceptics point out that the Commonwealth has in fact been stymied on the South African issue, has so far done little about the Fiji problem, and has contributed little to solving problems like the Third World debt crisis.

But when Editor AROON PURIE *and London Correspondent* RAMESH CHANDRAN *met Ramphal last fortnight for an interview at his sumptuous offices in Carlton Gardens, central London, Ramphal seemed confident that the shadow of the Fijian crisis hanging over the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (*CHOGM*) in Vancouver would also be dispelled. Excerpts:*

Q. How does the Commonwealth view the political crisis in Fiji?

A. I see the Fijian crisis as having a number of dimensions. One is clearly the racist overtones of what has been going on in Fiji. What is being structured for the future of the country strikes a discordant note within the Commonwealth. The attempt to establish a republic raises questions of its Commonwealth membership. The Commonwealth has no intrinsic problem with republican status, but it has very clear conventions about the procedure a country follows in making such a fundamental change in its constitutional system.

Q. Is there a need for a consensus within the Commonwealth for a Fijian Republic to remain a member?

A. Yes. The procedure is that if the country wishes to remain a member of the Commonwealth after it has chosen to become a republic, the consent of the Commonwealth is necessary and it involves unanimity. Such a consent is not to be taken for granted. South Africa, in fact, left the Commonwealth when this consent was not forthcoming. The accepted practice is that the country, after having decided to become a republic, signifies its intention whether it wishes to remain a member—as India did in 1949, or as Sri Lanka, Ghana or my own country did.

Q. What you are saying is that the Commonwealth does not recognise the legitimacy of Rabuka's government.

A. I will be quite clear on this. The situation in Fiji is an evolving one. If it does not change, it is unlikely that Colonel Rabuka's republic will be acknowledged by the Commonwealth. The courts in Fiji have clearly stated that they consider what has happened as illegal. The Governor-General has said that he has not accepted Colonel Rabuka's decree. The Commonwealth governments have not accepted the validity of Colonel Rabuka's decree either.

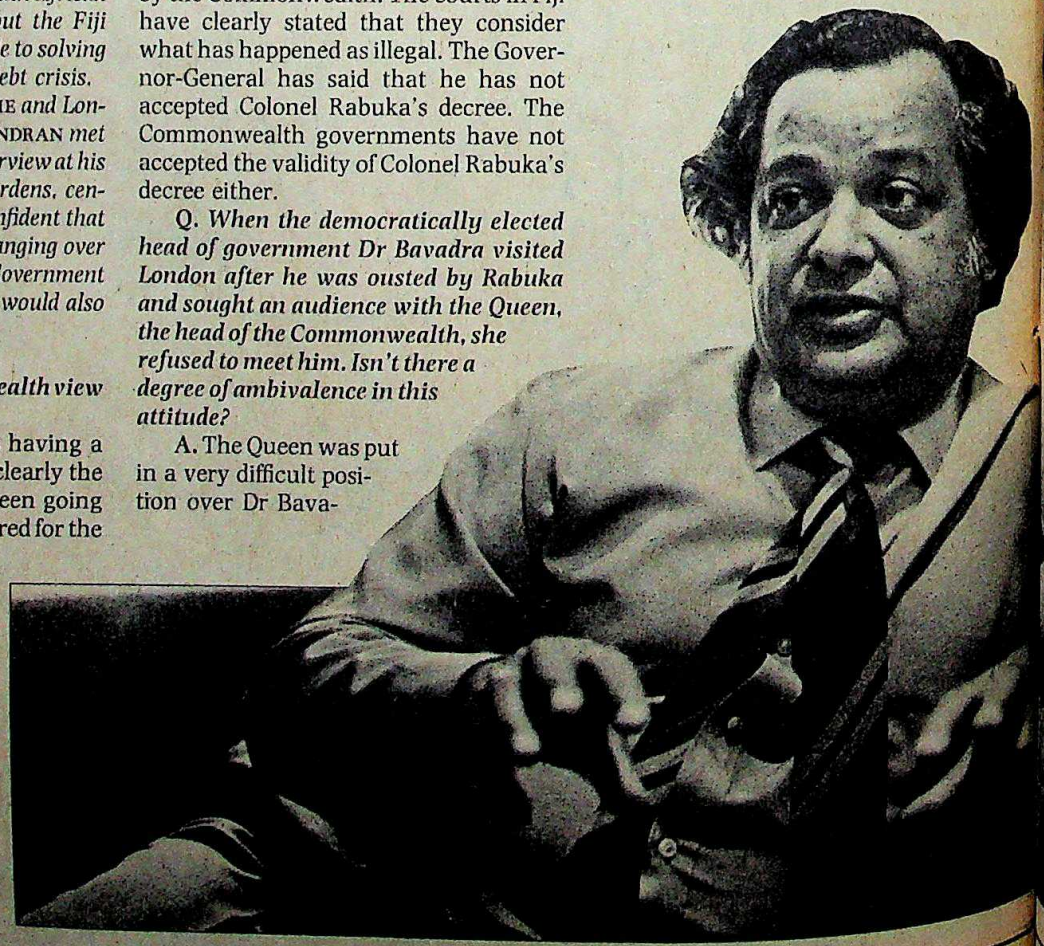
Q. When the democratically elected head of government Dr Bavadra visited London after he was ousted by Rabuka and sought an audience with the Queen, the head of the Commonwealth, she refused to meet him. Isn't there a degree of ambivalence in this attitude?

A. The Queen was put in a very difficult position over Dr Bavadra's visit. He visited Britain at a time when the Governor-General was attempting to assert his authority as the Queen's representative in Fiji. The Queen would have had advice on this matter from the Governor-General. So she invited him to meet with her Private Secretary, Sir William Heseltine, who happens to be an extremely senior official. I personally advised Dr Bavadra to take up this offer.

Q. Do you think it would be a sensible move if Commonwealth nations decided to impose economic sanctions to put pressure on Colonel Rabuka?

A. Well, I think such a move would be understandable and predictable. I would expect such a move could be in a national or regional context involving Australia and New Zealand and not a coordinated Commonwealth move.

Q. The current* CHOGM *in Vancouver occurs at a critical period. Can it do something more to influence the situa-



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...ght in Fiji?

A. Yes, the conference takes place at ...n extremely critical time. But our capac...y to influence the Fijian situation is ...imited primarily because of the military ...haracter of the situation.

Q. The Commonwealth often talks ...bout sanctions which prove largely ...ffectual, as best illustrated by the ...South African example. Pretoria has con...tinued to be intransigent and sanctions ...have extracted no concessions.

A. As far as sanctions against South ...frica are concerned, we have had sharp ...ifferences within the Commonwealth. ...he Commonwealth, with the exception ...f Britain, is very determined in its posi...on that economic sanctions against ...outh Africa should be applied rigorously. ...he British Government dissents.

Q. And you see no chance of a change ...n that attitude from the British?

A. I see no change in that attitude for ...he moment. But that does not mean there ...hould not be other areas of response to ...outh Africa in which Commonwealth ...ountries can cooperate.

Q. You have maintained that the list ...f banks and companies that have with...drawn their operations from South Af...rica is lengthening. Is the economic sanc...tions campaign conducted by the Com...monwealth in some way responsible?

A. I think it has a great deal to do with ...he Commonwealth. It is the impact of the ...ommonwealth effort on sanctions that ...as struck a responsive chord in people. ...he British Government may take a posi...tion on sanctions but the British people ...ay not be ready to do business with a ...ank operating in South Africa. And the ...anks have been responsive, not to the ...ews of the Government, but of the ...eople, since this affects their business.

Q. Can you put your finger on why Mrs Thatcher and her Government are so tenaciously opposed to sanctions?

A. You know Mrs Thatcher's argument—she says sanctions are not effective. It is not an argument accepted by the rest of the Commonwealth, which maintains that for sanctions to be effective it requires universality, and if a major trading partner of South Africa chooses to stand aside, you diminish the chances of its success. Britain's action of withholding involvement in economic sanctions is thus a self-fulfilling prophecy that sanctions will not work.

> **"I have seen a deepening of the informal character of these meetings (Commonwealth summits), as well as the leaders' resolve to make fuller use of collective action."**

Q. But the sanctions which have been imposed so far by the Commonwealth have hardly made an impact.

A. I don't accept that argument. I believe that the total impact of sanctions on South Africa is real. Pretoria is more troubled about sanctions than anything else. I believe what is going on in the area of disinvestment, which is part of the sanctions process, is extremely worrying to the South African economy. At the same time, none of us have argued that economic sanctions alone will end apartheid. Sanctions are part of the overall international pressure on South Africa. That pressure has got to be sustained.

Q. The Commonwealth also seems powerless before South Africa's overt destabilisation campaign against the front-line states.

A. This is a matter that concerns us directly. Three Commonwealth countries—Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Malawi—have troops in Mozambique. The British Government is providing military training to the armies of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. When we look at the areas where the Commonwealth can cooperate beyond economic assistance to the front-line states, I point to security issues. I see this as an area where there are no fundamental differences among us.

Q. It has been suggested that Pakistan has sought re-entry into the Commonwealth. What is the Commonwealth's position on its re-admission?

A. Yes, Pakistan has expressed interest and there have been informal discussions. But I do not expect the Vancouver conference to provide an answer to the Pakistan question. Here again, we need unanimity among the members.

Q. Is India enthusiastic about Pakistan's re-admission?

A. Why don't you ask India this question?

Q. We always seem to hear more about the political squabbles and dissensions within the Commonwealth. Do you see the Commonwealth as a body that serves any purpose?

A. I think it is indeed a very useful body. It is a group of vastly disparate nations which have some commonality of views, and the greatest need today is the convergence of views between different countries. Increasingly, other countries and blocs like Eastern Europe or EEC now speak of the Commonwealth's uniqueness and its real value. Many of them thought the Commonwealth would not have the capacity to survive the differences which cropped up in London and Nassau. But we did, and enhanced our prestige and credibility. But I think even our political differences are amplified by the media. After all, at Nassau, there was broad agreement on 20 to 25 political issues and there was a measure of difference only on the range of sanctions which the British Government was willing to accept.

Q. Do the leaders of the Commonwealth today take these summits seriously or consider them as useful?

A. Of course they do. A measure of their keenness to attend Commonwealth summits is their willingness to set aside this kind of time to attend a meeting like Vancouver. You can ask any of the prime ministers—they will tell you that this is one occasion in the calendar when they can have a dialogue with one another, thrash out issues face to face.

Q. You have been the secretary-general of the Commonwealth since 1975. What have been the most striking changes in these summits?

A. I have seen a progressive deepening of the informal character of these meetings, as well as the leaders' resolve to make fuller use of their potential for purposeful discussion and for collective action.

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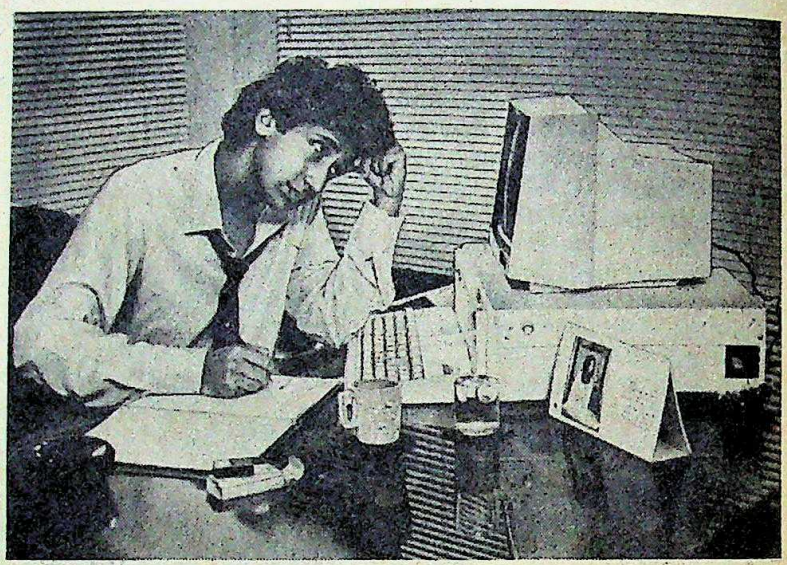

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Reuter

Mob attacks Lhasa central police station; and (below left): increasing defiance

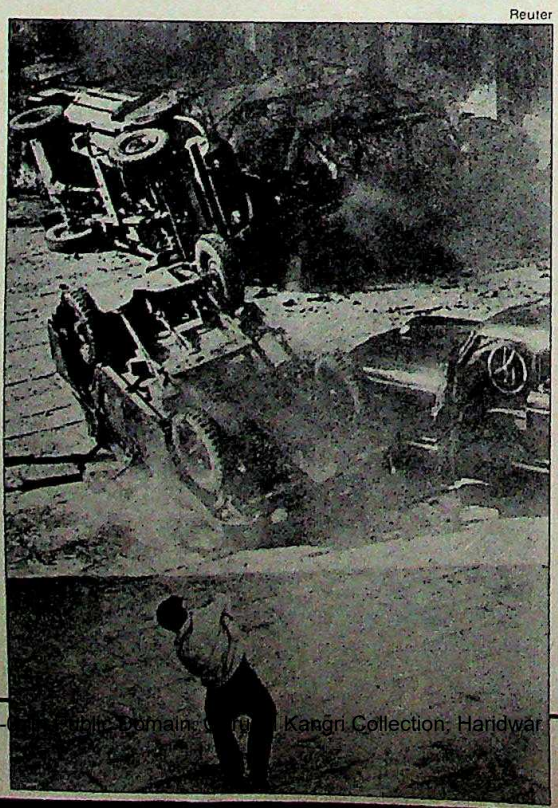
CHINA

The Tibetan Tangle

Riots explode in Lhasa and resurrect a dormant issue

IT started as a routine public trial of petty criminals in the sports stadium of the Forbidden City, Lhasa (population 1.6 lakh), capital of Chinese-occupied Tibet, on September 24. But the three days of rioting and anti-Chinese demonstrations that followed were the most serious in the nearly three decades since Beijing seized final control of Tibet in 1959. More important, it suddenly resurrected the dormant Tibet issue into screaming international headlines. The trigger for the riots may have been the Lhasa show trials but the impetus obviously came from Washington where the Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of the Tibetans was busy garnering American public support for his homeland's distinct identity from the Chinese and a better deal for his people. But the seeds of the latest uprising were obviously laid before his departure for the US. The 11 people who were being tried in Lhasa were not political prisoners, according to first-hand reports. But Chinese officials, over-reacting to Dalai Lama's overtures in the US, decided to use the occasion to remind the Tibetans that they were Chinese subjects.

Reuter



According to eyewitness reports from Lhasa: "Every family was ordered to send one representative to witness the trials and the police officials repeated in front of the 15,000 people present that any kind of crime would be met with an iron fist" According to eyewitness reports from western tourists, the resentment in Lhasa over the Chinese political propaganda at the trials, where one person was publicly executed, started building up rapidly, catching the Chinese unprepared. Local Tibetans launched a poster war against the official propaganda while monks from Sera monastery, one of the three major monasteries in Lhasa, demonstrated at the

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RAGHU RAI

Buddhist monks protest in Dharamsala

Barkhor Square alongwith crowds waving the Tibetan flag. The monks were rounded up and sent to the police station for interrogation. But the city was soon flooded with rumours that they were tortured and were to be executed.

On October 1, as China celebrated its national day, the Tibetans took to the Lhasa streets, especially in front of the police station where the monks were under detention. "First, stones were thrown mainly by women and children", one report states, "Police cameramen on the roof of Jokhang are badly beaten and driven out by monks". The police blockading the entrance of police stations with vehicles which were set ablaze by the protestors. The riots were brought under control only when Beijing flew in reinforcements—by then at least 12 Tibetans, including some monks and two children, had been killed or seriously wounded when the army opened fire on the crowd near the Jokhang Temple, Tibet's holiest shrine. According to the reports, four Chinese soldiers were also killed. The violence was easily the worst in Tibet since the massive Chinese crackdown in 1959 which forced the Dalai Lama and his followers to flee to India.

But the unrest in Tibet is equally embarrassing, in diplomatic terms, for New Delhi. So far, South Block has managed to play its Tibet card with commendable skill. But the latest riots could not have come at a worse time—the next round of border talks with Beijing are scheduled for November 13 and New Delhi will obviously refrain from clouding the atmosphere. When the Dalai Lama announced his intention to hold a press conference at Dharamsala last fortnight—his first on Indian soil since 1959—Beijing asked the Indian Government to restrain him from any political activity in India. South Block tried to stop the press conference, and failing which, finally persuaded him to tone down his comments. But officially, South Block made its stand clear. "We have never recognised their government-in-exile and now it is time to state clearly that our hospitality to Tibetans is purely on humanitarian grounds," a spokesman said.

What New Delhi was clearly worried about was any militant support for the Tibetans originating on Indian soil "which would have a negative effect on our efforts to better Indo-China relations" as a foreign ministry official put it. Under pressure from the Indian Government, the Dalai Lama avoided any personal comment on the future of the Tibetan movement at his press conference.

The Lhasa protests, however, have energised the 1.2 lakh Tibetan refugees in India. From the shanty town of Majnu Ka tila in Delhi and a secluded settlement in Mundgod in Karnataka to McLeod Ganj in Dharamsala, pro-Independence rallies were held by monks in their saffron robes, jeans-clad youth and schoolchildren.

But the official Indian reaction has proved a dampener for the Tibetan refugees in India. "We had tall hopes from India. The country which has championed human rights movements in Namibia, Nicaragua and Sri Lanka is closing its eyes to something in its backyard", said Chodak Gyatso, 28, a member of the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile.

But there is not much the Tibetan exiles can do without the Indian Government's approval. Says Tsering Thondup, vice-president of the Tibetan Youth Congress: "We have to show restraint as it will embarrass the Indian Government if we launch a violent protest from Indian soil".

Of more concern to Beijing was the diplomatic fall-out of the Lhasa protests in

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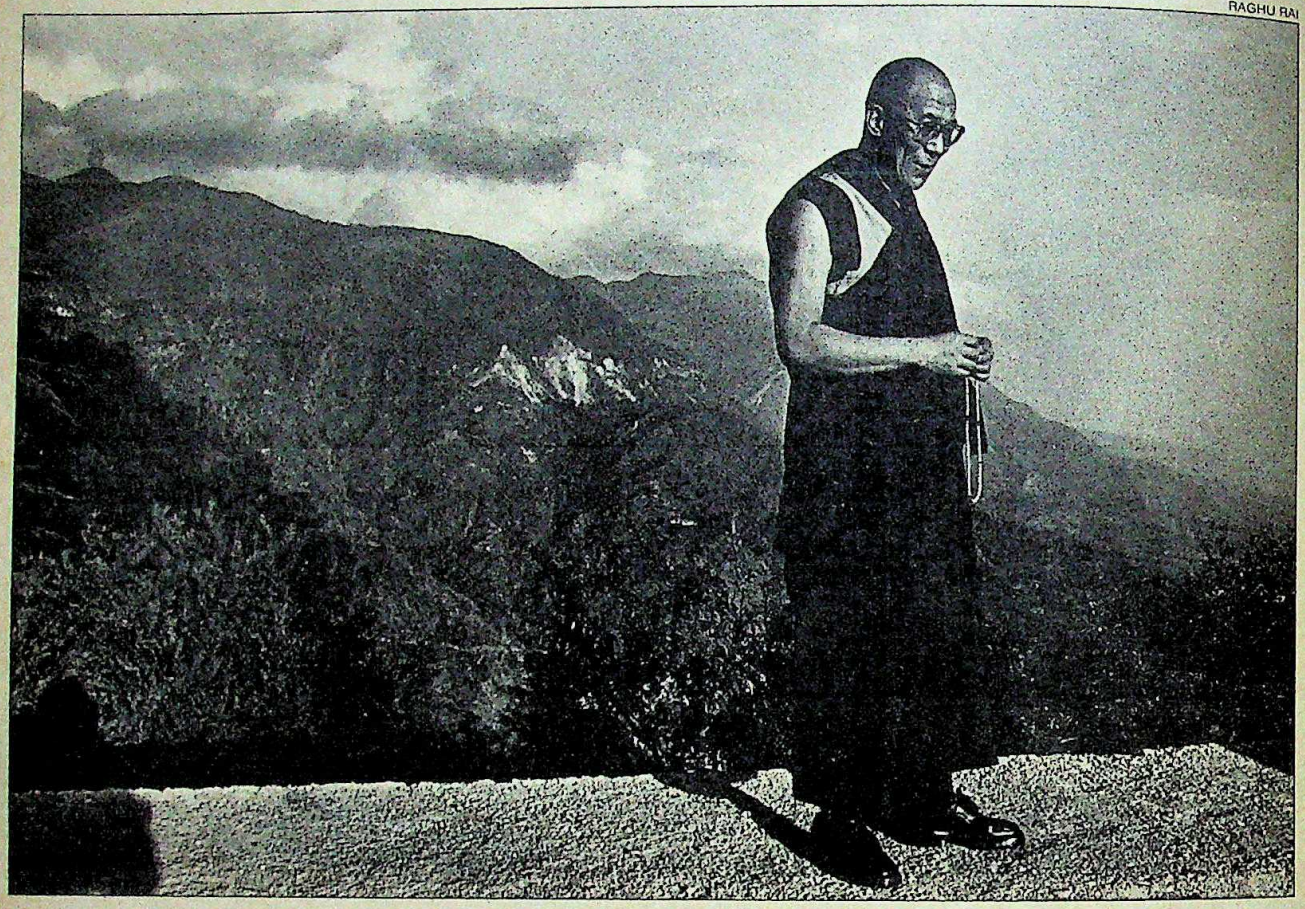
RAGHU RAI

DALAI LAMA

"India should find a solution"

At the Himalayan headquarters of his government-in-exile in picturesque Dharamsala last fortnight, the spiritual head of the Tibetans gave his first press conference on Indian soil since he was forced to flee for his life 28 years ago. Mcleod Ganj, called 'Little Lhasa' in Dharamsala was unprepared for the massive influx of international journalists who descended on the city expecting a major announcement. But under pressure from New Delhi, the Dalai Lama was circumspect in his comments on the situation in Tibet. However, he later agreed to an exclusive interview with VIJAY KRANTI *where he was more forthcoming in his views. Excerpts.*

Q. *Why have the Tibetans suddenly decided to agitate inside Tibet?*

A. The situation has been becoming clearer in recent times because of more and more tourists going to Tibet. Because of this people outside have been able to know more about conditions prevailing inside Tibet. I think this has generated more interest and sympathy towards Tibet all over the world and obviously had its impact on Tibetans living in Tibet too. Thus they found a more favourable atmosphere to express their feelings openly.

Q. *Do you think this new phase of public unrest is significant enough to improve chances of Tibetan freedom ?*

A. Yes, I think so. But I also know that the path to freedom is very very long.There are many obstacles and it is not going to be an easy job either. After all China is a big country and, strategically speaking, Tibet is very important to them. Moreover, Tibet has also many other economic uses for China.

Q. *But can the Tibetans fight this out on their own ?*

A. Unless there is some kind of very effective pressure from outside this is going to be quite a difficult task. As far as the determination among Tibetans is concerned it is very much there, especially among the younger generation who have better education and better knowledge. Now the only other thing which is important is world opinion and world pressure.

Q. *How do you look at the sympathy and support expressed by the US Congress and Senate towards your cause?*

A. Of course I am happy. I think this is just a beginning. They are thinking seriously about the human rights problem. But this is just an expression of public opinion. It is not a government policy. Still it is a positive start.

Q. *Do you think this is going to have its impact on other countries too?*

A. We look at it as real support based on moral principles. It is an important development. Earlier many countries and people have been trying to avoid showing their sympathy and concern for Tibetan people and Tibet for the simple reason that China is a big country. I hope those countries will change their attitude.

Q. *What about the Indian stand ?*

A. Although the Tibetan problem is a mutual problem of Tibet and India, yet

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the Indian Government is facing certain difficulties in taking a stand. India can make long-term benefits through this issue. But if this government neglects the issue for a few years more, then the influx of Chinese settlers will convert Tibet into a real Chinese land. By then it will be too late. So even if there are difficulties at present for India she should study this problem more seriously and find a solution. This will help and benefit India immensely in the long run.

Q. How are the interests of India and Tibet mutual ?

A. As I have suggested, Tibet should be made a zone of peace and should be demilitarised. This will surely help India because then she can use her resources for her economic development rather than spending a huge sum of money on her borders facing the Chinese Army.

Q. Do you think the Beijing leadership may now withdraw liberalisation in Tibet?

A. On this issue even Chinese leaders have been in a dilemma. I believe that a more liberal and humane policy would prove better in the long run even though they may make some immediate gains by adopting a policy of rigidity.

Q. What did you gain out of your new policy of establishing contact and a running dialogue with the Chinese Government? Do you intend to continue this dialogue?

A. Yes, I want to maintain this contact. Though this has been quite difficult and time-consuming, yet we find that it will help in developing mutual understanding. So far the problem is that whenever we have grievances the Chinese side unfortunately takes it as an anti-Chinese expression and our suggestions don't get into their head. But still I believe that things may change as time passes. So I think it is useful to keep a direct contact with them.

Q. The Chinese have blamed you personally for instigating the Tibetans inside Tibet. How do you react?

A. This is obviously an attempt to create an impression that all trouble is only because of some individual and that otherwise things are fine in Tibet. In the days of the Cultural Revolution so many mistakes were committed. Later they put all the blame on the Gang of Four to wash off their own hands. Now too they want to blame an individual rather than blaming the entire Tibetan population. But it doesn't affect me. I am happy that they decided to make me the scapegoat.

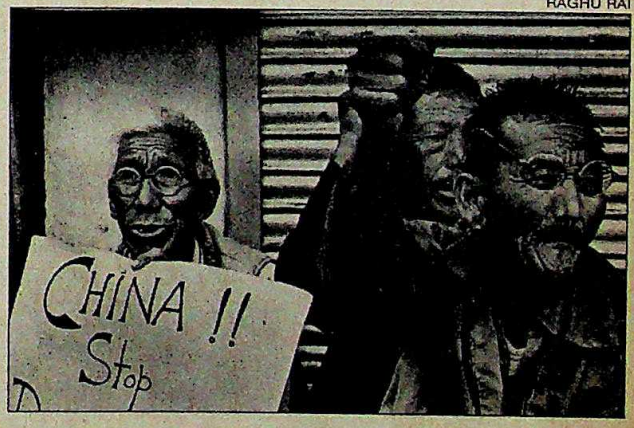
Washington, where the Dalai Lama had just earned impressive support from Capitol Hill. The major success of the Dalai Lama's mission was in floating a five-point peace proposal for opening talks on a new status for Tibet. They include:

► Declaration of Tibet as a zone of peace and withdrawal of Chinese troops;

► An end to the planned/ongoing Chinese migration to Tibet which has made Tibetans a minority in their native land;

RAGHU RAI

RAGHU RAI



Tibetan refugees in India: limited options

► Restoration of human rights of Tibetans and release of political prisoners;

► Restoration of Tibetan ecology and culture, including removal of military establishments from the area and the nuclear waste dumps;

► Commencement of a dialogue with China across the table for a new status for Tibet.

The statement was the first major political move by the Dalai Lama outside India which, to the consternation of Beijing, was seconded by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. Earlier, the US House of Representatives had adopted a unanimous resolution strongly condemning human rights violations by China in Tibet.

When the US Senate also adopted a resolution condemning the Chinese crackdown on Lhasa, the *Peoples' Daily*, the official Chinese organ, lashed out at the US Congressmen and warned them against deterioration in Sino-US relations. It claimed that the protests in Lhasa were a direct fall-out of the Dalai Lama's visit to the US. The Chinese are certainly aware that the recent trouble in Tibet would give the conservative communists a stick to beat the Deng Xiaopeng leadership and his liberalisation policy which allowed foreigners to enter Tibet.

The strong reaction to the Lhasa disturbances in Washington has posed serious problems for the State Department which was still in the process of doing damage control after the revelations that the Silkworm anti-shipping missiles employed by the Iranians against the US Navy in the Gulf were supplied by the Chinese.

Beijing on its part, has made every effort to ensure that there is no repeat of the riots. Massive reinforcements have been brought in to put the lid on any further ferment. But it will be a long time before the Chinese dragon can afford to sleep peacefully in Tibet, if ever again.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI and VIJAY KRANTI in Dharamsala with SHEKHAR GUPTA in Washington

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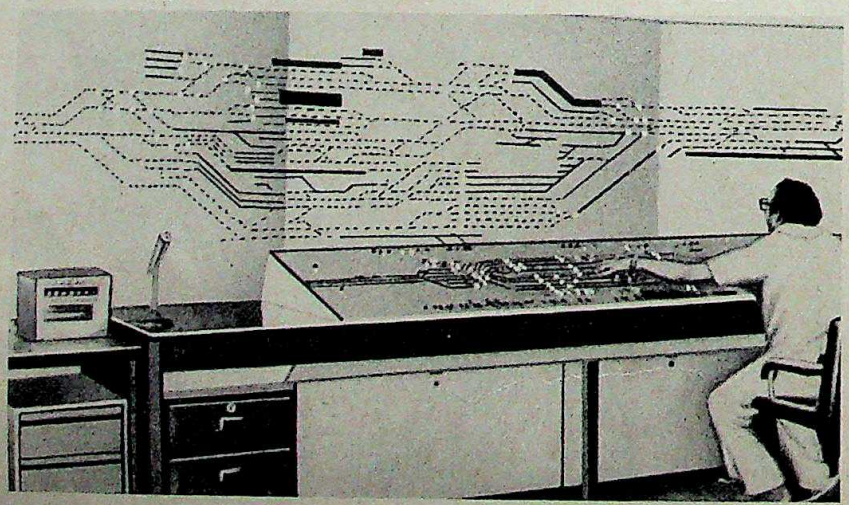

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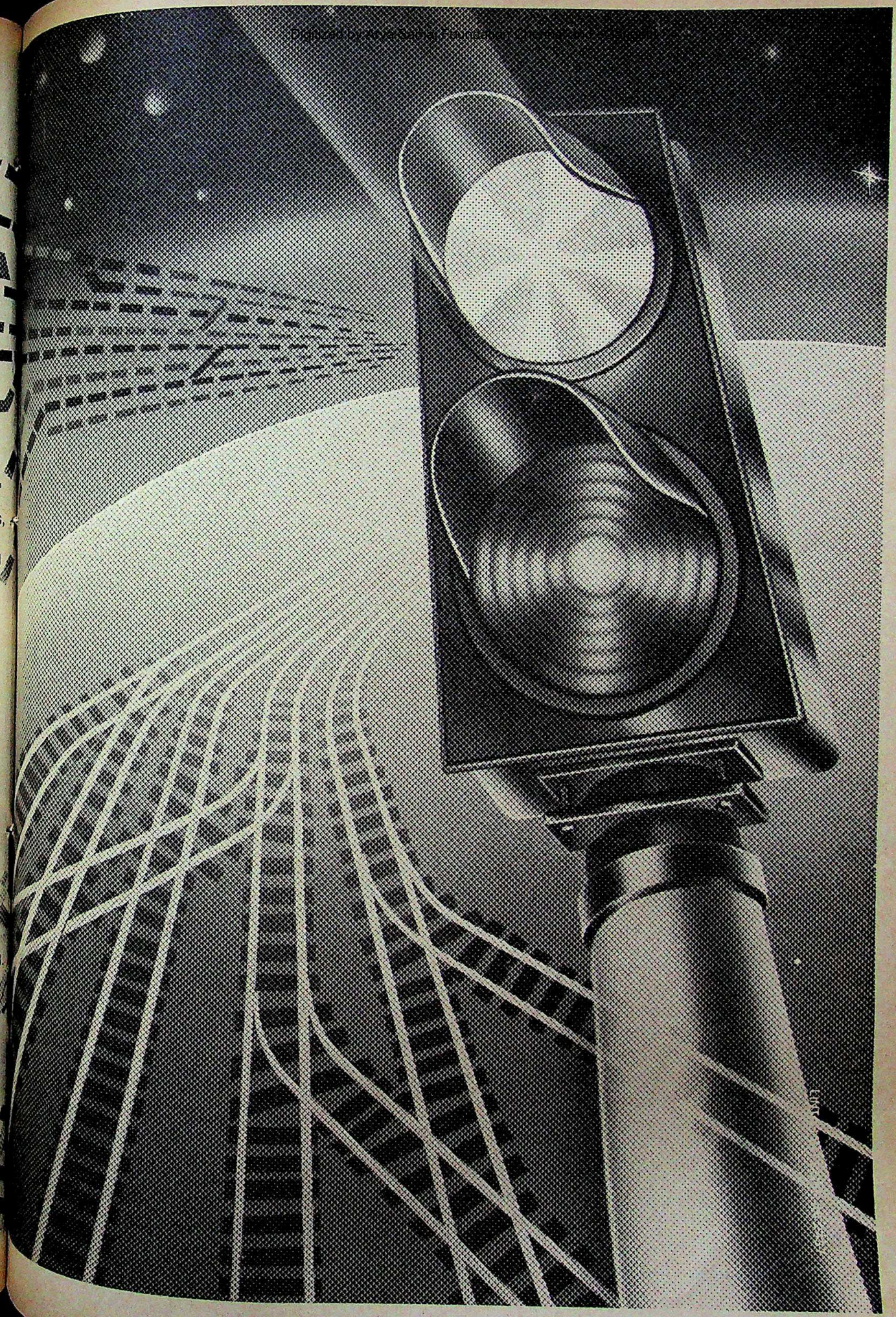

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SIACHEN GLACIER

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Battle of the Heights

Indian troops repulse a major Pakistani offensive

FOR days the Indian Army pickets stationed at Bilafond La, almost 20,000 feet high and overlooking the frozen wastes of the Siachen glacier, were expecting the Pakistani troops below to attack. Through their binoculars they had watched with consternation as the Pakistanis brought in more men and arms than ever before. The Indian commanders even informally sent word to their counterparts, warning them not to launch an offensive.

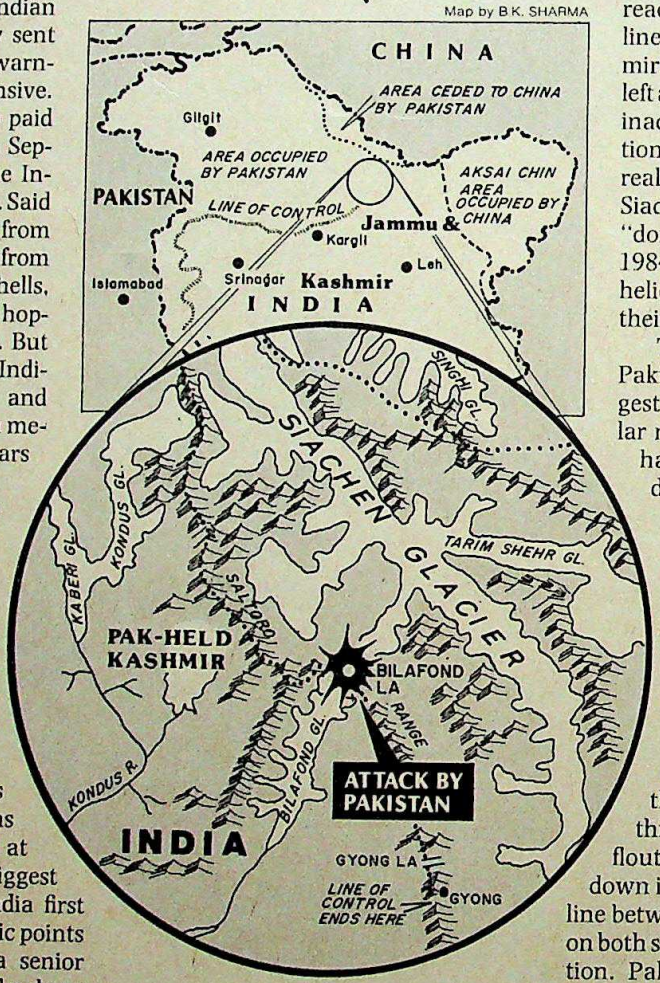
But the Pakistani soldiers paid no heed and around noon on September 23 started shelling the Indian pickets with mortar shells. Said a senior Indian officer just back from the fighting: "They came to us from all fronts, firing mortar shells, shooting long-range missiles hoping to inflict heavy casualties. But we were ready for them." The Indians were well prepared and pounded the ridges below with medium range gun-fire and mortars inflicting heavy casualties.

The battle raged well into the night and the Pakistani raiders were beaten back but continued their attacks for the next two nights. On September 25 after the Pakistanis finally withdrew, the Indians claimed that they had killed at least 150 of them, injuring an equal number. While Defence Ministry sources said that only around 20 Indians were killed others put the toll at roughly 50. It was easily the biggest offensive by Pakistan since India first established its pickets at strategic points near Siachen in 1984. Said a senior Indian Army officer: "It seemed a do or die attack by Pakistan and for them it ended in a die and not a do."

While Indian Defence Ministry officials announced the successful repulsion of the attack, Pakistan disputed it immediately. Rana Naeem Mahmood, Pakistan's minister of state for defence, said: "Reports of the encounter as disseminated by the Indian side are highly exaggerated and the casualties reported on the Pakistan side are preposterous."

But Pakistani newspapers were unconvinced and alleged that the Indians had even captured an area which the Pakistani prime minister had visited recently. Naeem Mahmood quickly refuted the doubts saying that not only was Pakistan in control of that area but claimed "we have something more than that". To which a senior Defence Ministry official retorted: "If they have gained something why haven't they disclosed the area? Why keep quiet? The truth is we repulsed them time and time again."

Map by B.K. SHARMA



The truth also is that Siachen, for all its freezing climate and uninhabitable vastness, has become a major military prestige issue on both sides. Ever since Indian troops moved in to occupy the mountains overlooking the Siachen glacier, Pakistan has been at a disadvantage and made every effort to dislodge them. In what must be the highest battlefield in the world, one Indian Army officer pointed out that "more soldiers die falling into crevasses or from frostbite than from actual gun-fire". Conditions are hostile with temperatures dropping to minus 40 degrees Celsius in winter and remaining below freezing point in summer. The skirmishes have been frequent with the attacks coming mostly in September and October when the snow melts and there is sunshine.

The Siachen glacier has become a bone of contention between the two countries only recently. Both in 1949 and 1972 when the two countries reached agreements over the actual line of control of the disputed Kashmir heights, the vast watershed was left as "no man's land" because of its inaccessibility and hostile conditions. But both countries soon realised that whoever controlled the Siachen glacier would become the "dominant power" in the region. By 1984 the Indians made some daring helicopter landings and established their superiority over the region.

The key question is why did Pakistan choose to launch its biggest offensive to date at this particular moment? One answer is that it has been timed when India is busy dealing with Sri Lanka, and serious trouble is brewing on her northern border in Tibet. Also, President General Zia-ul-Haq has been under pressure from the Opposition to establish Pakistan's claim over the region.

Although both countries have vowed not to use force and to sort out any dispute in the Siachen region amicably, this has been continuously flouted. Indicative of this breakdown is that despite there being a hot line between the directors of operations on both sides, there was no communication. Pakistan, in fact, tried another abortive attack on Indian posts in the first week of October. This has been repulsed too.

The Indian Army is confident of defending their posts in the region and a senior officer said: "We are on top of them now and I mean that literally. We are in full control of the region. If Pakistan wants to dispute it they would have to do so with casualties and they would have to pay for it dearly." But that is hardly going to deter Pakistan from trying again.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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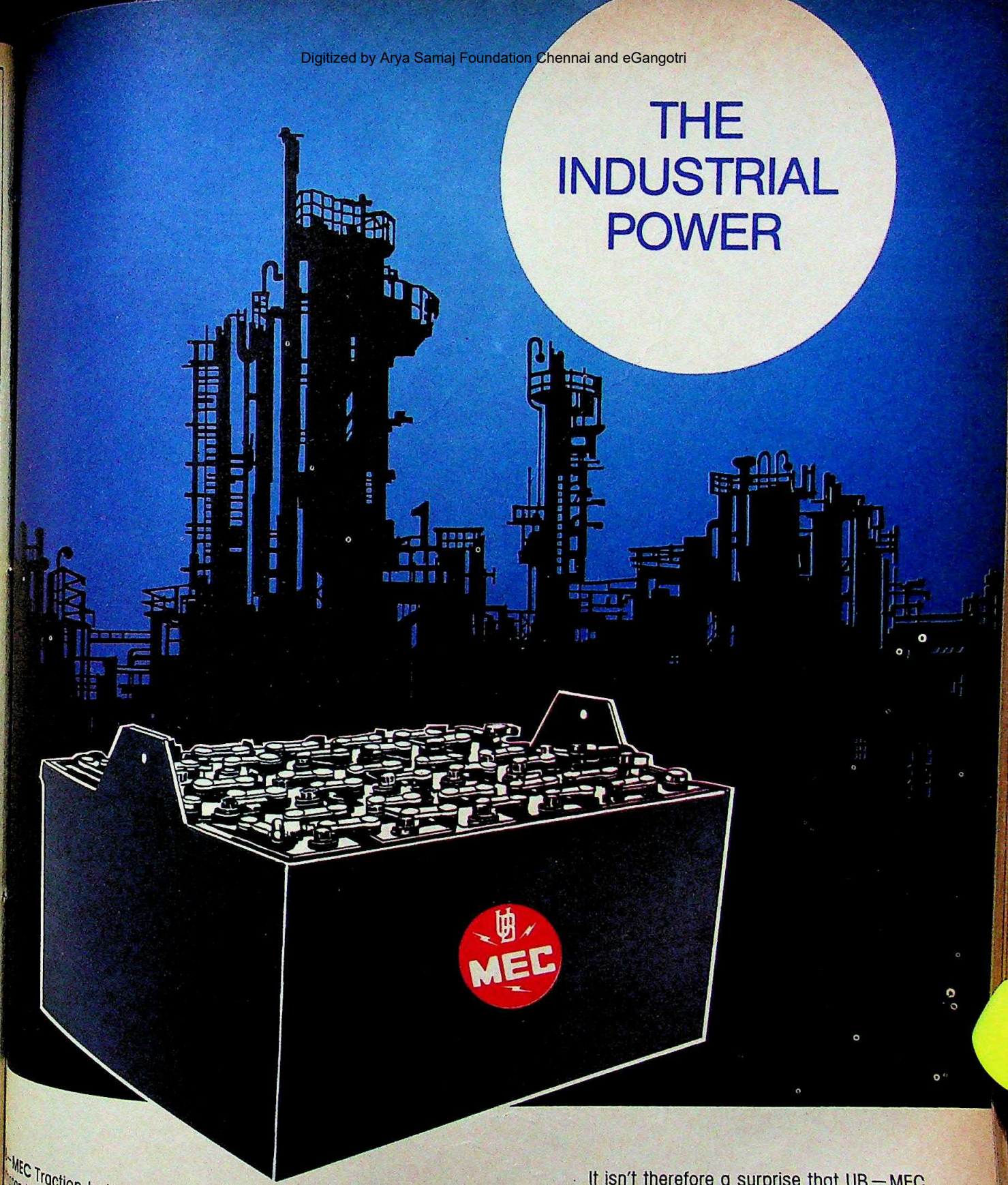
THE INDUSTRIAL POWER



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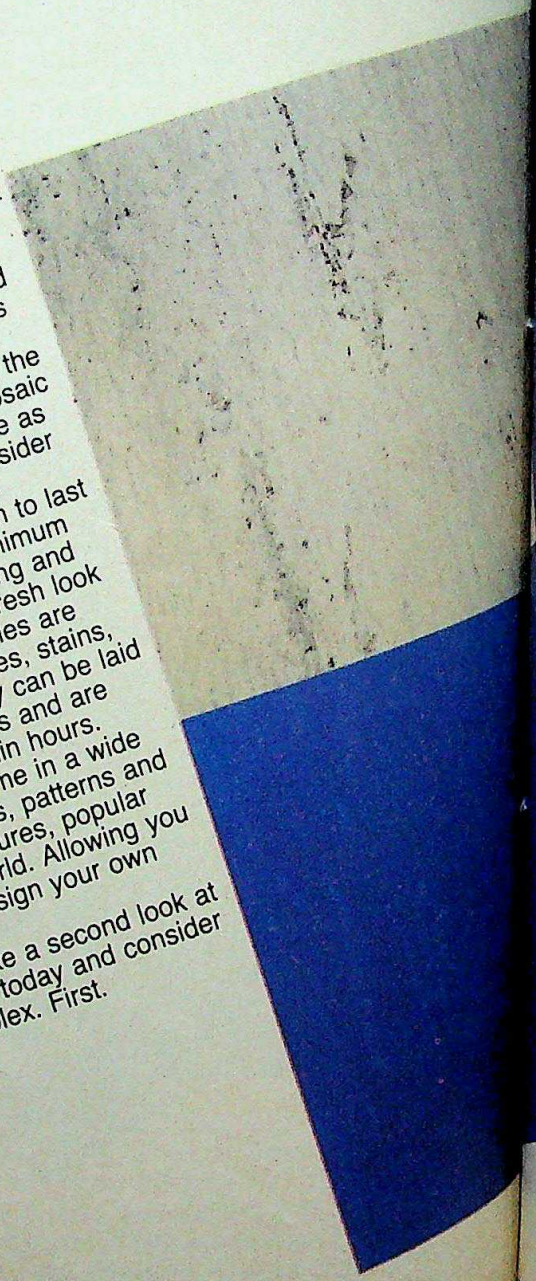

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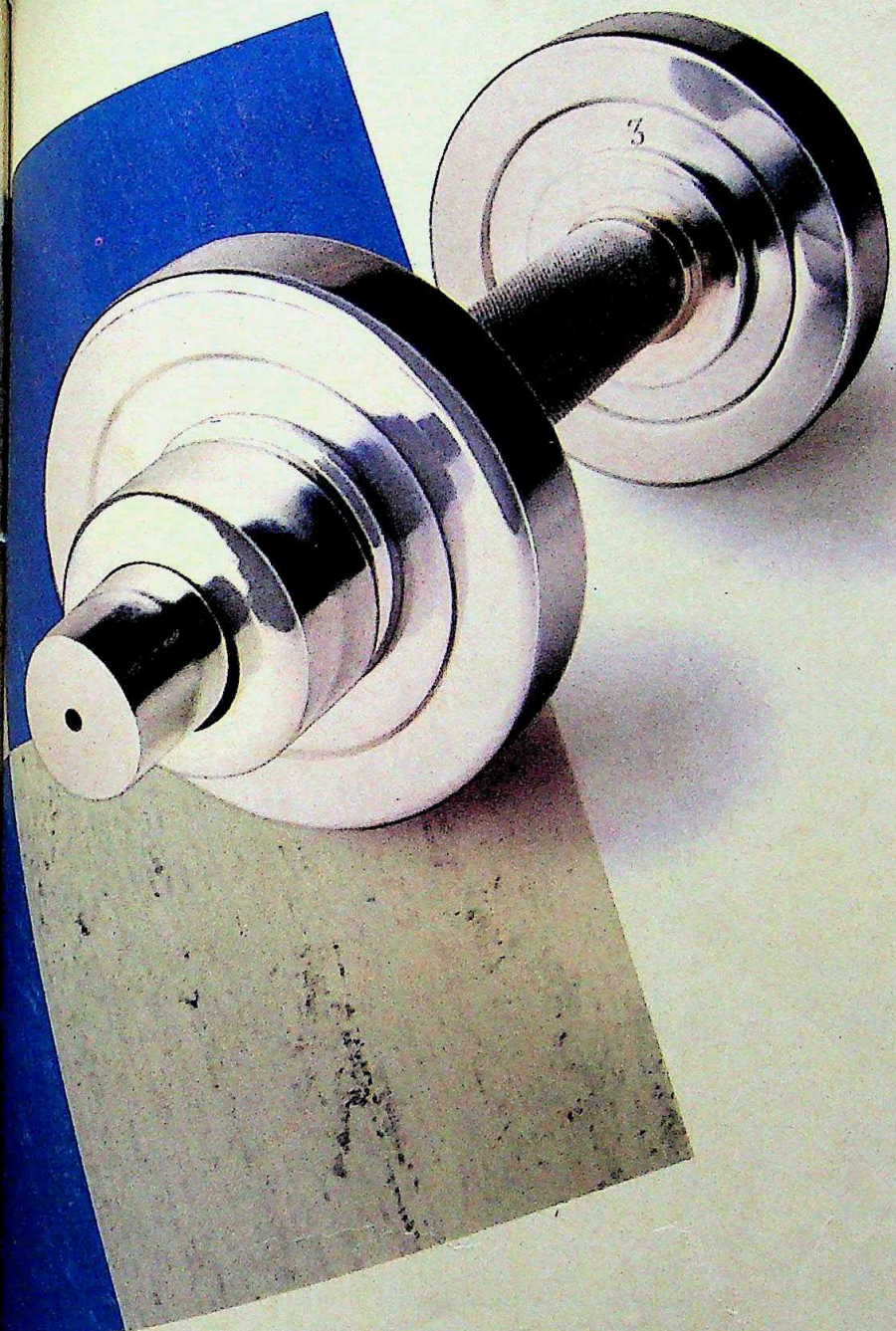

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RAMESH KRISHNAN

An Unassuming Winner

Ramesh leads India into the Davis Cup final

HIS face is expressionless, leaving his opponent guessing about his next move. And whatever the stakes, nothing seems to ruffle him. But in spite of his bland personality, Ramesh Krishnan, 26, had the nation glued to the television on October 4, when he played Wally Masur in a nerve-wracking match to determine whether India or Australia would make it to the final of the 1987 Davis Cup, the world team tennis championship.

The Indians were the underdogs, although the last-minute withdrawal of Wimbledon champion Pat Cash had raised some hopes. Emotion surfaced on Ramesh's face only briefly when he smiled and raised his clenched fists during his short victory jog to the net. With a fluent 8-6, 6-4, 6-4 straight sets win, Ramesh had taken India into the finals—with a 3-2 triumph—for only the third time ever.

In doing so, Ramesh had followed in the footsteps of his father, Ramanathan Krishnan, 50, who had vaulted the team into the last stage in 1966, before Australia won the Cup 4-1. The team reached the finals again in 1974 but refused to play South Africa because of its apartheid policy. Exulted Ramanathan Krishnan: "It is the first time that a father and son have both won the Wimbledon junior crown and taken their country into the Davis Cup final."

The career graphs of the two have indeed been startlingly similar. Both father and son launched their tennis careers by claiming the Stanley Cup, an inter-collegiate tournament in Madras. Again, when Ramesh (16 years and 6 months old) became the national champion at Calcutta, he was two months younger than his father had been when he had performed the same feat. Both were 16 when they made their Davis Cup debuts and exactly 25 years after his father had won the Wimbledon junior crown, Ramesh claimed it too.

Tennis runs in the family. Ramesh was put through his first paces on the backyard court in their Madras home by his grandfather, T.K. Ramanathan. It was his mother Lalitha who played with Ramesh in the early days. His sister Gauri, also bitten by the tennis bug, later went on to win the national junior crown. Said Lalitha: "Now Ramesh is teaching his wife Priya to play."

The first evidence of Ramesh's calibre came in August 1977 when he won the American Championship for under 16s at Kalamazoo, Michigan. His game was honed at Harry Hopman's school in Las Vegas—where he spent a few weeks every year for a decade until Hopman's death—and on the American and European circuits. He established his talent by winning the French and Wimbledon junior championships in 1979.

Since then, he has improved with remarkable consistency. Ranked only 88th in the world by the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) in 1979, he now stands 28th. In 1985, he had done even better, standing 22nd. In 1984, he reached the semi-finals of the Seiko Open and the European Champions Cup tournament at Antwerp. The next year he got to the finals of a $75,000 Grand Prix tournament in Cologne, West Germany, and to the semi-finals of a $100,000 championship at Toulouse, France. And in 1986, after reaching the quarter-finals at Wimbledon, Ramesh went on to win a $50,000 tourney in New York and the $100,000 Japan Open. The same year, he became the first Asian to win the $200,000 Hong Kong Championship.

Ramesh's style of play is likened to that of the perennial Australian favourite, Ken Rosewall, whose backhand shots are legendary. Not only does Ramesh have

INTERVIEW

"The going has been good"

HE is always on the move, travelling to and playing in tournaments for all but eight weeks in the year. Last fortnight, tennis star Ramesh Krishnan, 26, and his wife Priya, 22, celebrated his stellar role in steering India into the Davis Cup final at Sydney, by dining with a group of 25 Indians at a restaurant serving Indian food before flying out to Brisbane for another tournament. Three days after India's memorable win, Senior Correspondent AMARNATH K. MENON *interviewed him on the telephone in his Brisbane hotel. Excerpts:*

Q. Did you anticipate India's entry into the finals after Pat Cash withdrew from the singles?

A. He did not play and it was a big break for us. I am glad to be in the team reaching the Davis Cup final.

Q. The pressure must have been on you in the second reverse singles with India and Australia level at 2-2.

A. I knew it was a chance in a lifetime because it is extremely difficult to reach the finals. I was a bit nervous though I have been playing well.

Q. Is this your best year in tennis?

A. I have been playing well in the past couple of years. The going has been good. I reached the quarter-finals in Wimbledon last year and the quarters again at the US Open this year.

Q. What was the influence of Vijay's coach Gene Malin in preparing for the Davis Cup?

A. He has been a very good influence on the team. He knows Vijay very well. He was very helpful. But when you get to a Davis Cup match there is a whole lot of things that you do on your own. It is the player who faces the situation and changes his strategy during the game. But he definitely was helpful.

Q. How do you rate India's challenge in the finals against Sweden?

A. The Swedes are the toughest team in the Cup championship right now. They are into the finals for the fifth time in a row. It will be tough going for us. They are the strongest team, and are the favourites. There are five of them—numbers 2, 3, 11, 12 and 17—in the top 20 of the ATP computer rankings announced in October.

Q. Have you played against the top Swedes this year?

A. Only Stefan Edberg, in the quarter finals of the US Open.

Q. But you must have got past some of the top Swedes earlier?

A. I have beaten Mats Wilander and Edberg once. And Joachim Nystrom too. But they have done better more often.

Q. Vijay has gone over the hill. How

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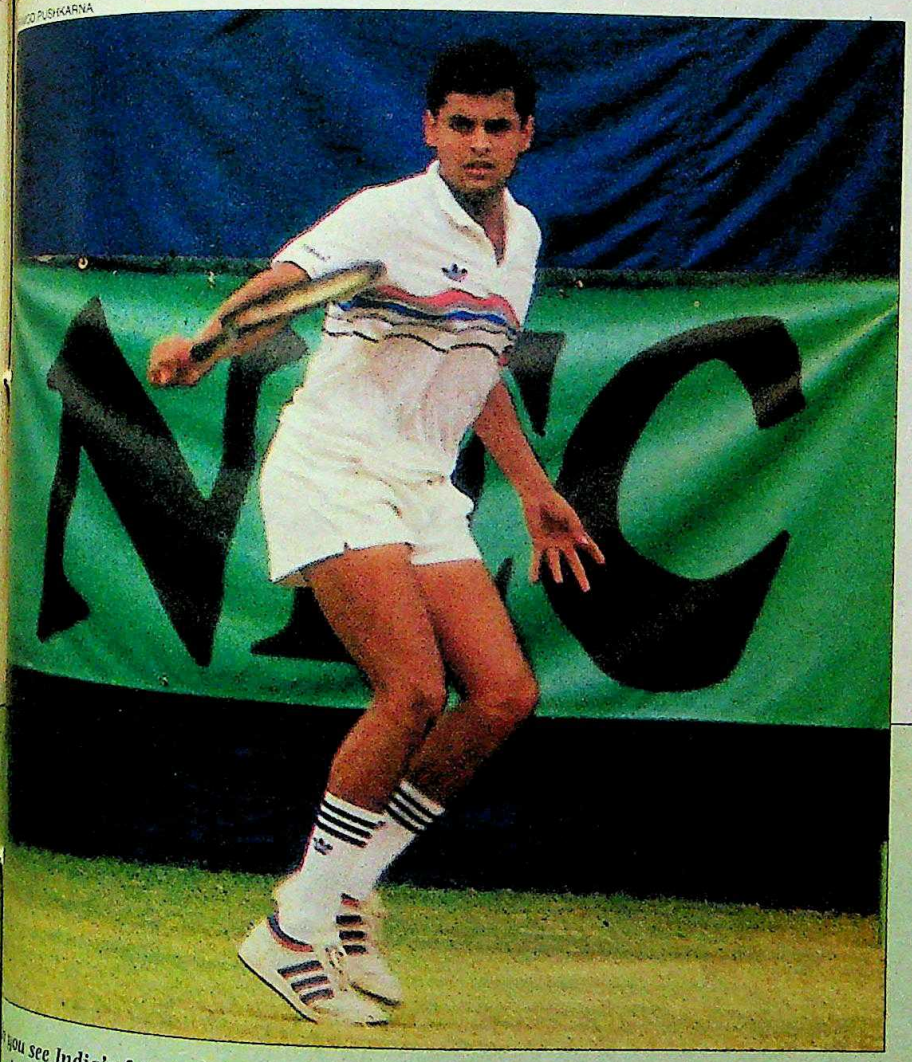
...sewall's straight-backed, stocky build, ...also shares his ability to nimbly hit a ...ad shot from all parts of the court. Said ...ner player-turned-coach Akhtar Ali: ...is the timing of his backhand, effortless ...laying, sound ground strokes and fine ...turn of service that have taken Ramesh ...the top."

Ramesh, however, is something of an ...ball on the circuit. At a time when a ...nnis star's retinue consists of trainer, ...nager, physiotherapist, and personal physician—and pets—Krishnan often has only his family members along. And when he stays at one place for a few weeks, Ramesh and Priya rent an apartment and do their own cooking. The night before a big match, the entire family retires to bed early. Said former Davis Cupper and sports commentator Naresh Kumar: "The discipline is amazing. The distractions of modern social life are not for them."

Ramesh: consistent performance

VINOD PUSHKARNA



Although the '70s are universally recognised as having marked the advent of power tennis and extraordinary athleticism on court—plus the decline of the touch artistes—Ramesh disagrees with this assessment. Says he: "The distinction between the touch artiste and the player of the power game is the making of the media. Today's player is a mix of both."

In spite of the recent euphoria, the future of Indian tennis is bleak. Said C. Subramaniam, former Union finance minister who also once headed the All India Lawn Tennis Association (AILTA): "We have a poor second line. Only Vasudevan and Zeeshan Ali have shown promise. After that we may draw a blank unless we formulate a clear plan."

The AILTA did draw up a plan to hold satellite tournaments so that Indian youngsters could learn from leading foreign junior players. For want of sufficient will, however, the scheme has failed to come through. Even the Britannia-Amritraj Tennis Scheme in Madras and the plan for the Amritraj-Prakash Padukone-Khatau combine to spot, train and sponsor talent will take at least four or five years before results start showing. The challenge before Indian tennis now is not to find a McEnroe, a Lendl or a Cash. It is to find at least a Ramesh Krishnan.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

...you see India's future prospects?

A. We have been pretty lucky that ...ey has chosen to play this long. But ...en he decides finally to retire, it will be ...ficult to find a replacement. Unfortu...ely, we do not have anybody else on ...e international circuit. Somebody ...uld have been out there already, ...ining valuable match experience.

Q. The Britannia-Amritraj Tennis ...heme is spotting and shaping new ...rts talent. Isn't this a sound strategy ...promote good tennis?

A. It is a good idea. But what India really lacks is competition. What we should have is more age group tournaments—for under 12s, the 12 to 14 group, and the plus 14s. Coaching on top of this will be very beneficial. Also, unfortunately, the number of tournaments seems to be going down.

Q. What will be your strategy if India is to have better players?

A. I think we have to be business-like. Today, tennis is very competitive. We have to emphasise on good physical conditioning. This is not done enough in India. We give more importance to hitting the nice shot, to improving technique, but do not concentrate enough on improving athletic abilities.

Q. What does tennis mean to you?

A. Tennis is my job—it is my passion. When I am not playing in a tournament, I practise for three to four hours a day. And I keep playing for about 10-and-a-half months a year on the circuit so that I get invited to more tournaments even as my game improves.

Q. So you are a millionaire close to becoming a billionaire.

A. (Laughs) Not yet.

Q. How do you manage as a vegetarian on the tennis circuit?

A. I don't lay much emphasis on this. Many leading players live on vegetarian food and newer medical evidence suggests vegetarianism is good, if not better.

Q. What are your future plans?

A. Play more tennis.

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HENRY MOORE

An Earthy Appeal

For the first time, a major international sculpture exposition in India

AT last the chance to appreciate one of the world's greatest sculptors on home ground. Last fortnight, three plane-loads of Henry Moore's works landed in New Delhi for an exhibition that will colonise the National Gallery of Modern Art till mid-November and a smaller touring exhibition which will cover eight other cities. The biggest visual arts show Britain has ever organised in India, "it is deliberately designed not to be an elitist event", said John Hanson of the British Council. It is intended to involve all those Indians who, when they go to London find themselves on Oxford street rather than in museums of art.

So who is Henry Moore (1898—1986) anyway? Britain calls him it's greatest modern sculptor—and one would say, "Yes, but thankfully not modern enough." Moore is understandable. His major works of mother and child and reclining figures are at once, intimate and distant, as all good art should be. He was supposed to have opened the exhibition himself, but died a year before he could do so. This is the first posthumous retrospective and a reciprocal gesture for the Festival of India in UK. Moore once said: "Sculpture should always at first have some obscurities....People should want to go on looking and thinking; it should never tell all about itself immediately."

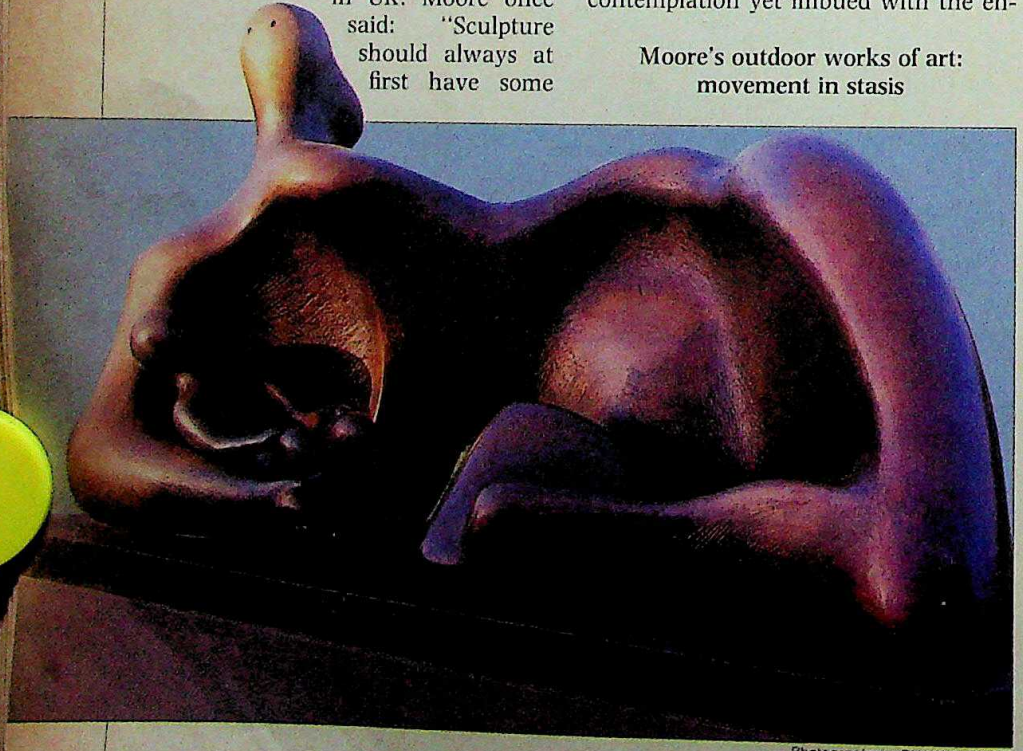
It doesn't. There is the early Moore experimenting with the human form, holes in torsos and other angry, unlovely pieces that disturb but don't seem to mean a thing. They got him many whiplashes from the critics who in the '30s were calling his women and children ugly and his uses of the human body disrespectful. Some 20 years later, the same critics were eating their words. By the '50s, Henry Moore was being showered with awards, honorary degrees, prizes. "To find a place among Picasso, Chagal, Michelangelo is something," said Dr Anis Farooqi, director of the gallery. Moore had succumbed to—and indeed, rounded off—the great humanist tradition begun by Michelangelo and, more significantly, he had brought sculpture out of the stuffy chambers of elitist art right into the open.

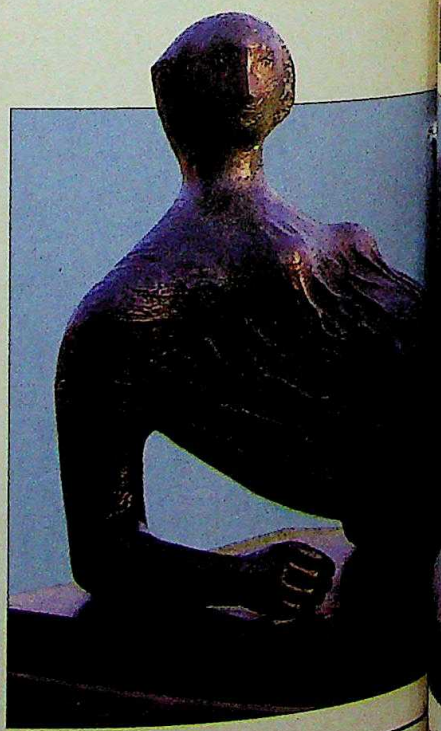
And outdoors is perhaps the best place to appreciate Moore. Twelve of his monumental pieces—worth several million pounds—have been settled in the gardens of the gallery, images of silence and contemplation yet imbued with the energy of mountains, glowing in the mellow autumn sunshine. It is a perfect time for the exhibition. The draped reclining mother and baby is almost landscapic in conception, a flowing silhouette with the tiny, alert form of the baby written into the mother, serene, protective, almost remote. There is the other wondrously serene piece: the draped reclining figure, a lightly veiled woman in a moss-green bronze, who looks indignant and surprised, as if roused out of a dream.

But not all the works have that calm. One of his most famous works is the family group, a couple holding on to a baby, almost pulling it apart—it could be a hostile piece, if one didn't go behind and notice the man's gentle hand on his wife's shoulder. That's the great advantage sculpture has over painting. You can go all around it to appreciate it better. The falling warrior, for instance, is one of Moore's few memorable males—and he sculpts him just before he hits the ground. It would be an unattractive, disproportionate piece if it weren't for the tremendous movement built into it.

Moore's men always have to do with

Moore's outdoor works of art: movement in stasis





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...eath and danger, but the women are life ...d life-giving. His woman is never a ...ymate, like the Renaissance women ...ere, yet she is never sexless. If anything, ...he is associated with earth and mellow ...efulness. Again and again, he goes ...ack to protective mother images circling ...ft forms, waiting to be born. A certain ...rganic element shrouds most of the ...work, the way Moore leaves the cracks ...d fissures in his stone. He is not a purist, ...or is he a surrealist—he is too innocent ...belong to that iconoclastic circle.

The famous king and queen, one of Moore's own favourites, sit on a bench—by now the ground has become an integral part of the sculpture—with a quiet dignity. But their faces are almost wolfish and there is a primitive presence about the whole thing. One can imagine it on a windy hillside in Scotland. Perhaps the most amazing thing about Moore's work is that the faces don't really have any features, and yet you can swear you saw a look on them: surprise, indignation, fury. It is the triumph of an artist who has got his bodies to do the work of faces.

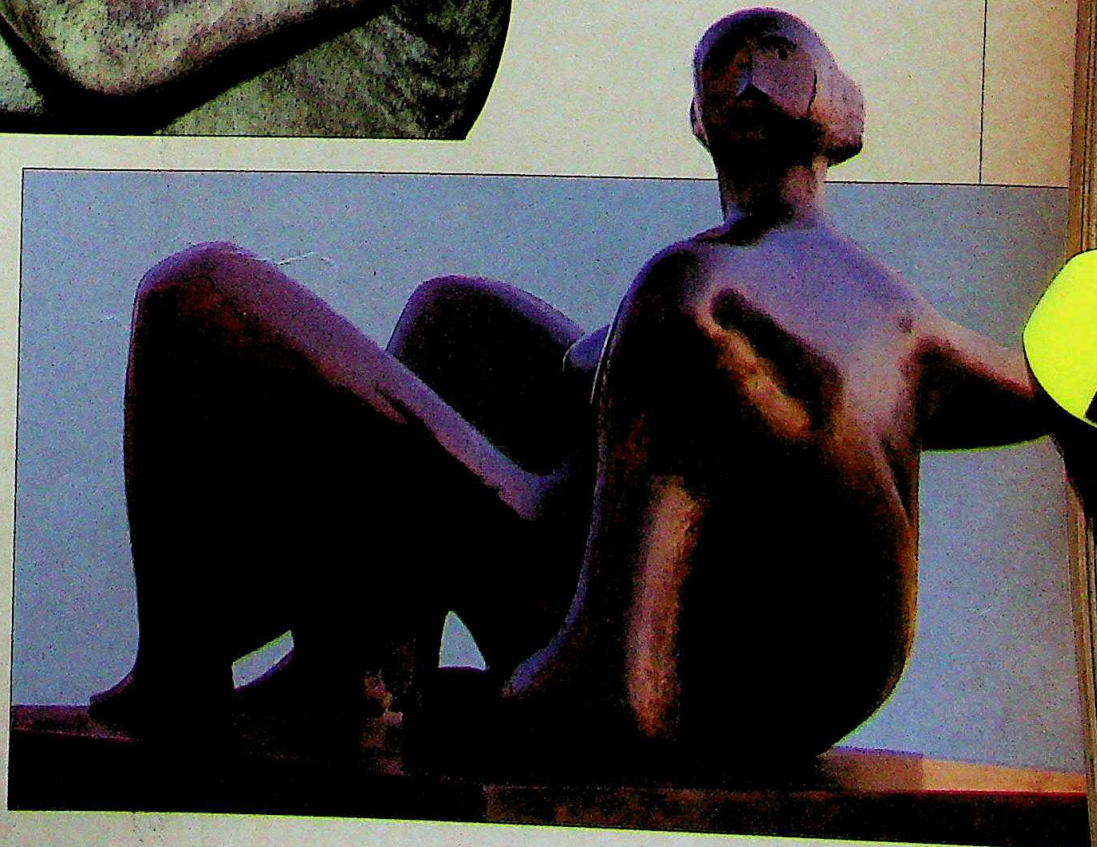
Born the seventh son of a coal-miner, Moore grew into Britain's greatest sculptor. Alas, his life had no dark romantic secrets, no love affairs in the garret, so he has not been romanticised in fiction. He was a grandfatherly figure who simply went from success to success, as he endlessly played on the human figure.

He had his phases that were abstract, his peculiar fascination for instance with bones, skulls, the interplay of voids and rounded surfaces. He belongs to two worlds, really, an imaginative, abstract one and another more familiar, rooted firmly in nature. It is almost as if his head and heart honoured traditional rules but his hands were doing their own thing.

To appreciate Moore in India, one should simply shed prejudices about sculpture, look at the pieces from all sides and go home. His sculpture is not, like traditional Indian sculpture, designed to be placed in temples inspiring man to high morality. Nor is it any use trying to fit him into any compartment he doesn't belong. Perhaps the one thing worth remembering is that Moore constantly regarded his life as a discovery of "new thoughts and ideas based on the human figure". Like the monumental woman in the garden, sitting half upraised on her elbows, her head turned, and her eyes—little dots that any child could have put there—following you all the way through till you leave.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

The famous family group of 1949: sentiments in stone



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THE US

The Asian Dilemma

Why America's India policy collapsed in the '50s

PERHAPS the best reading Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi could have found in the US last fortnight, was a pile of documents the US State Department has just declassified. They relate to its operations in the subcontinent during the 1955-57 period when tensions over Kashmir ran high.

Startling disclosures are made in the documents which bear a striking resemblance to the current situation as Special Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *found out, after poring over nearly half-a-million words in documents, including even records of telephone calls. His report:*

IN Washington, the State Department functions out of a sprawling building located in an area called Foggy Bottom. Combined with the convolutions of US foreign policy, it is often said that the mandarins of Foggy Bottom make sense only 30 years afterwards.

This is especially true in the context of the subcontinent which has provided the US foreign policy with one of its tougher challenges. The documents on the Nehru-Eisenhower-Dulles era show the origin of the continuing American dilemma in balancing India with Pakistan, while accepting India's pre-eminent role, not just in South Asia, but in the entire democratic world. They reveal that:

- even three decades ago the Eisenhower-Dulles administration acquiesced to Pakistan's case for arms aid despite recognising it as a "hoax";
- Pakistan had begun to demand nuclear parity with India 30 years ago;
- the US had invited Jawaharlal Nehru to join the South East Asian Treaty Organisation, of which Pakistan was a key member;
- at the peak of the Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai wave in 1957, the US had predicted a Sino-Indian clash by 1962—and even India had anticipated it;
- the US was extremely anxious about Afghanistan even in 1955; and
- the Americans disliked V.K. Krishna Menon, Nehru's key lieutenant, whose exclusion from Nehru's 1956 Washington entourage was extracted by the office of John Foster Dulles, then US secretary of state.

The evidence reveals that the current Reagan policy on South Asia is merely a reflection of the Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine under which Pakistan was cultivated to run a pro-American gendarme in south-west Asia—to loan troops from the new US-financed divisions to guard the passes of Iran, Afghanistan and even Turkey. Today too, the best case scenario for the US is a Pakistan executing US policy, beginning with Afghanistan.

Nehru made it clear that he would have to go to Moscow, if the US did not allow him to buy western arms.

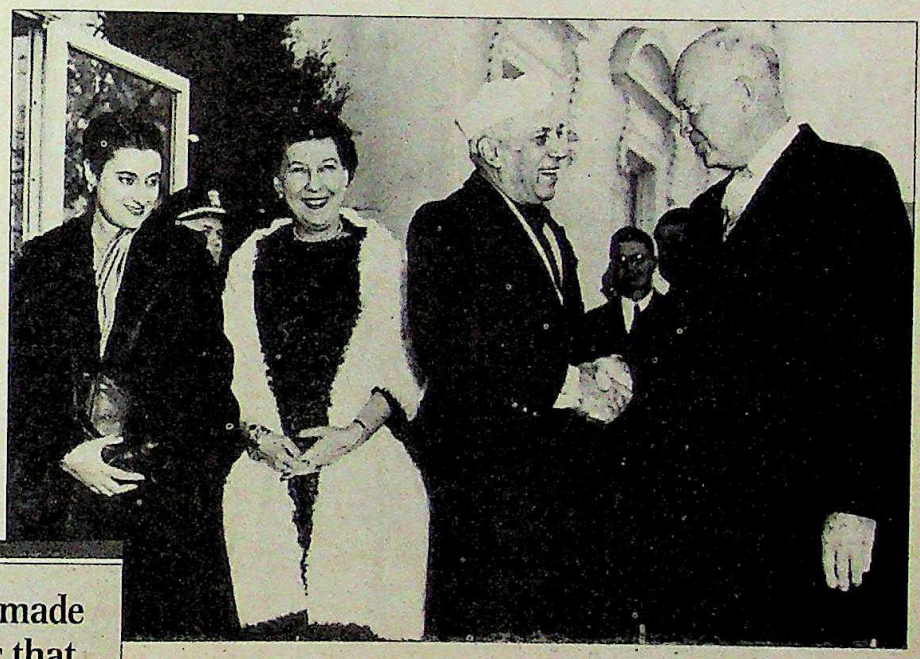
Even in the '50s, the US premise was based on wishful thinking that Pakistan's primary concern was not India and that it would share the US view. But Pakistan rejected a request to send a division to Korea, unless the US promised security against India. After that, US officials repeatedly reported that Pakistan's security problem was not the Soviet Union, China or other communists. James Langley, US ambassador to Pakistan said in a letter of December 27, 1957, to the State Department: "The present military programme (arms aid to Pakistan) is based on a hoax, the hoax being that it is related to the Soviet threat... concentration on India is such that, a considerably larger Pakistani programme would not yield a division for use to the West."

Alongside, memos speak of a "squeeze play" by Pakistan on aid which, though doubled from the initially promised $171 million (at current rates, Rs 222 crore) left the Pakistanis unhappy. They also wanted a submarine and Canberra bombers, ostensibly to deter an Indian attack.

More revealing is the resume of a high-level meeting in Karachi between vice-president Richard Nixon, President Iskander Mirza and prime minister Ismail Chundrigar. Mirza repeatedly raised the demand for bombers as a "deterrent" against India and demanded large-scale aid for the country's nuclear programme to compete with India. The US was then cooperating with India in the nuclear field, partly in its own interest. But Nixon agreed that India's growth in nuclear research created problems due to its "neutrality" and conceded that "Pakistan needed some help in a big way".

The record explains Nixon's actions during the Bangladesh war. It also exposes the fallacy propounded by Washington: that it gives Pakistan arms only for defensive purposes. Mirza tauntingly asked Nixon if the US had given up its

Nehru with the Eisenhowers



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ideas of defensive weaponry after Korea. Nixon unabashedly replied that while "one must emphasize defense in public statements as a policy matter...actions would be both defensive and offensive".

Ambassador Horace Hildreth recorded in March 1955 that he told prime minister Mohammed Ali that the US could not make sense of some requests such as the ones for uniforms which could easily be made at home. "The prime minister seemed to whole-heartedly concur...and I went on to comment that...there was an inclination in some Pakistani military circles to prefer procurement...because there was more chance of a rake-off."

Recognising, however, that the army called the shots, the US was also dealing with likely military dictators. On October 4, 1955, the US consul-general in Lahore advised Washington to cultivate army chief General Ayub Khan. He stressed the need to reassure Ayub, who had told him that he was already "red in the face" and would "lose my pants" if the US arms did not pour in as expected.

Again, in a reflection of its current dilemma, while the US gave in to increasing Pakistani demands, it also did not want India to buy too much from the Soviets. But Nehru stressed that he had no choice but to go to Moscow if the US did not let Britain sell Canberras with sensitive, US-made radar to India. This time, the US had to yield to India, and allowed the sale.

The other leg of the policy was to keep India free from Soviet and Chinese influence and encourage economic competition with China. So, while Nehru tried to play the honest broker in a Sino-US relationship, the Americans viewed a Sino-Indian military clash as inevitable. The documents show, though, the US belief that Nehru considered China India's primary threat.

The exclusion of Krishna Menon from Nehru's entourage in 1956 was achieved by the Americans.

An assessment sent by the US Embassy in New Delhi to Washington on the eve of the Nehru-Eisenhower meeting says: "Despite (the) presence (of) Chou En-lai in India, we have information from Mrs Dutt, wife of the foreign secretary (Subimal Dutt), that India is gravely worried about Chinese motivations...and suspects that Pakistan and China may...connive against Indian interests." The brief goes on to say that "Nehru still believes that the Chinese can be morally contained".

The US strategy was to use India as a balancing force against China. The note calls the Nehru-Eisenhower summit a "moment of history which if seized and exploited can give us much firmer anti-communist and anti-Red China counterpoise in India". Later, the embassy's top-secret five-year study, *India: 1957-62*, talked of India facing an "eventual military challenge from China".

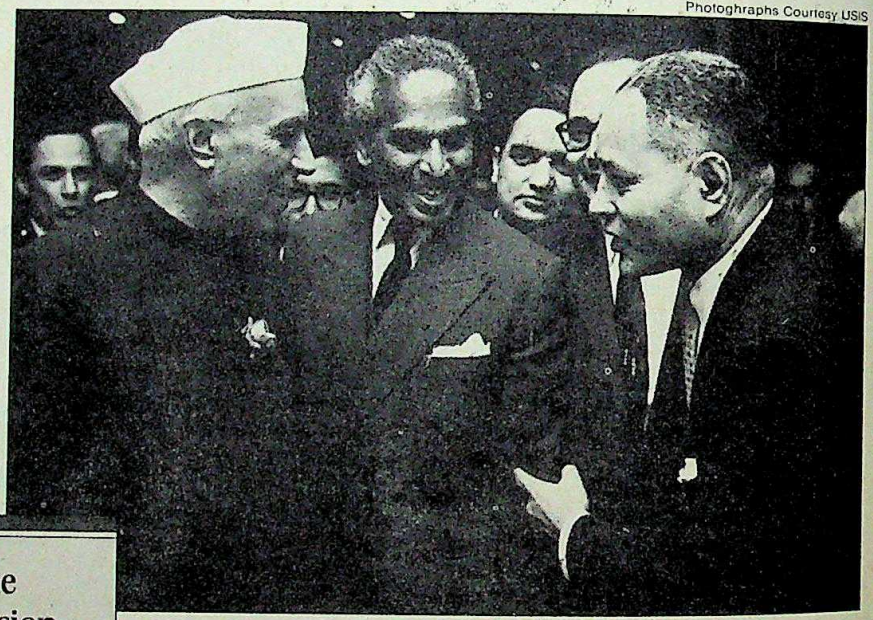
It was this concern that led the US into taking an interest in India's development. In a memo of November 4, 1957, to Eisenhower, Dulles referred to a Special National Intelligence Estimate, saying: "Failure of the Second Plan would hasten the disintegration of the Congress Party and threaten the continuance of democratic government...there is no other coherent force in India except the Communists." The National Security Council also decided that it was in the "national interest...to see to it that the second five-year plan substantially succeeds".

An interesting aside is the vehement dislike the US took to V.K. Krishna Menon. His brash demeanour upset the Americans: during a UN debate on Kashmir, he told the US ambassador that India could occupy Pakistan whenever it wanted. "East Pakistan would fall if India just blew hard," and Goa could be taken by "six policemen," he asserted. The US found the Goa issue awkward as Portugal was a NATO ally and had given the US a key base.

Menon's probable inclusion in Nehru's entourage in 1956 prompted Dulles to ask his aides to seek a postponement from Nehru on account of Eisenhower's illness. Also, at an earlier stage it seems, the Americans used Frank Moraes, then editor of *The Times of India*, to apprise Nehru of the "bad influence" Menon was having on Indo-US relations. According to a secret US Embassy cable, Moraes reported that Nehru avoided making a commitment. But when the summit later took place, Menon was not present.

Krishna Menon (centre) with Nehru: fly in the ointment

Photoghraphs Courtesy USIS



Yet, such minor successes were small consolation for the colossal failure of a policy which faltered on all it had set out to achieve. Pakistan used its American arms against India in 1965, India rapidly moved closer to Moscow, China humiliated India in 1962, and Afghanistan was lost to the Soviets. In the end, the US was left walking a desperate tightrope: sweet-talking India on the one hand, while bribing Pakistan with lethal weapons on the other and thereby leading to increasing Indian suspicion.

The tiny part of history recently thrown open by the State Department is only a partial explanation for this situation. The rest must lie buried in files in New Delhi and Islamabad with little hope of ever becoming available for a comprehensive analysis of this dilemma.

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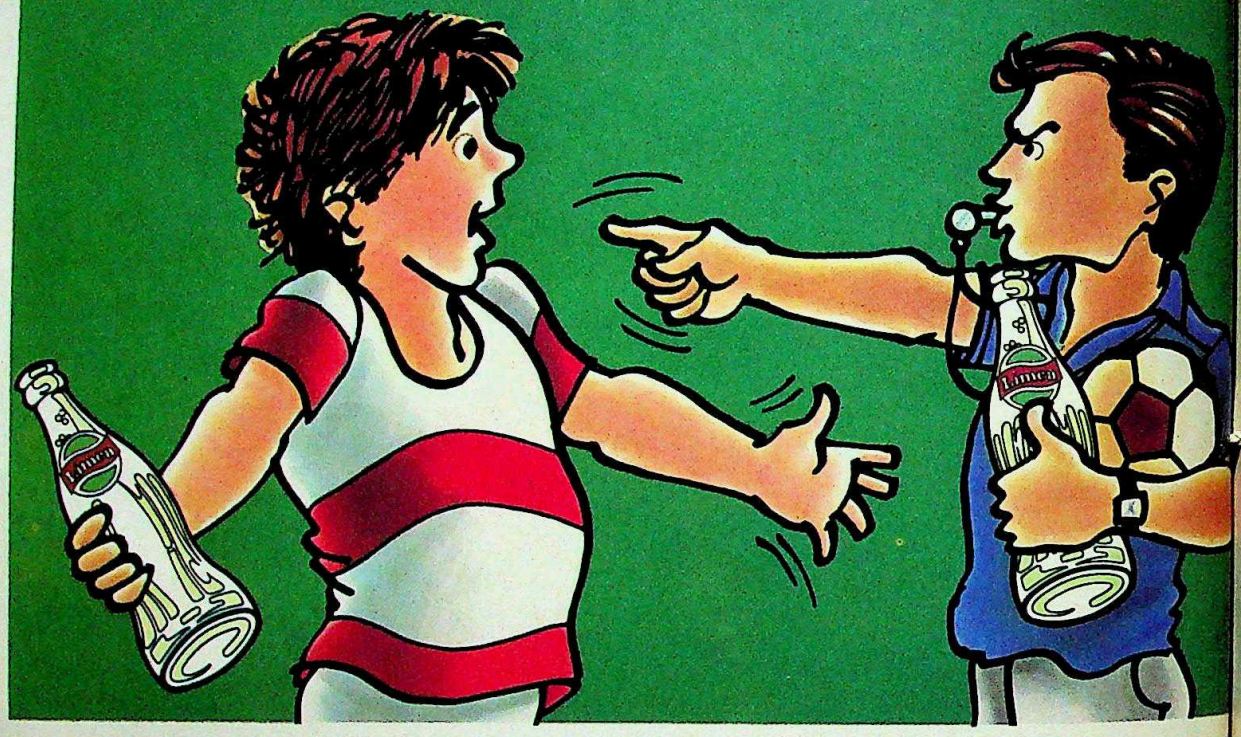

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UNESCO

A Deepening Crisis

A bitterly fought election raises vital issues

If next month's general conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) endorses the selection of Amadou Mahtar M'bow by the 50-member executive board as the director-general for an unprecedented third term, it would be a remarkable personal triumph for the 66-year-old controversial Senegalese. In Paris, after last fortnight's absorbing series of secret balloting, his exceptional feat could only be described as a 'coup de maitre' amidst all the 'coup de theatre'.

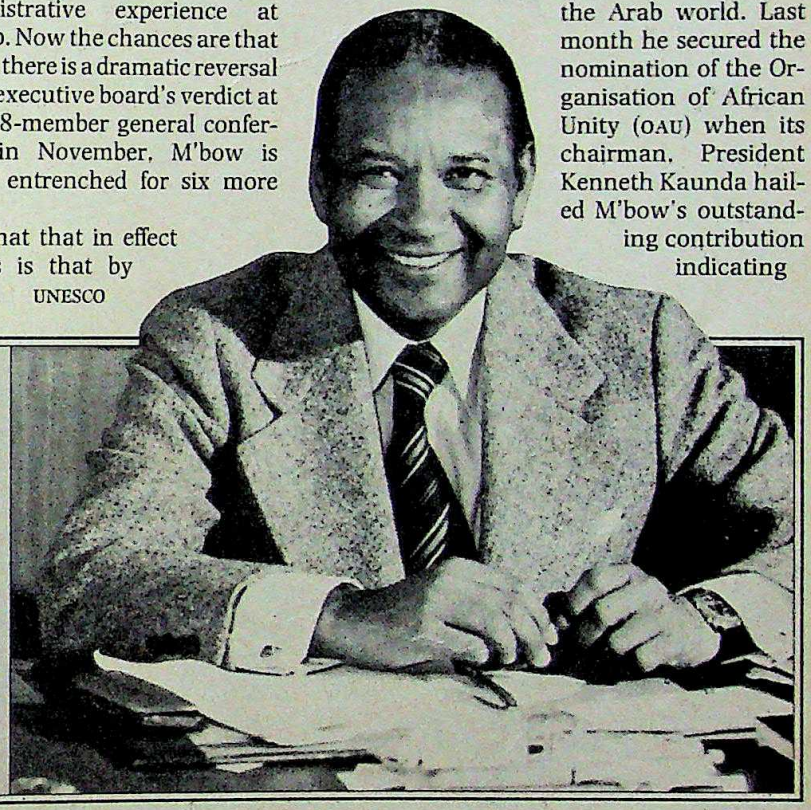
The passion and fervour of the opposition to M'bow came as a nasty shock not only to the candidate but to his backers in the African contingent and the Arab League. Secondly, Pakistan's candidate, patrician Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, learnt that despite being backed by powerful western interests, notably the US, military dictatorships, however smartly camouflaged, are terribly unpopular. The foreign minister might also ruefully reflect that while American aid is most handy at home, its support is not always helpful, especially in a forum that the US has persistently criticised and finally quit in disgust. But perhaps the most significant factor to emerge from last fortnight's balloting, covered into the ground by western media, was that both M'bow and Yaqub Khan were palpably the wrong choices.

Both proved too controversial—M'bow for his past record and personal eccentricities, Yaqub Khan for his own military background and the political system adopted by his country. An irreproachable solution would have been to go for a non-contentious candidate like the Spanish biochemist, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, who has had considerable administrative experience at UNESCO. Now the chances are that unless there is a dramatic reversal of the executive board's verdict at the 158-member general conference in November, M'bow is firmly entrenched for six more years.

What that in effect means is that by 1993, UNESCO would not exist in its present form or worse, would even be disintegrated. The US, the UK and Singapore left UNESCO a couple of years ago which meant a ruinous cut of 30 per cent of its $150 million (Rs 196.5 crore) budget. And now, the other remaining large financial backers—specifically Japan, Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark and Switzerland—have all threatened to follow suit if M'bow were re-elected, taking another 30 per cent off the budget. UNESCO would no more be called corpulent and profligate. But how much longer can it last?

Several delegates told INDIA TODAY from Paris that the atmosphere at the meetings was one of "cynicism at the extent of the use of exploitative patronage". The campaigning for the £99,000 (Rs21.3 lakh)-a-year post with a penthouse on top of UNESCO's gleaming offices at Place Fontenoy had effectively begun two years ago. Neutral countries. India excluded since it backed M'bow. have had a chance since 1985 to choose a non-controversial consensus candidate. Instead they vacillated.

Meanwhile, M'bow played his cards well. Early last year he told the startled executive board that "he was not standing again". No one then noticed the small print which said: "unless he was asked". Since then, he has campaigned rigorously in Africa and in the Arab world. Last month he secured the nomination of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) when its chairman, President Kenneth Kaunda hailed M'bow's outstanding contribution indicating that the battle was on.



The tragedy of M'bow's election for an unprecedented third term is that it may well have set UNESCO on the path of disintegration. But it is a personal triumph for the controversial Senegalese.

It was not as though the Pakistani campaign was quiescent. Pakistan mounted an extensive diplomatic initiative early this year. In Latin America, for instance, where Yaqub Khan had sparse support, its UN Ambassador Shah Nawaz launched a three-week blitz carrying a personal message from Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo canvassing support for its candidate. However, several observers said last fortnight that Pakistan would find it "exceedingly difficult" to get Yaqub Khan elected since Nafis Sadik, another Pakistani, was elected as executive director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). But Pakistani sources had claimed that the UNFPA post was appointed by the UN secretary-general

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while the UNESCO director-general's post was determined by votes. "It is all a question of diplomatic mobilisation," Pakistani delegates had argued.

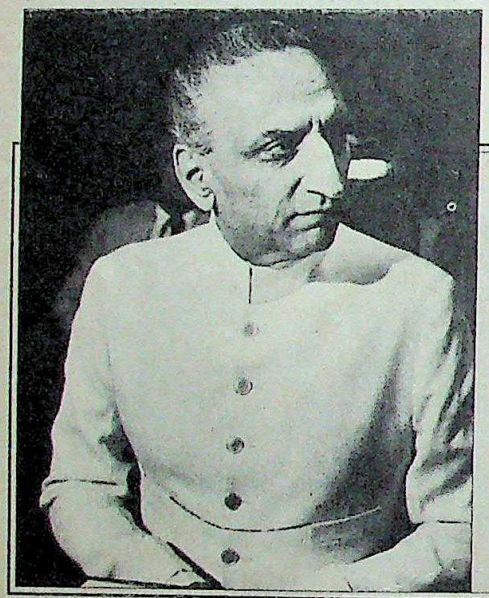
But when the voting began last fortnight, there were loud discussions and press commentaries, especially in France, scrutinising Pakistan's human rights record. Some delegates commented that it was a bit ludicrous that an organisation founded "to build the defences of peace in the minds of men" ought to be spearheaded by "a military bloke flashing shiny brass".

Despite the criticism, Yaqub Khan's support was impressive. In the first ballot, he received 16 votes to M'bow's 18. In the second ballot he got 12—having lost four votes while M'bow remained on 18. Federico Mayor, who was backed by 100 intellectuals, including Nobel Prize winners, increased his score from six to nine. Nicolai Todorov of Bulgaria remained at six, Soedjatmoko of Indonesia got two, Yugoslavia's Ivo Margan and Sheilah Solomon of Trinidad received one vote each.

All the 50 delegations remained edgy and nervy, not wishing to state their preferences. However, it was clear that Japan and China backed Pakistan's candidate. But the most woeful embarrassment was suffered by host nation France. Its long-time executive board member Gisele Halimi resigned from the board when she was ordered to support Yaqub Khan. In her press conference, Halimi attacked the record of Pakistan's military Government. It was hardly surprising that there were a lot of red-faced Frenchmen about in UNESCO's lobbies.

Ironically, after suffering this embarrassment, the French delegation had to change its stand and back M'bow. This happened just before the third-round ballot when Yaqub Khan suddenly pulled out of the election and urged his supporters to throw their votes behind M'bow. Explaining the abrupt about-face, Pakistan's chief delegate Attiya Inayatullah said: "My country stands firmly and squarely for Afro-Asian solidarity and now wishes to avoid confrontation between the two continents."

The Indian delegation—represented by Ambassador Arundhati Ghosh and at the executive board by Sardar Swaran Singh—too opted to keep their preferences secret. However, it was transparent that M'bow was the choice. It seemed an inexplicable strategy if the purpose was to guard UNESCO's future, as India had maintained, for the last person to be backed was M'bow, whose probable re-election would seriously undermine the organisation in the future.



Pakistan's candidate Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan learnt that despite being backed by powerful western interests, notably the US, military dictatorships, however smartly camouflaged, are terribly unpopular.

Then again, India's stance at another vital forthcoming election was also lopsided. It was backing an even more controversial personality than M'bow—the Lebanese director-general of the sprawling Rome-based agency, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Edouard Saouma. His legions of critics accuse Saouma of running the FAO as a "personal fiefdom" and an "autocratic secretariat". He has presided over the FAO since 1975 and his tenure saw one of the greatest tragedies of this century: the Ethiopian famine. Like M'bow, he has surrounded himself with cronies, has an extravagant and ostentatious life-style while orchestrating plans to combat Africa's hunger. Saouma too wants a third term. Pitted against him is an outstanding African with impeccable credentials. Moise Mensah, 53, is an agronomist from Benin and a vice-president at the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the small agency which supplies agrarian aid funds and which has built up a formidable reputation as the most efficient of all UN agencies.

Here again, India is once again backing the wrong man. When all of Africa, where much of the war against hunger is being waged, supports Mensah, India prefers old favourite Saouma. The most generous of donor nations, the Nordic states, Canada and the Netherlands, have all but threatened to pull out of FAO should Saouma be re-elected. Will this monstrous bureaucracy which employs almost 7,000 then survive? The Indian rhetoric against these arguments are those well-worn cliches: any criticism against M'bow and Saouma are those hatched by western nations and shadowy plots conjured by conservative demons like the Heritage Foundation. Tiresomely repeated for so many years, they now simply sound nonsensical. There is hardly an effort to take an objective look at the abject record of the controversial helmsmen who have steered the fortunes of these flabby and highly politicised agencies for more than a decade.

Worst of all, M'bow's re-election could actually help Saouma in FAO. There is a strong sentiment to allow two Africans to hold the top jobs in two important agencies. A gifted Moise Mensah contesting the FAO elections could thus find himself outmanoeuvred by two wily "emperors".

Thankfully, there is currently a proposition in European circles to limit the terms of the heads of UN agencies to two successive terms. This would mean that not only would the M'bows and Saoumas be compelled to gracefully leave the scene to a more dynamic management but also that several others like Dr Halfdan Mahler, a Dane, who has run the World Health Organisation for 14 years and Francois Blanchard, a Frenchman, who has headed the International Labour Organisation since 1973. Even if a new order may not be able to accomplish a major turnaround, it could surely do no worse.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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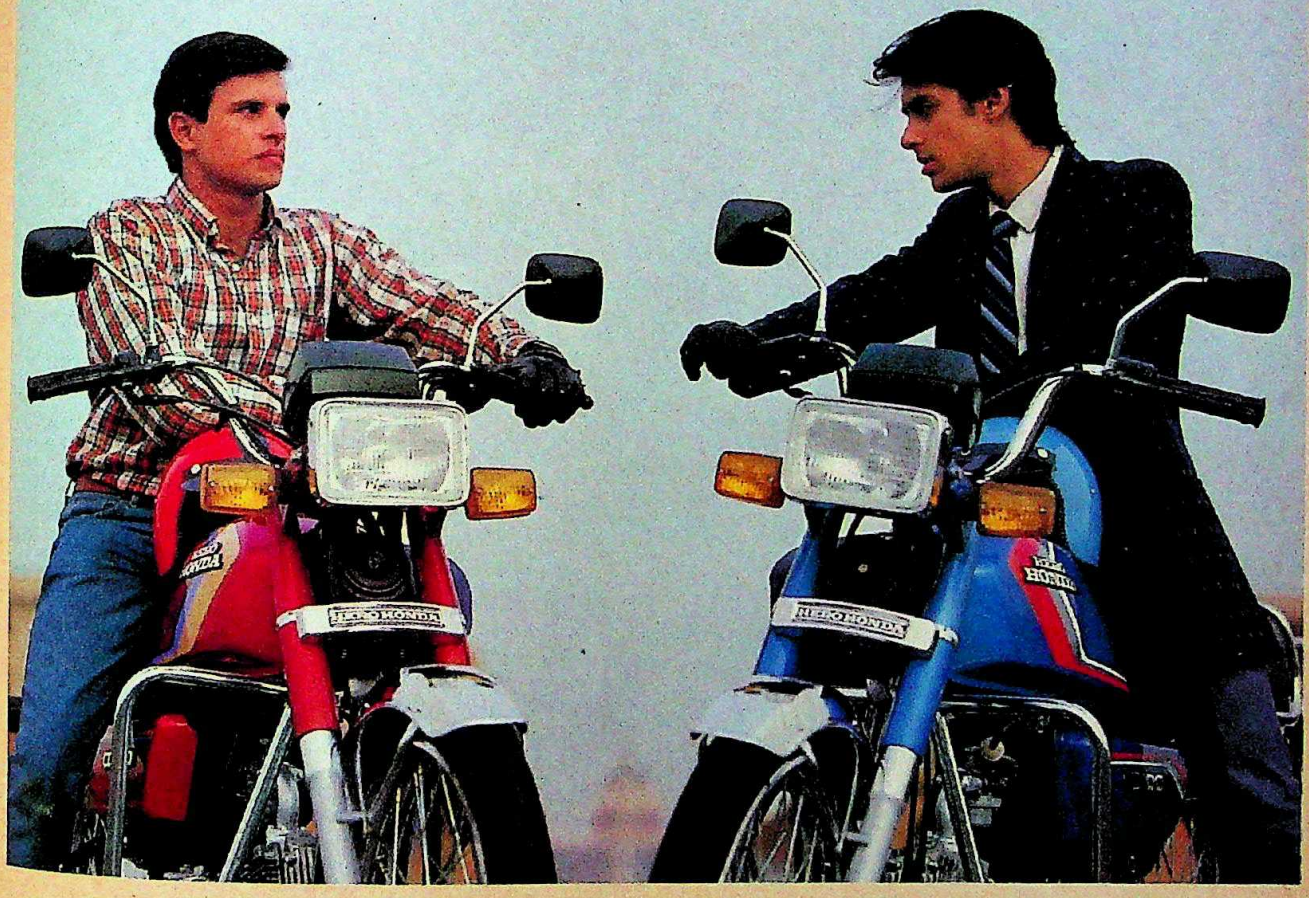

Meet Sunny (on the left) and Bunty. They are old friends. And old foes. They have rarely agreed on anything in life.

If Sunny loves cricket, Bunty loves football. Sunny enjoys literature, Bunty loves to plunge into the world of facts and figures. Bunty is always formally dressed. Sunny would never be caught in a suit and tie. Sunny works in an advertising agency. Bunty works in a bank.

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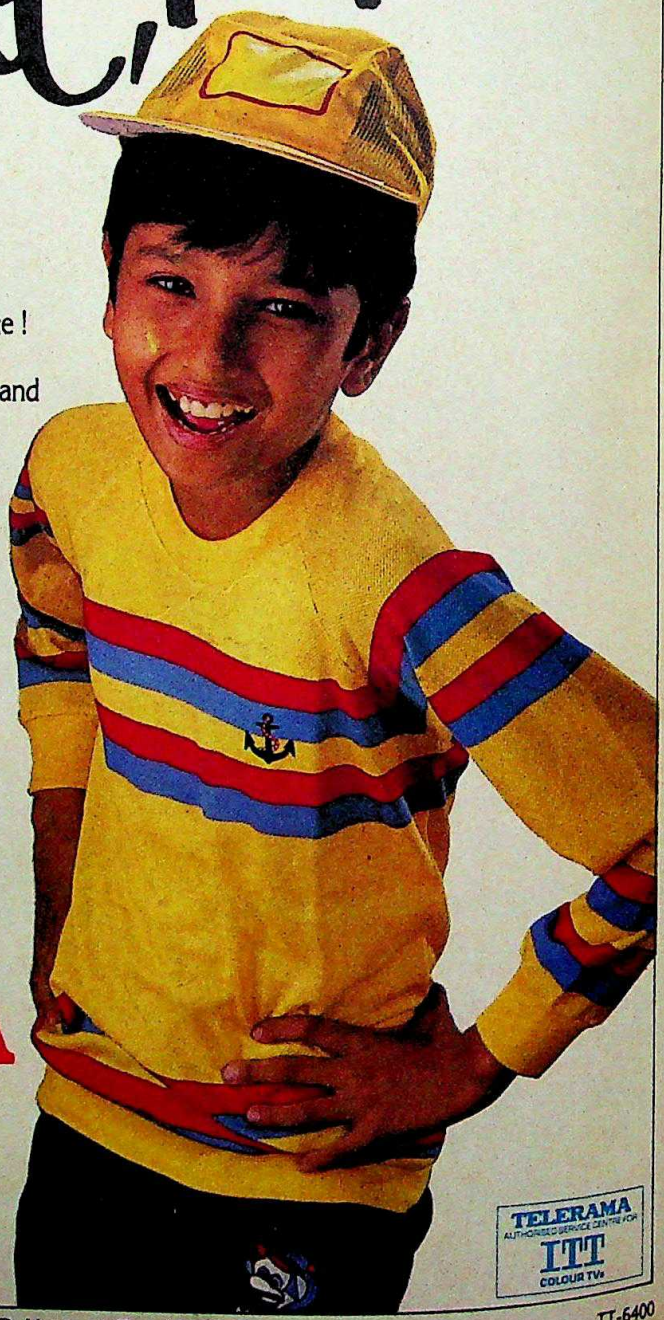

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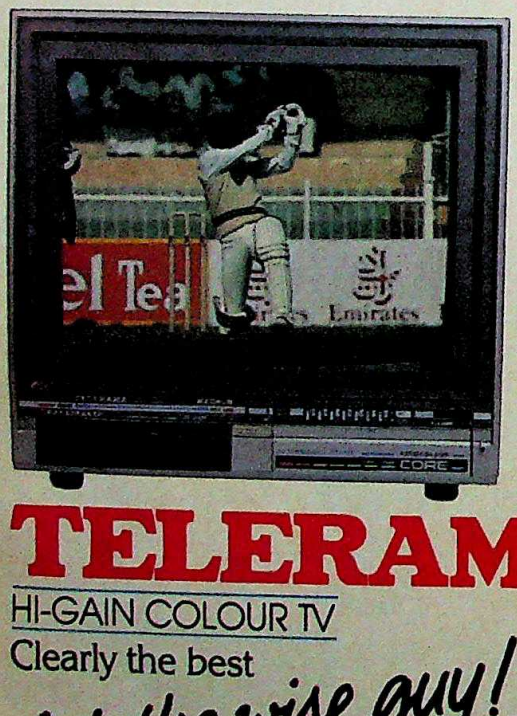

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AIR-INDIA

Victim of Persecution

Nigeria charges crew members with drug smuggling

By its behaviour over the past seven weeks, the Nigerian Government has earned itself an unflattering reference in aviation history. The Nigerian military rulers not only detained an Air-India (AI) Airbus 300, *Beas*, at Lagos' Muratala Muhammed Airport, but also defied the orders of their own judiciary, and confined three members of the crew to a prison meant for hardened criminals. The detention of the airliner, whose crew has been charged with carrying 32.4 kg of cocaine, has led to an extended diplomatic and legal tussle between India and Nigeria (area: 9.24 lakh sq km; population: approximately 100 million).

While officials of the civil aviation and external affairs ministries flew to Lagos to bail out the crew, the airline ticked up a loss of $120,000 (Rs 15.6 lakh) daily. The Nigerians demanded a $32 million (Rs 41.6 crore) bank guarantee for the release of the aircraft, a record amount. (The aircraft itself costs Rs 50 crore). AI also faces the risk of paying over Rs 10 crore as penalty to the Nigerian customs.

The story began on August 25, when AI's flight from Bombay to Lagos via Nairobi landed at Muratala Airport with over 150 passengers on board. Soon after the passengers disembarked, Flight Purser N. Kalidasan noticed some packages strewn on the floor at the rear of the Airbus. Kalidasan informed Inflight Supervisor A.K. Chakravarty and Flight Engineer N.K. Chakravarty and the three jointly decided to call in local security and customs officials. Other crew members, including the pilot, had by then disembarked.

On conducting a check, the customs officials found five packages, each of them containing Nycil powder tins stuffed with a brown substance. After confiscating the mystery consignment and recording their statements, the crew members were allowed to carry on to their hotels. Simultaneously, however, they were told not to leave until further orders, and a command was also issued to detain the aircraft.

Soon after the crew left, AI's Lagos-based airport manager and ground engineer were summoned to the airport to identify the packages under question. While there, the Indians saw a Nigerian who had arrived on the same AI flight from Bombay. He was handcuffed and had near him another set of packages that looked similar to the ones that had been seized. The AI officials believed that they had been summoned in connection with his arrest but were stunned when told that the Airbus could be released only if the company paid a fine of over $49 million (Rs 63.7 crore). (The demand was later scaled down).

A few hours later, the AI crew was summoned to the airport for interrogation and detained for over eight hours. Their release came only after the Indian High Commission's intervention.

That, unfortunately, was not the end of the story. Three days later, six customs officials served the crew with search warrants at the Sheraton, where they were staying. When the crew members insisted that they would frisk the officials before permitting them in their rooms, only three of them agreed. Later, however, they left a document stating that nothing had been found.

But the Nigerian Government was clearly determined to see that matters didn't end there. On September 17 the three crew members—Kalidasan and the two Chakravartys—were served with summons to appear before the Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal (MOT)—a body dominated by defence services men—which also deals with criminal cases. The charges were that they were found in possession of 32.5 kg of cocaine, which they had brought illegally into Nigeria in the aircraft.

According to AI, the consignment was loaded in Bombay as cabin baggage. But when the aircraft touched down at Lagos, the passenger left it behind probably intending to collect it later because he sensed the situation was risky. The Nigerians, inexplicably, invoked a law which permits the authorities to impound a vehicle—or any mode of transport—exclusively used to transport contraband. According to international civil aviation regulations, however, a passenger aircraft cannot be held in a case of smuggling. The Nigerian customs authorities made out a case as if the Airbus was being used only to carry cocaine and other smuggled goods.

While AI was battling it out in court, sustained diplomatic efforts by the Indian High Commission yielded no results—even local civil aviation officials

An Air-India Airbus: deep trouble

Air-India sources feel that the airline is caught in the web of Nigerian politics, in which the military rulers and the judiciary are at odds.

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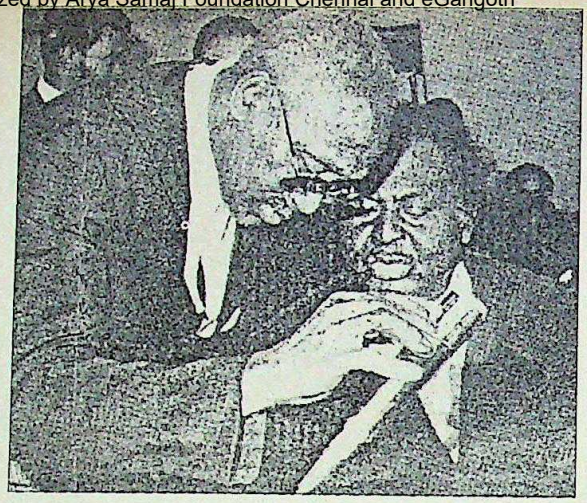
were inaccessible. In New Delhi, the Nigerian acting high commissioner was summoned at least five times to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and told to request her government to intervene. Minister of State for External Affairs, Eduardo Faleiro also wrote a letter to his counterpart in Lagos, but without effect.

Simultaneously, AI filed an appeal in the MOT but withdrew it 24 hours later on the advice of counsel Lalit Bhasin who had flown to Nigeria. Efforts for a settlement out of court through local civil aviation officials also failed to come through.

Finally, when all other options had drawn a blank, the airline filed an appeal before Justice Kolo of the Federal High Court on September 7. While the arguments were still going on, the Nigerian authorities filed a criminal case in the MOT and challenged the jurisdiction of the high court to deal with a criminal case. But Kolo rejected the plea and ordered the release of the airliner.

However, the Government not only refused to honour the order but also approached the MOT and secured yet another contrary order a week later. This authorised them to detain the plane and send the crew to Kirrikiri jail, about 30 km from Lagos, to a prison meant for those charged with serious offences.



Air-India counsel Williams (right) at tribunal session: witch-hunt

Photographs by PAUL OLOKO

(From left to right) N.K. Chakravarty, A.K. Chakravarty, and N. Kalidasan: political scapegoats

THE Indian carrier then filed a case of contempt in Kolo's court. The judge admitted the petition and ordered the arrest of those who flouted his orders. Rejecting the government plea of constitutional protection, Kolo wrote in his judgement: "How...can such a defendant now seek the protection of the Constitution he has defiled? It is a pity that this sort of thing should take place in a regime which claims to have respect for the fundamental human rights as a rule of law....May the good lord save this country."

Dismayed by the Government's attitude, Rotimi Williams, a reputed Nigerian lawyer, AI's senior counsel, said in court: "In my 44 years of legal practice, this is my saddest day, because I see a decline, I see the light going out, I see the clouds darkening and I see darkness encompassing the whole lot of us."

Kolo wasn't the only judge to reprimand the executive. When the Nigerian director for public prosecution decided to approach another judge on the question of the Federal High Court's jurisdiction—and also to launch a criminal case against the crew—he received a nasty surprise. Justice Babatunde Belgore, who heard the case, directed the Nigerian Board of Customs and Excise to confine itself to one court. During the arguments Belgore said that the officials were not clear about which court they wanted to charge AI in. He said that "by so doing you are no more prosecuting the airline but persecuting it". The situation is extraordinary and AI sources feel that the airline has become the victim of Nigerian politics in which the military rulers and the judiciary are at odds.

Nigerian reaction was also influenced by the seizure of its plane at New York in August following the recovery of cocaine from the crew. The US authorities, however, had released both the crew and the plane after securing a bank guarantee of just $1,20,000 (Rs 15.6 lakh). The incident had brought the Nigerians adverse international publicity and the recovery of drugs from an AI aircraft came in handy to prove that the drug traffic originated from India and not Nigeria, and that Indians settled in Africa were involved.

AI officials also allege that no serious effort was made to track down the real courier of the contraband who might have been helped to escape with the Nigerian Government's connivance. The Nigerian High Commission in New Delhi was unwilling to comment.

The decision to send senior Indian officials came when the tangle refused to be resolved and wives of the detained Indians met Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Jagdish Tytler. After Tytler had got in touch with the MEA, a high-powered delegation led by Dr S.S. Sidhu, secretary civil aviation, and Eric Gonsalves, a secretary in the MEA, was despatched to Lagos. The Government deliberately kept the political leadership out of the negotiations as it wanted to avoid the impression of protecting drug peddlers. Moreover, an informal dialogue, it was felt, would yield quicker results.

On arriving in Lagos they discovered though that their mission was not about to be easily accomplished. At one stage the Nigerians were willing to release the plane and the crew if the Indian Government produced a guarantee for $32 million which would be adjusted against the fine imposed later.

But AI officials feel that they are being forced to plead guilty for a crime which they haven't committed. They also feel that the pressure tactics are aimed at getting AI to waive Rs 24 crore owed to it for five years by the Nigerian Government and its agencies. Said an airline official: "It is setting a dangerous precedent. In future, Air-India will have to pay for crimes committed by others. We are paying for the security lapse at Bombay." The price of maintaining business and diplomatic relations with Nigeria is proving to be a high one.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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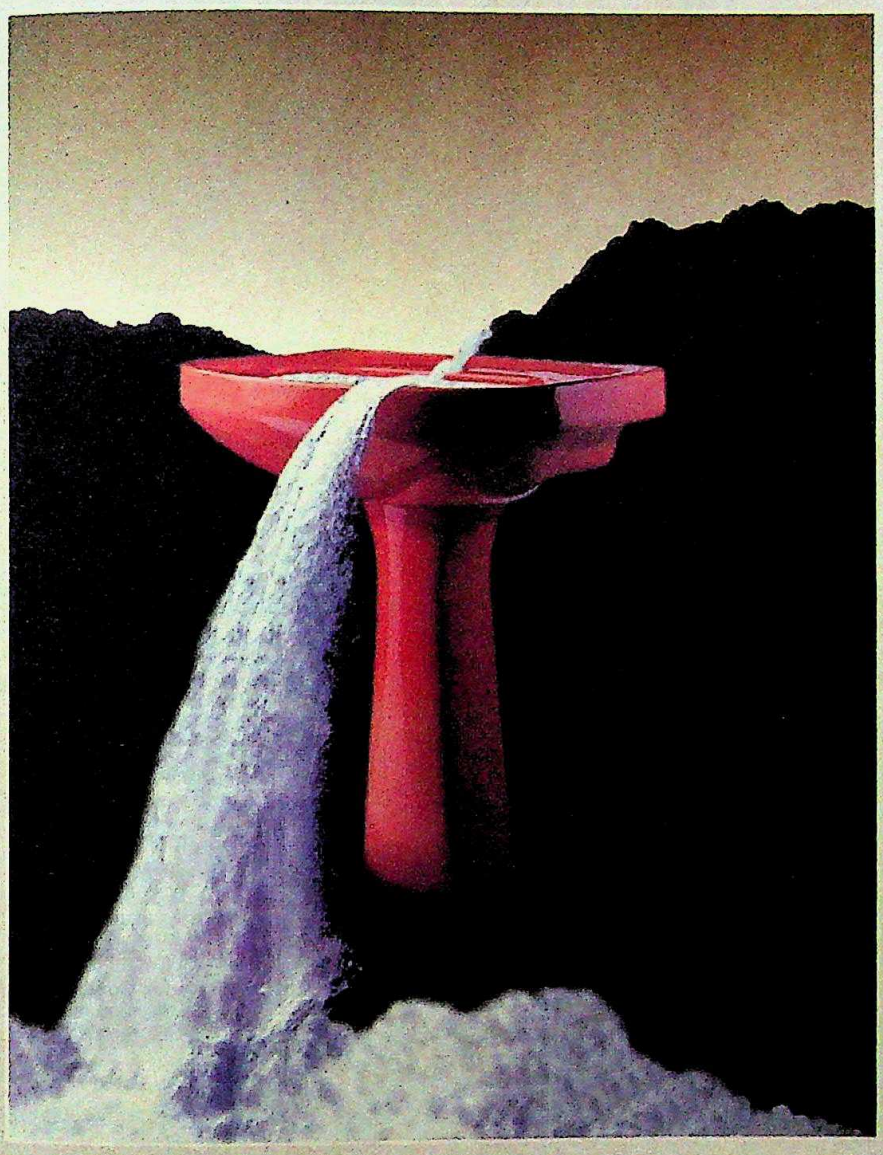

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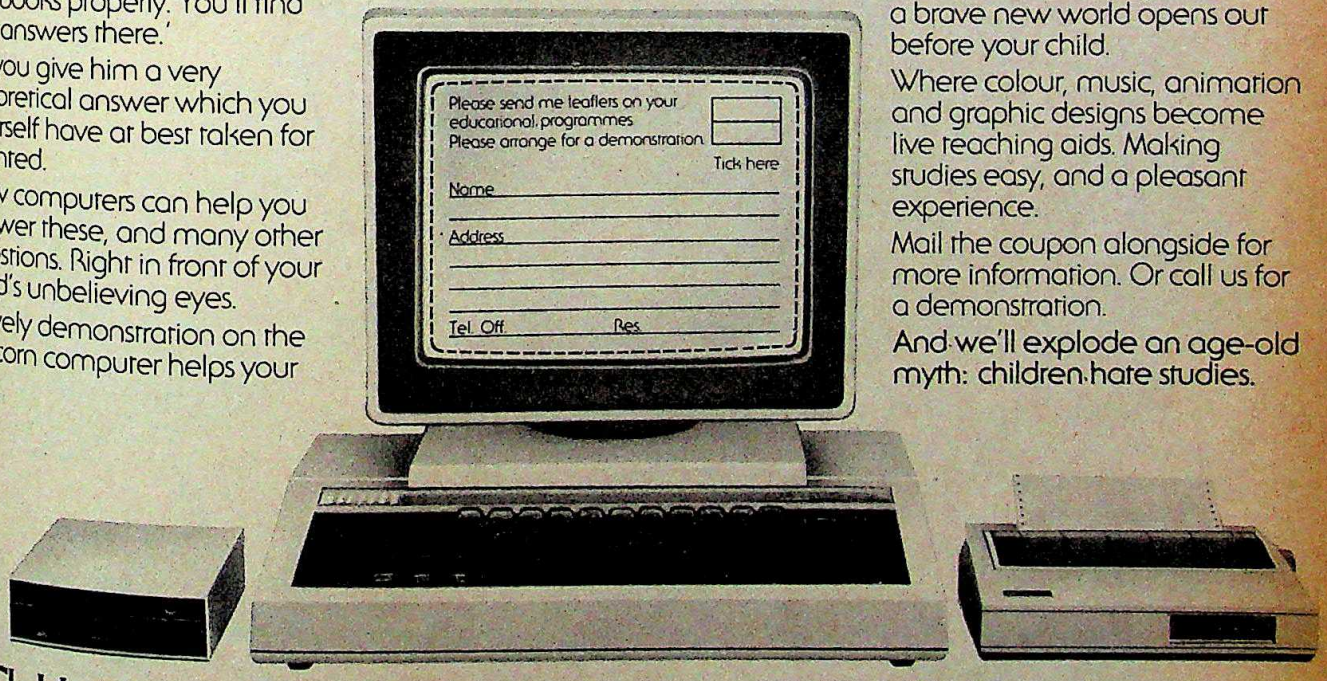

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in its infancy in India, scientists fear they might end up conducting clinical trials instead of being involved in developing vaccines. And despite assurances from biotechnology officials, the system to prevent researchers from using Indians as "guinea-pigs" has several glaring flaws. For instance, officials say that no vaccine would be tested in India unless the Drugs Controller of India and the ICMR clear it. Experts point out that in the past, the drugs controller has neither checked the sale of spurious drugs in the country nor prevented banned drugs from being marketed.

More importantly, the drugs controller is not bound to get ICMR's clearance to permit the testing and marketing of new drugs in India. Since it is easier to get the drugs controller's approval many companies and institutions try to bypass the ICMR clearance.

The Lucknow-based Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI), for instance, only got the drugs controller's approval to test a controversial birth control pill called Centrochroman. Even while clearing the pill for mass use the drugs controller did not ask the ICMR to review

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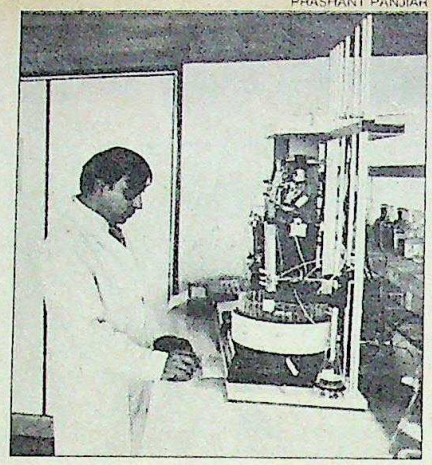

Vaccine research in India: slow

CDRI's human clinical trials. The institute wanted the drug to be released by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi recently. But the Prime Minister's Secretariat insisted that it be cleared by the ICMR. The council is now reviewing the trials.

The problem doesn't end there. Neither ICMR nor the Drugs Controller of India has an effective way of ascertaining if clinical trials are being conducted properly. The council has a Toxicological Review Committee which checks out if the drug is safe for human use. And its ethical committee merely lays down guidelines for human clinical trials and has no way of ensuring that these are observed by researchers.

For instance, the ethics committee insists that researchers must inform all people undergoing clinical trials about the side effects of the drugs being tested and the risks involved. But in most trials, this is rarely done (*see box*). Admits Professor N.C. Nayak, chairman of ICMR's Toxicological Review Committee: "We need proper surveillance teams to check whether the tests are being done ethically."

Meanwhile, the Americans are piqued by the outcry. They dismiss all talk of biological warfare as a lot of "hogwash". Philip Schambra, science attache to the US Embassy in India, says: "We are disappointed by the whole controversy. If the vaccine programme is stopped, the greater loss will be to the Indian people." Not many Indian scientists are convinced about that.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

CLINICAL TRIALS

No Qualms

HOW people are subjected to clinical tests for new drugs without even realising it is illustrated by Vasundhara Sharma's case. When told by her friend that New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had a new contraceptive, she wanted to try it out. Mother of a newly-born son, she wanted to have her next child after two years.

Doctors in the AIIMS Gynaecological Department told Sharma she would be given an injection which would protect her for three months. They assured her there would be no side-effects. What they didn't say was that they were actually making a clinical trial on the new contraceptive, Norethisterone Enanthate, (NET-EN) to test its efficacy. Nor did they tell her of the known side-effects or risks involved.

Complications began soon after Sharma's first injection. Her menstrual periods became highly irregular, a known side-effect of the contraceptive. After six months though she wanted to stop the injections, the doctors sent a nurse over to administer it. Even after she stopped the injections, complications persisted. She stopped menstruating for a year. And when she finally got her periods they were very painful. Worse, she was unable to conceive.

Sharma finally became pregnant earlier this year—five years after she stopped the injections. But even now she is worried. "I don't know if my child will be normal," she said.

None of the doctors who gave her the injections are still with AIIMS to cross-check her story. But officials of the Indian Council of Medical Research, which initiated the trials, confirm they were surprised by the high rate of acceptance in the tests done by AIIMS. The doctors claimed to have achieved the results by "motivating" people to complete the trials.

But Sharma's case only shows how doctors flout all ethical norms and get away with it. If a premier medical institution is so callous, there is no way of ensuring that the proposed clinical trials under the Indo-US vaccine project will not be misused.

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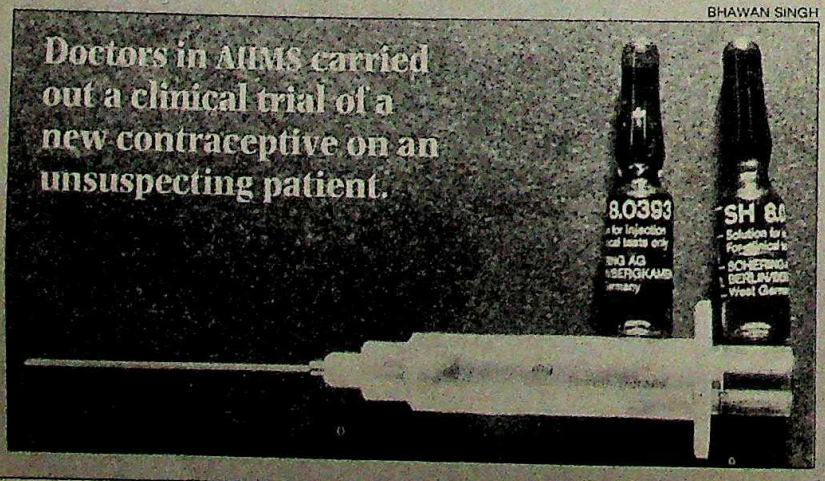
BHAWAN SINGH



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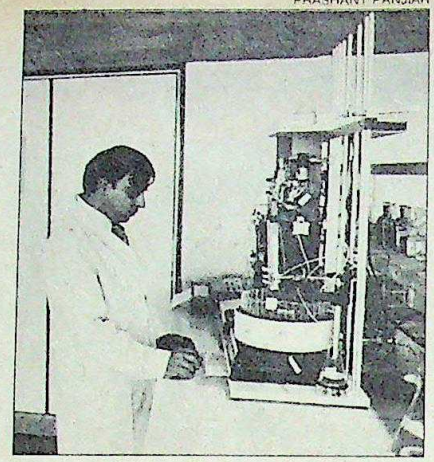

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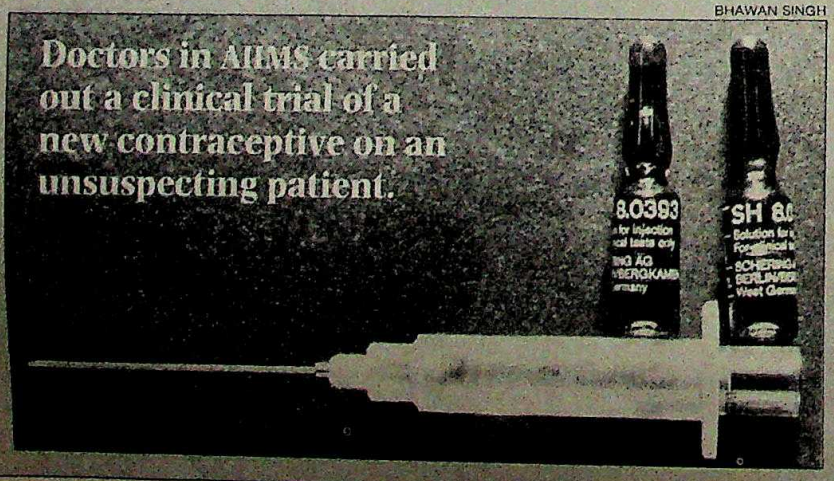

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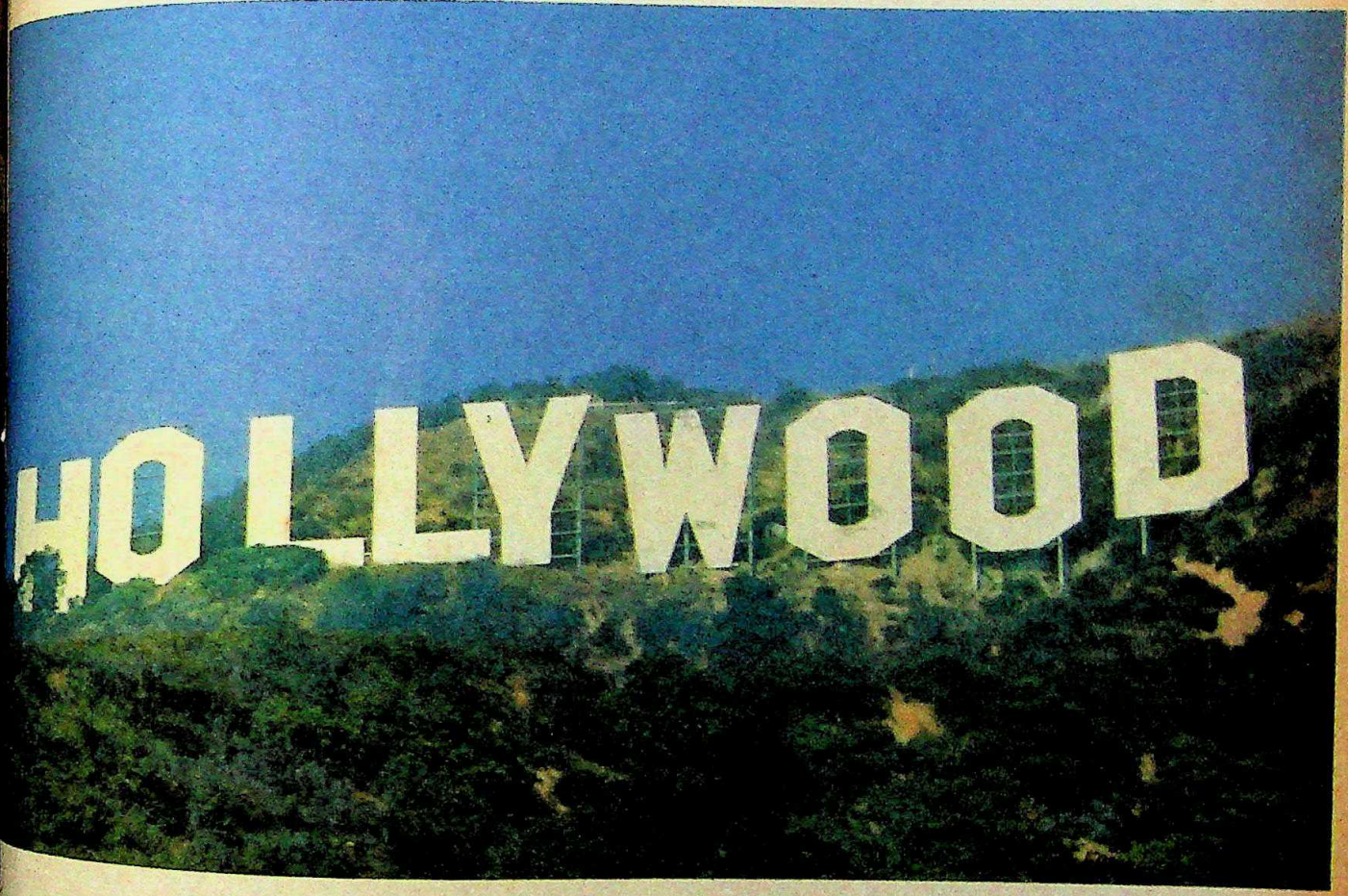

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EXPECT MORE FROM PAN AM

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◆ Emily Post would've approved. The high-priestess of etiquette has a desi imitator to teach the fairer sex how to mind their p's and q's. Clearly, felt actress **Anooradha Patel**, style is acquired, not bestowed. So, 'The Orchid' opens this month, to provide Indian teens the finishing touch. At a price, of course. The Rs-2,500, 36-hour course is calculated to create "the total woman". But it's not quite a "Swiss-style finishing school" the attractive granddaughter of Ashok Kumar envisions; she's never been to one. That's no deterrent. "I'd like to start one for men also," she enthuses.

◆ From bus conductor, he's finally made it—128 films later—to the driver's seat. Only this time, as a cabby directed by Hollywood. In *Bloodstone*, southern star **Rajnikant** plays a dare-devil taxi-driver—'Sabu', a man with a heart of gold. And with an eye on a stone—a ruby, naturally—which is planted on an American couple by jewel smugglers. Drawn into gun battles and car chases, he races to the rescue: "It's just my-kind-of-role," he says.

Patel: pricey style

Rajnikant: dare-devil driver

SRINIVAS KUMAR

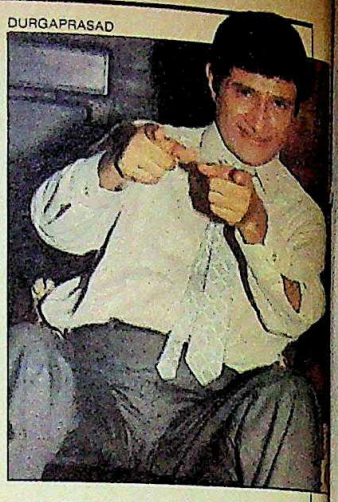
On location in Karnataka's bazaars and palaces this month, the adventure film is a visual treat of the exotic east. And Sabu provides the right comic touch through, as Director Dwight Little says, his "native charisma". Only, Rajnikant doesn't get to play Romeo: "In all my films, I've had a girl with me. Unfortunately, not in this one."

◆ The collective good, it is believed, was his goal. But the famed Travancore ruler—150 years ago—had a far more individual pursuit. A temple dancer, reveals a Malayalam film titled after him, *Swati Tirunal*. And as the devadasi Sugandavalli, **Ranjani** swings sinuously till she causes his ruin. That debatable portrait of the ruler, played by Anant Nag, has his latter-day devotees up in arms. "I've tried to show him as a benevolent ruler but one whose moods are ruled by music," says Marxist Director Lenin Rajendran. But it's his Tamil find who steals the show—and his highness' heart. A noble cause, that.

Ranjani and Anant Nag

◆ Something doesn't quite ad up. **Dev Anand**, cutting a fine figure for Jaykaylon Fabrics? But at a youthful 65, age doesn't count. Taking a cue from his model proteges, the director posed on the sets of *Sache ka Bhola Bhala*, for his "friends"—the advertisers. "I got free publicity for my film," he admitted. Actually, went the rumour mills, it was an unpaid pitch to help reverse his waning career. And his other debut was as suspect. After 15 years, a role in a film made by an unknown. The one-time heart-throb of the '60s, naturally, denied the crisis. "Everyone has financial problems. Besides, this is the most expensive movie I've made."

DURGAPRASAD

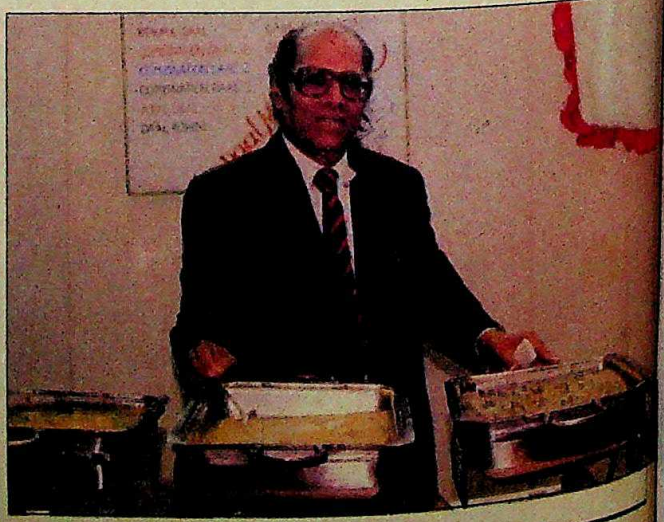


Dev Anand: ad act

◆ Spiced and stirred in 24 ways, it was an epicurean's dream. At a 'daal' festival in Bombay, **Satya Narain Bakshi**, 56, served the cereal with a gourmet's touch. The 'daal maharajah'—Air-India's senior manager (catering) has long savoured vegetarian cuisine. He even turned chef at Maxim's, in Paris, which dished out consomme a la Bakshi in his honour. "Even with the lowly daal, a rich variety is possible," said the curry king, amidst simmering daal Kohinoor, Rangili and Mamooli. Rare fare for staple broth.

Bakshi: curry king

NAMAS BHOJANI



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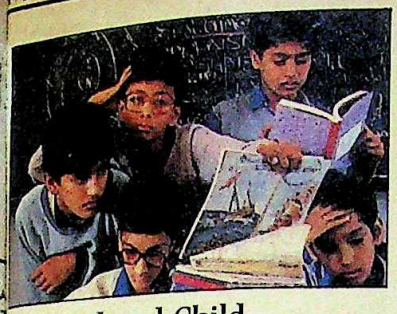


The Burdened Child

For millions of children, education today resembles not a voyage of discovery but an endurance test. Heaped with homework and impossible demands, they trudge through their troubled world, their childhood sacrificed to the demands of the textbook.

COVER STORY 78

Fresh Differences

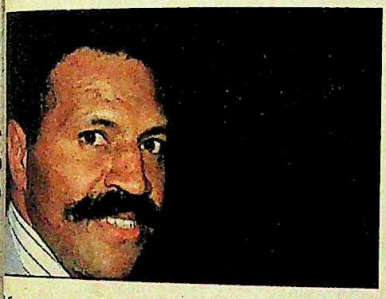
When R. Venkataraman took over after the stormy Zail Singh period, hopes of a tension-free President-prime minister relationship had been raised. But there are several indicators that Venkataraman and Rajiv Gandhi don't see eye to eye in many areas.

CURRENT EVENTS 26

The King of Con

Natwarlal's name has been synonymous with cheating for more than five decades. The legend and the truth about the master criminal, who was nabbed by the Uttar Pradesh Police last fortnight. Plus, an interview with the confidence trickster.

SPECIAL REPORT 66



Marooned at Home

What little hope the Indians in Fiji had of the restoration of their rights is rapidly disappearing. Reluctant to return to India, many of them are trying to emigrate to other countries, but with little luck. Also, an exclusive interview with Colonel Rabuka.

GLOBE-TROTTING 98

Tears and Triumph

It was a near-perfect script until somebody changed the ending. After raising great hopes, favourites India and Pakistan faltered and ultimately outsiders Australia walked away with the Reliance Cup. Also, an exclusive column by Kapil Dev on why India lost.

SPECIAL FEATURE 108

Filling the Void

"After Kishore Kumar, who?" is the most oft-repeated question in Bombay's film industry. A host of young playback singers are trying to fill the gap that has been left by the gradual fade-out of an entire generation of established names, both men and women.

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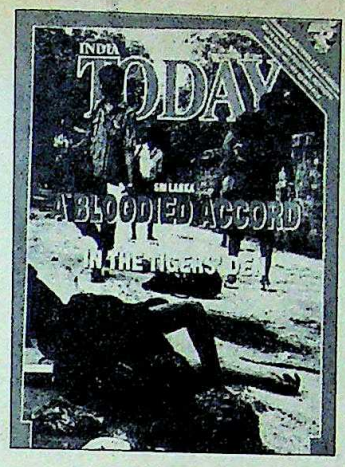

REVEALING ACCOUNT

Your cover story ("A Bloodied Accord", November 15) has hit the bull's eye. The casualties of this bungled accord—as seen through a daredevil photo-journalist's lens—should open the eyes of our military strategists to dealing in urban guerilla warfare. The question is—will peace ever return to the strife-torn towns of Sri Lanka?

Bhopal — **A.N. RAMESH**

■ India should never have gone in for such an accord, and should have let Sri Lanka handle its problems. Our government appears to have acted in haste in order to gain some popularity, and now it can repent at leisure. Sri Lanka has pulled off a coup—it is cleverly using Indian manpower and resources to solve its domestic problems. President Jayewardene deserves the Nobel prize for political diplomacy.

Bangalore — **RAMANAND SHARMA**

■ The remarkable pictures ("In the Tigers' Den", November 15) are the first of the actual conflict in Jaffna. The eyewitness account brings out ever so clearly the fact that the Tigers have scant regard for human life.

Srinagar — **TARIQ ABDULLAH**

■ The eyewitness account clearly shows that apart from killing innocent Sri Lankan Tamils, the Indian Army is losing dedicated personnel. Our forces should be called back instead of indulging in a war for someone else.

Bombay — **A. SUBBURAM**

■ The eyewitness description and accompanying photographs were chilling. I am reminded of the famous lines on soldiers: "Theirs is not to reason why. Theirs is but to do and die..."

Baroda — **AMIT LOIWAL**

■ If India could be partitioned, why not Sri Lanka? The Tamils there should be freed from Sinhalese dominance.

New Delhi — **PALLAB K. BOSE**

SOLE PREOCCUPATION

Your editorial ("A Nation Obsessed", November 15), rightly points out that cricket is the only game in which India can be said to be in the world league. Considering the fact that only seven or eight countries play competitive cricket, while in athletics or soccer there is stiff rivalry among a host of nations, it is no wonder that there is such a preoccupation with cricket in India.

Ludhiana — **SARBJIT SINGH GHUMAN**

VANCOUVER VACATION

A teen-age fascination for behind-the-scene incidents at political conventions was fulfilled by your article on the recent Commonwealth summit ("A Moveable Feast", November 15).

Agra — **KUMAR VINIT**

■ If I were to comment on the Commonwealth summit at Vancouver, I would describe it as some people holidaying at government expense.

Amritsar — **KAMAL JIT SINGH AHLUWALIA**

WIDOWS' WOES

The feature ("Wrecks of Humanity", November 15) evocatively brought out the plight of widows in India who continue to suffer in silence. The pictures were particularly poignant.

Mysore — **C.R. RANGASWAMY**

MEMBERS' PREROGATIVE

The club concept is an occidental one ("The Brown Sahibs", November 15), that cannot be Indianised: just as a suit can't be worn as a sherwani. The Calcutta Swimming Club incident was rather unfortunate. A club is sacred to its members and they should be allowed to keep it that way—non-members have no business to violate it. This has nothing to do with national ideology or patriotism.

Meerut — **P.N. BANERJEE**

POLITICIAN OF THE POOR

Janardhan Poojary deserves congratulations for championing the cause of millions of poor people in India ("The

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Pugnacious Politician", November 15). His work should be emulated by other ministers as well.
Bombay — K.M. KOTIAN

SUCCESS STORIES

Kudos for your cover story ("The New Millionaires", October 31). But you should not have lumped the home-grown Karsanbhai Patel and M.N. Kothari with the four technocrat millionaires.
Kanpur — YASH PAL ARORA

■ The success stories of all the new millionaires illustrate that there is no substitute for hard work.
Vijayawada — M.S. PRASAD

■ The article indicates that the Government's fiscal policy is taking our economy forward. It shows that great economic progress is possible even in a so-called socialist system.
Kakinada — P. SITHAPATI RAO

■ Many of the millionaires inspire the youth not from the traditional business communities. Your story was superb but you should have given details of the many hurdles these men must have encountered in the early years.
Bombay — N.S. DESHPANDE

FLAG ILLUSTRATION

The Zimbabwean flag ("Dream Come True", October 15) printed on page 118 was not correctly shown. It seems to belong to some other country.
Bangalore — VIKRAM R.

The error is regretted. —Editor

COMMON GUILT

Your comment ("Moral Bankruptcy", October 31), brings into sharp focus the guilt of the entire country in Roop Kanwar's murder. While widowers remarry without any stigma, Roop Kanwar's act speaks volumes about the plight of widows in India.
Chandigarh — S.S. JAIN

SENSELESS BELIEFS

The Deorala sati incident ("Militant Defiance", October 31), reveals the senseless beliefs still held by many Indians. The ordinance against the glorification of sati is welcome and must be effectively implemented.
Allahabad — SHALINI SAXENA

■ Supporters of Roop Kanwar's sati claim the act brought glory to womanhood. But it would be interesting to see how many husbands would come forward to immolate themselves and bring glory to manhood?
Saharanpur — NARAYAN SINGH

■ Sati is, no doubt, a barbaric custom. But there is no surer way of alienating a community than by passing a law against its traditions. An isolated incident could well snowball into a major socio-religious issue. While the practice of sati should be discouraged, abolished if possible, the Rajasthan Government should have been more discreet in issuing the ordinance.
Pune — R.S. GILL

STARK POVERTY

I have been a resident of Koraput district, Orissa, for 22 years and entirely agree with you that the reports on starvation deaths ("Starvation or Sickness?", October 31) have been highly exaggerated. Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik's statement that people of the district are accustomed to eating mango kernels and only take rice as a substitute is absolutely true. Even so, the state Government should hang its head in shame at the grinding poverty and underdevelopment that stalks the district even 40 years after Independence.
Koraput — PRAKASH CHANDRA SAHU

■ The scene reported in your story can be witnessed in almost all our villages. The poor continue to die from lack of medical attention, as doctors are reluctant to practise in rural areas. To overcome this, the Government should make it compulsory for all doctors to spend at least one week each month in a village. Some incentives like travel allowance should also be offered to make villages more attractive to them.
Ludhiana — R.S. PATHAK

PEACE TALKS

It is tragic that another accord signed by our prime minister has failed miserably ("Tiger by the Tail", October 31). As the Indian Peace-Keeping Force is facing stiff public resistance in Sri Lanka, the only alternative left for our government is to initiate a dialogue with the Tamil Tigers and reach an amicable solution within the framework of the Sri Lankan Constitution.
Chandigarh — AJAY KAPOOR

■ The situation in Sri Lanka has reached grave proportions. Through your magazine, I would like to mourn the death of Indian soldiers in Jaffna who could not become martyrs in their own country, but on foreign soil.
Assam — HEMANTA DAS

NEED FOR SUPPORT

The October 1 demonstration by Tibetans in China ("The Tibetan Tangle", October 31), highlighted their grim and long-drawn-out struggle for Independence. There is absolutely no reason why India cannot extend to the citizens of this neighbouring country the kind of support that it has so freely given to the Tamils of Sri Lanka.
Solan — SARABJEET SINGH

CALL FOR CAUTION

The story on the Indo-US vaccine programme ("Fears of Misuse", October 31), has sounded an urgent warning bell. Not only the officials and scientists involved in the programme but also the common man, who will unknowingly become a guinea-pig, must take immediate heed of the dangerous consequences as presented in your report.
Ranchi — ASHOK KUMAR TIWARY

SECRET OF SUCCESS

The article on Ramesh Krishnan ("An Unassuming Winner", October 31) rightly points out that the career graphs of Ramesh and father Ramanathan Krishnan are remarkably similar. The secret of Ramesh's success is undoubtedly his delicate stroke play and rigid discipline. It is a pity that there are few youngsters on the Indian tennis scene who will be able to fill Ramesh's shoes.
Madras — S. SATYAMURTI

CORRECT CAPACITY

This refers to your report "A Wordy Duel" (August 31). The Jamshedpur Cooperative Flying Club Ltd is a registered society and not a TISCO flying club. I was questioned by the customs in my capacity as the vice-president of the club and not as the chief industrial relations manager of TISCO. It is absolutely incorrect to say that I told the customs authorities that it was a toy plane.
Jamshedpur — NIROOP MAHANTY
vice-president, Jamshedpur Cooperative Flying Club

The errors are regretted. —Editor

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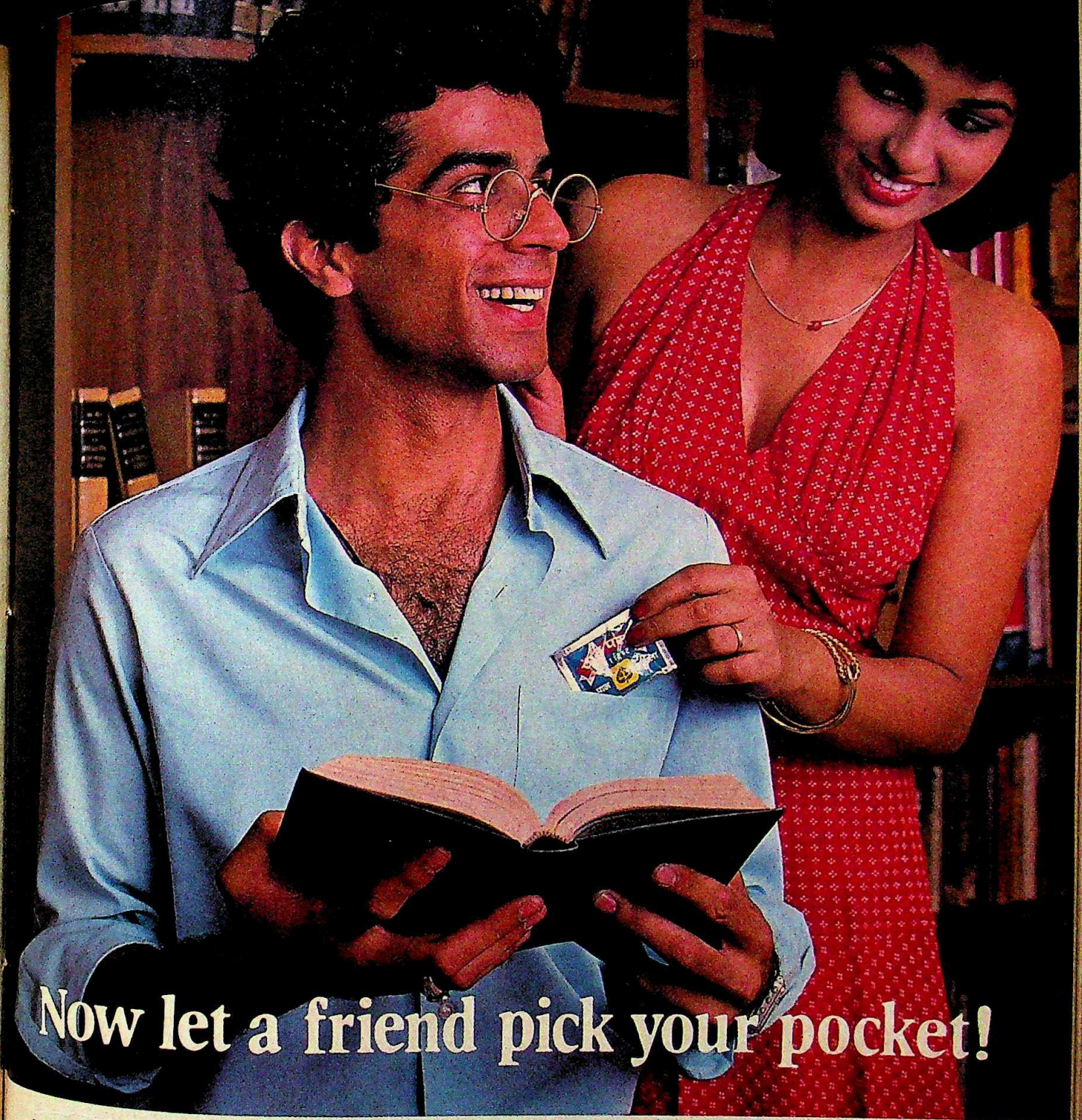

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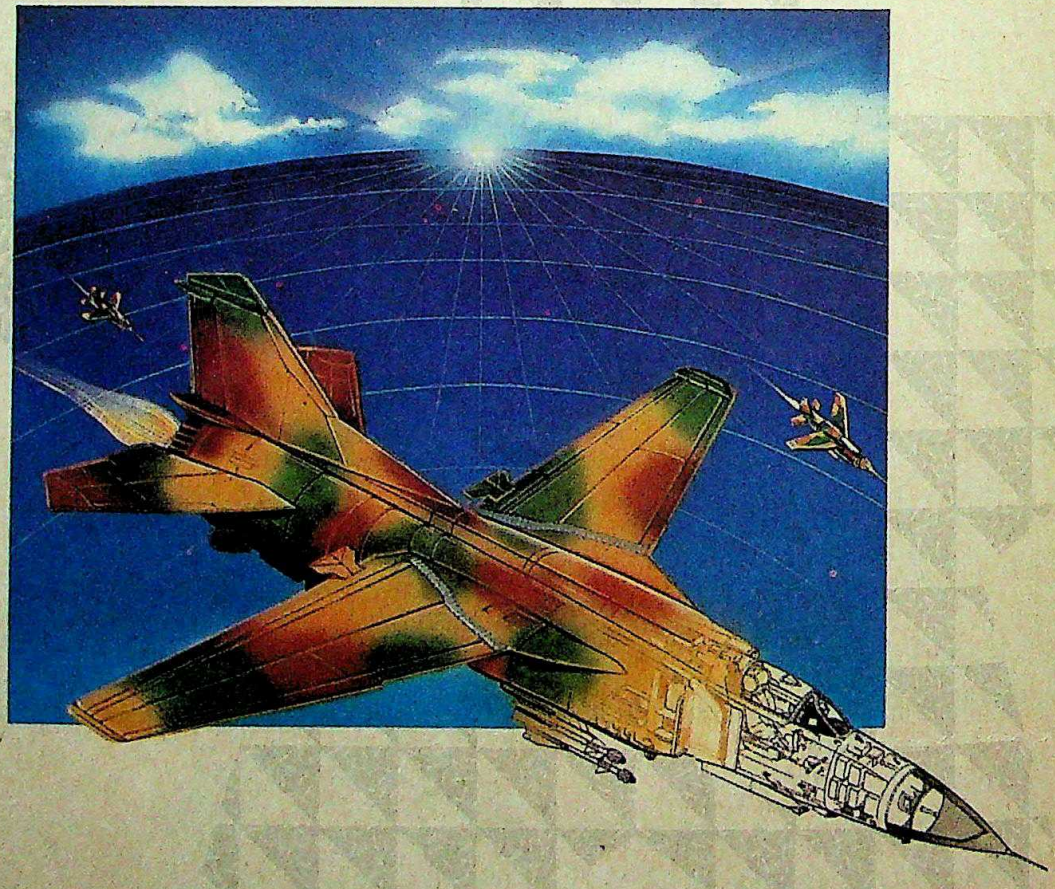
These aircraft would still be heading west if we hadn't moved in.



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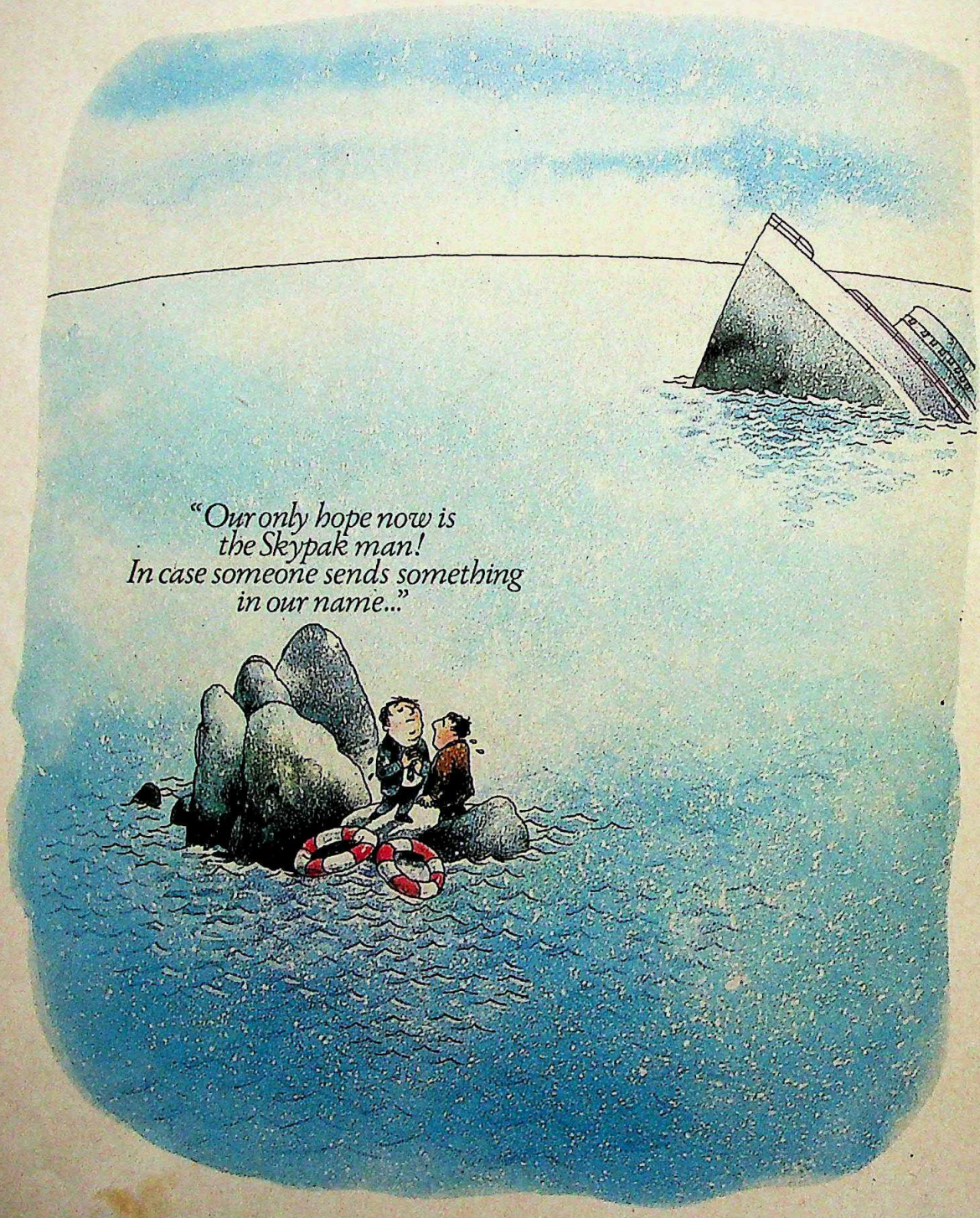

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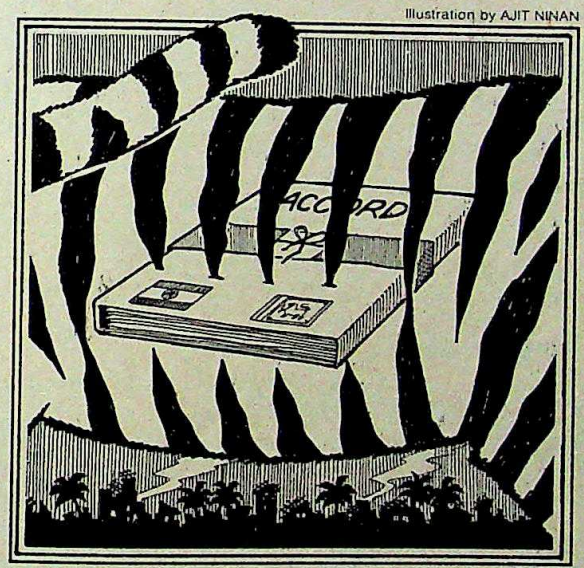
The Lankan Quagmire

WITH hindsight, the timetable seems to have been hopelessly optimistic: cessation of hostilities within 48 hours of the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, the surrendering of all arms in another 72 hours, a general amnesty, the immediate formation of an interim administrative set-up, elections to the northern and eastern provincial councils in three months, and a referendum on uniting the two provinces by the end of next year. By now, all but the last of those steps should have been taken. In fact, not even the first goal (cessation of hostilities) has been achieved. The Sri Lankan situation is messier than ever before, and Rajiv Gandhi's unhappy record of bungled accords continues.

One result is the blast in Colombo last fortnight, which killed more than 50 Sri Lankans. Another is Rajiv Gandhi's laboured effort to explain his Sri Lanka policy to a crowd of drought-stricken farmers in Maharashtra. But worse could be in store. Indian soldiers have already paid a heavy price while battling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and now they face the unwelcome prospect of a long-drawn-out guerrilla war that may extract a price out of proportion to possible diplomatic or military benefits. Yet, an immediate pull-out will damage the army's morale. So should the country risk a Vietnam, or should Rajiv do what Henry Kissinger did in Paris: mask a withdrawal from battle with a fig-leaf accord? The choice is not an easy one.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Politically, the accord has run into an almost impossible minefield. Even the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) has said that the proposed devolution of powers under the bills now before the Sri Lankan Parliament is inadequate, but President J.R. Jayewardene has stuck to his stand that he will not yield further ground just now. The Sri Lankan Supreme Court nearly threw another spanner in the works by decreeing that a referendum was necessary on some provisions of the proposed 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution. The Sri Lankan Cabinet has quickly moved to prevent this by amending some of the provisions. Nevertheless, these are indicators of the kind of hurdles that will crop up in the future too.

Jayewardene might, as he often has in the past, pull a rabbit out of his hat, if only because his own survival and place in history are at stake. But the fact remains that he has to tread very carefully if he is not to lose the support of the Sinhalese majority. Both Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa and National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali have made their dissidence known; Premadasa even launched an anti-Indian tirade at the United Nations. The blast in Colombo was another warning signal. Perhaps inevitably, Jayewardene has been blowing hot and cold too, making intemperate remarks about Tamil Nadu and the TULF before somewhat modifying his stand. He is either not sure of his own position and cannot keep his ministers in line, or he is being the old fox that many regard him to be.

Other pressures restrict manoeuvring this side of the Palk Straits. The mood in Tamil Nadu is uncertain, and could pose problems if fighting continues on the island or if either of the Dravida parties in the state successfully whips up Tamil feeling. Both Jayewardene and Rajiv have to tread gingerly.

Neither leader has covered himself with glory since the accord was signed in late July. Under Jayewardene's nose, the eastern province continued to be 'colonised' by the Sinhalese, obviously with the intention to influence the outcome of the proposed referendum on merging the northern and eastern provinces into a single administrative unit by reducing the Tamils to a hopeless minority. And the almost deliberate insistence on taking captured Tamil Tigers to Colombo to stand trial (provoking the mass suicide and everything else that followed) did not speak of a desire to sort out a long-standing ethnic problem as amicably as possible.

Rajiv Gandhi in turn has obviously underestimated both the chicanery and will-power of the LTTE, even as he aroused its suspicions after the accord was signed, by allowing Indian security forces to be partial to the non-LTTE militant groups. Militarily, the most serious error was in giving the LTTE time to mine and booby-trap Jaffna town in a manner that made the final assault on the town so costly. Even before this, Indian troops were committed to a difficult task on alien soil without enough thought to what might happen if things go wrong.

At the moment, proposals on defence treaties are being combined with hopeful talk of provincial elections being held next month. But the over-all situation remains fluid and unpredictable because there are so many players with completely conflicting interests and objectives. If the Government's present strategy of pulverising the LTTE and bringing it to its senses works, the accord still stands a chance of being implemented. If not, there should be a fall-back strategy aimed at reducing the army's role on the island, in order to avoid getting into a protracted guerilla war. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran should meanwhile be used as a conduit to communicate with the LTTE and bring the Tigers to the talking table. With an army pull-out of some sort and the navy ensuring that no fresh arms reach the Tigers from outside, Jayewardene and the Tigers should then be asked to come to terms with each other, with India playing the role of umpire rather than combatant in somebody else's war.

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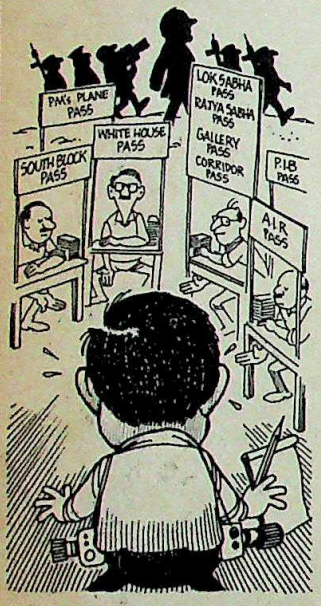
Flashing Passes

● Life can be pretty tough in these security-conscious days. Because nobody seems to trust anybody else's security system.

The result: to get anywhere within government offices involves carrying a briefcase full of passes, for each one



of which the hapless soul has to stand with an idiot grin in front of a special camera.

There is one pass for the Press Information Bureau, another that is valid for most government offices, and a third one for the prime minister's office. There is a separate pass for the Lok Sabha, and another for the Rajya Sabha. And each house also requires an extra pass for access to the official gallery. Which makes for four parliamentary passes in all.

And if anyone wants to get into any one of the several special government outfits (like All India Radio), he needs yet another pass. If that makes a total of eight passes already, the Government still isn't through. To travel in the prime minister's plane, there is still a ninth pass, with yet more passes if someone is to be a part of the itinerary wherever the prime minister is going.

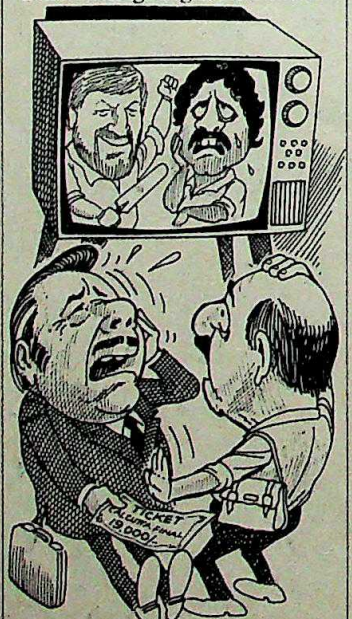
Those who went with the prime minister on his recent visit to Vancouver and the US had separate passes for the Commonwealth meet and the United Nations and (in the case of the White House) a security pin to be displayed on one's jacket front.

Whether all these separate passes are required or not can certainly be debated. Meanwhile, what is clear is that the buck is being passed to somebody to make all these passes.

Premium Problem

● Many people had egg on their faces after India lost the Reliance Cup semi-final match in Bombay. Till a few days before this apocalyptic event, senior government officials were busy ringing up their hapless private sector counterparts for tickets to the finals at Calcutta, and planning official tours there.

The problem was that tickets were commanding phenomenal premiums. A Rs 600 ticket was going for as much



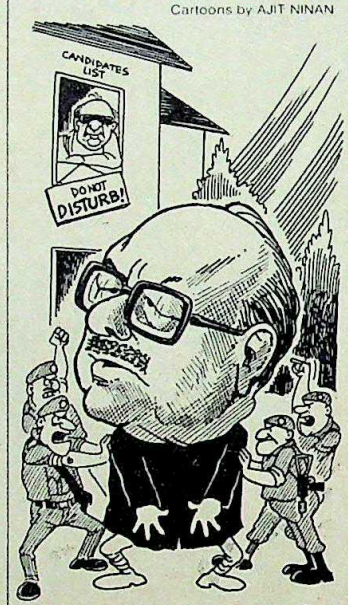
as Rs 19,000 in the capital, and at least three companies in New Delhi (a garment export unit, a large industrial house and a big company now fallen on hard times) had forked out the cash rather than risk official displeasure.

But once Kapil's men crashed out in Bombay, the officials said they didn't want the tickets after all. The tickets went waste, and so did close to a lakh of rupees spent by these three companies alone.

Guard Hazard

● Security can be a hazard in other ways too, as Communications Minister Arjun

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



Singh realised. Singh, who belongs to Madhya Pradesh, was elected to the Lok Sabha from South Delhi, and therefore felt he should do something following the recent terrorist killings in his constituency's Chittaranjan Park.

But Singh was in for a rude shock when he tried to attend a Delhi PCC(I) meeting held to condemn the killings. When he went to the residence of Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat, the venue of the meet, Bhagat's guards refused to let Singh in.

Singh had arrived with his own carload of security men, and the two sets of guards were soon engaged in heated argument. But it was all to no avail. An infuriated Singh finally left in a huff.

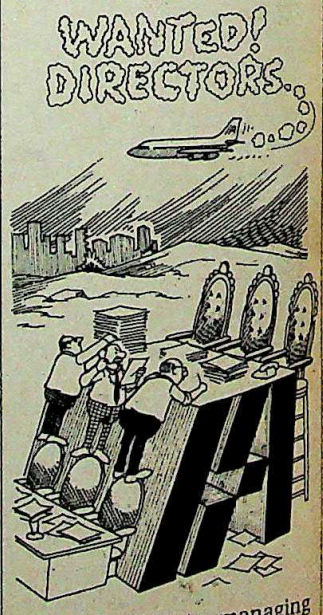
Bhagat's personal staff explained later that his guards had failed to recognise Singh. But the real objective may have been to deny Singh any role in handing out party tickets for the coming elections to the Delhi Metropolitan Council, which Bhagat wants to treat as his pocket borough.

Pilotless Posts

● Indian Airlines is not used to having empty seats on its flights. But now the country's premier domestic carrier seems to be having several empty seats in the cockpit.

Virtually all the posts of functional directors in the airline are vacant. There is no full-time director (finance), nor a director (operations), nor even a commercial director. There is no director (flight safety), no director (engineering), and no full-time director (planning). Moreover, a chief engineer is acting as the southern regional director, and the western regional director is soon due to retire.

The airline's three deputy managing directors are doing double duty. One of the deputy managing directors even does the job of the northern regional director. For good mea-



sure, the deputy managing director who looks after the job of the commercial director in New Delhi, is also doing the work of director (training), which is based in Hyderabad.

All this makes for a lot of hard work, but why doesn't the airline simply fill the vacancies?

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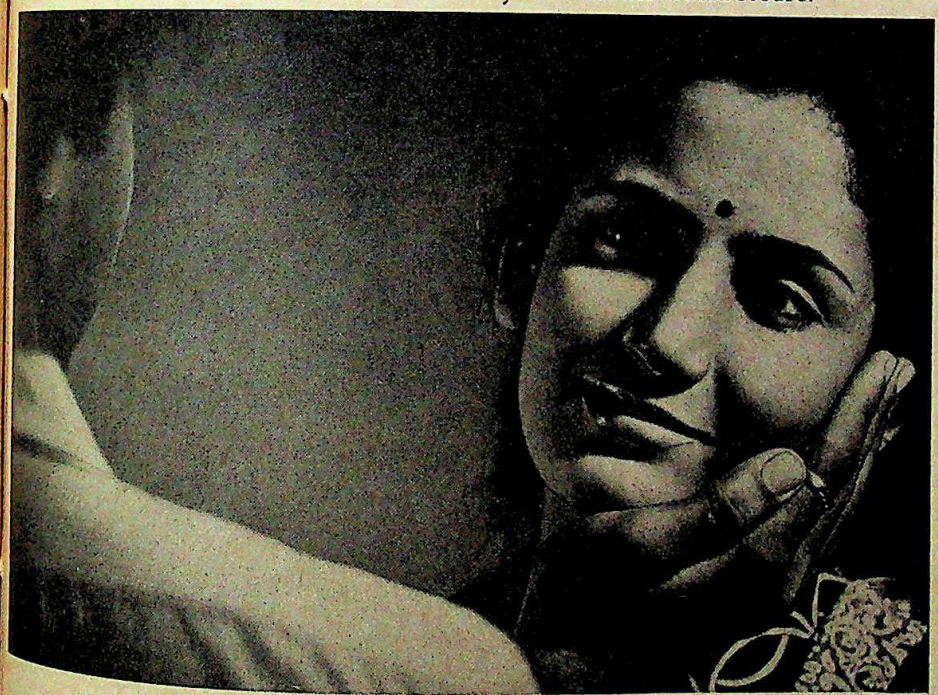

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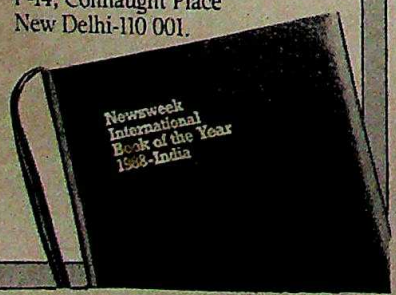

The Times of India

● *The SAARC is just over two years old. For God's sake, give us some time.... We understand what is good for us in this region.*

■ H.M. ERSHAD, Bangladesh President, in an interview with *The Telegraph*

● *It does not really matter very much who emerges as the Akali leader. Whoever he is, he is bound to be an embittered man, owing his position to men even more embittered than he.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *The Hindustan Times Sunday Magazine*

● *The Indian Express group in Delhi is paralysed not by an industrial action but by the Congress(I).*

■ ARUN SHOURIE in *Sunday Mail*

● *We had (not) seen any evidence to support the Express charge that outside forces, a euphemism for the Congress(I), had engineered the strike and kept it going.*

■ Editorial in *The Times of India*

● *The IPKF has done a splendid job and I am confident that it will mop up the remaining resistance.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI quoted in *The Times of India*

● *About Jaffna, I must say I am rather ignorant, although we have people coming and telling us about the situation.*

■ J.R. JAYEWARDENE, Sri Lankan President, in an interview with *The Hindu*

● *If normalcy means riding along the streets freely, then it will take a long time to come.*

■ LT-GENERAL DEPINDER SINGH, overall commander of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, quoted in *Newsweek*

● *It should not be that what is good for the gander in Pakistan is not good for the goose in India.*

■ GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ, in a reference to Pakistan's refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, in *The Indian Post*

● *Quite frankly, I never thought I would reach the mark (a century).... I'm glad I have done what I've always wanted to do: play like Srikkanth, Viv Richards or Kapil Dev in a one-day match.*

■ SUNIL GAVASKAR in *The Hindu*

● *I mean it from my heart when I say that I don't resent or dislike Sridevi and that if my husband (Mithun Chakraborty) ever wants to marry her, I'll accept her.*

■ YOGEETA BALI in *Stardust*

● *This achievement has been bestowed on me by God. It is not a human achievement.*

■ RAMANAND SAGAR on the success of *Ramayan*, in *Imprint*

● *I am as passionate as any other girl, but I have not had the opportunity to prove it.*

■ MEENAKSHI SHESHADRI quoted in *Cine Blitz*

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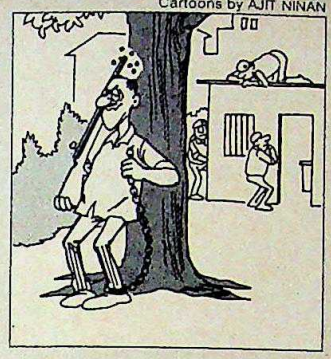
MIDNIGHT BREAK



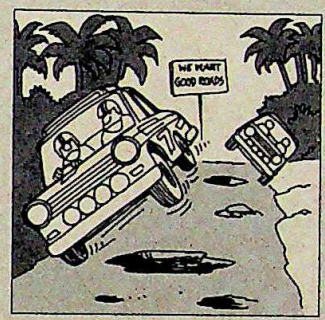
■ Alcohol numbs the senses but in this case it only sharpened the reflexes. Dasarath, an ex-convict, was picked up by the Andhra Pradesh police last fortnight for disturbing the public peace. The police said he was intoxicated and needed to be brought back to familiar surroundings in order to avoid a hangover. Taking him to the police station, they proceeded to chain him to a table, instead of locking him up.

A little past midnight, the sentry on duty decided he needed to take a break from duty. Keeping his rifle on a nearby table, the man shuffled away in the direction of an all-night tea shop, close to the police station. The policeman then returned a little later to discover that neither Dasarath nor the rifle were where he had last seen them.

The ex-convict, the sentry and his three colleagues realised, had obviously not been as drunk as he had looked. Where Dasarath and his rifle may be continues to be an intriguing question.

RALLYING AROUND

■ All the roads in Panaji are decorated with pot-holes. And petitions and protests made no difference to the concerned authorities. So the Goans thought up an ingenious method to drive home their point that the roads must be repaired: a car rally.

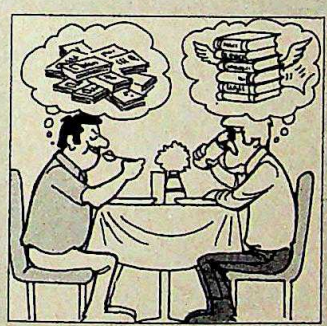


Participants, the rules say, will have to race from Curchorem to Margao, a town 20 km away in the south of Goa. The tricky bit is that any driver who falls into a pot-hole on the way will be disqualified. To the uninitiated, this may sound simple. But considering the state of the roads, this will probably make the contest more difficult than the Himalayan Car Rally.

The organisers have announced that the race will be held on December 19, Goa's Liberation Day "subject to the present pot-holes remaining in existence". The road repair authorities can be depended on to spoil the fun.

BOOK HEIST

■ Come Diwali, everyone eagerly awaits the earthly visit of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. So, when C.P. Choudhury saw an Arab walking into his Delhi bookshop, he was certain it was her in disguise. And when the Arab introduced himself as Rashidi from Qatar, a book lover, the bookseller was overjoyed.



The Arab proceeded to select books worth Rs 4,300. And Choudhury anticipating a windfall, also fed him lunch. But Rashidi informed the shopkeeper that he would have to accompany him to his hotel for the payment.

The duo hadn't gone far when the Arab asked Choudhury for Rs 200. Still under the illusion that he was in august company, he rushed to his shop for the money.

But on his return, he discovered that Lakshmi and the books had vanished without a trace. Out of sight but not out of mind.

AGAIN AND AGAIN

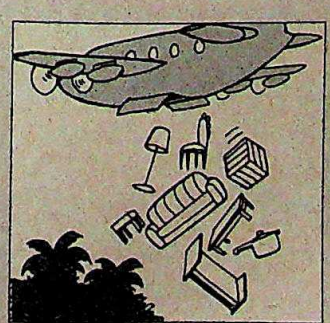
■ Marriages may be made in heaven, but they are generally undone with a little earthly intervention. Not willing to take any chances with that, a couple in Mandapet, Andhra Pradesh, decided to go through with the ceremony thrice.

Syambabu and Kakunari—both belonged to different castes and hence the problem—married first in the Gandharva style, and followed it by a civil marriage. But this is when the bride's father stepped in. Angry, the old man hired goondas to settle accounts with his son-in-law. The couple turned to the police after which the old man changed his mind. All the same, he seemed aggrieved that he had been cheated out of the splendour of his daughter's wedding.

Relieved, the two agreed to go through with another ceremony, their third. The thrice-tied knot will be hard for anyone to undo.

SURPRISE DELIVERY

■ Not willing to trust his precious furniture to the railways, a senior air force officer transferred from Assam to Delhi decided to have it flown in on an air force plane. The furniture was promptly packed and deposited at a military airport. Sure that his men would speedily deliver, the gentleman left for the capital in another aircraft.



But days went by and the furniture was as hard to find as a needle in a haystack.

Then one day, flipping through the newspapers, the officer discovered that civilians claimed the Indians had been dropping furniture on Jaffna. Further inquiries confirmed the worst. His sofa-sets had been strewn across Jaffna along with relief supplies.

Maybe the Indian Air Force was catering to all exigencies. Providing furniture to the marooned Indians, who appear to be stuck on that little island for a long time to come.

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"Leprosy ? Thank God it's nothing worse."

"Gopal's parents came to me in tears when they first learnt that he had leprosy. They thought his future was doomed. But I thought, thank God it's only leprosy. I told them there was no need to despair because leprosy is completely curable. And leaves no scars when detected and treated early.

"As Gopal's teacher, I assured them that he could stay on in school while his treatment continued, since leprosy is the least infectious of all communicable diseases. His doctor agreed.

"Looking at Gopal, no one can tell he has leprosy. He studies and plays like any other child. Sometimes, he even tries to skip homework and pretends that his visits to the doctor are to blame! I wonder what new excuses this bright, mischievous pupil of mine will think up once he's cured!"

Leprosy is completely curable — do not fear it, treat it

- Leprosy causes no deformities when detected and treated early. In advanced stages, deformities cannot always be remedied.
- Leprosy is the least infectious of all communicable diseases.
- Anyone can get leprosy, but most people have a natural immunity.
- 30% of newly detected cases are children. However, leprosy is not hereditary.

The first signs

- A pale or red skin patch — smooth, shiny or dry.
- Total loss of sensation on the patch.
- Loss of hair or lack of sweating in the area.
- Tingling or ant-crawling sensation around or near the patch.

Your support counts

Support the national programme for leprosy treatment and control by making sure your family and friends know the facts about leprosy. Encourage early detection and sustained treatment at Government clinics and hospitals. Help leprosy patients to lead normal lives by ensuring that they retain their place in society.

React/0823/87

The real healing touch must come from you

unicef

TATA STEEL

For further information, write to :
Leprosy Awareness Campaign,
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A joint public service in support of the Government of India's programme for treatment and control of leprosy.

The true identity of the leprosy patient has been concealed for want of community support.

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Endangered Areas

UNI/Photo Service

The bomb in Colombo had its echo in New Delhi.

THE sinuous shadow of Sri Lanka slithered through the fortnight that was and dragged it deeper into its dangerous darkness. In the jungles of Jaffna, the Tigers no longer prowl so proudly, but their tenacity has already taken a terrible toll. In Colombo, the bomb that mangled a market-place—and innocent women and children—had its loudest echo in New Delhi, where the Government bravely bolsters an accord that seems doomed to destruction.

The heat generated in the winter session of Parliament over India's increasing entanglement in the island is an indication that the domestic pot can no longer be lidded. But the fate of the accord could be soon sealed in the Parliament in Colombo with ruling party members, the target of anti-accord elements, due to cast their crucial vote on the bill. The diplomatic—and domestic—minefield on both sides of the Palk Straits are strewn with hidden trip-wires and the margin for mistakes no longer exists.

SHAWAN SINGH

The Reliance Cup ended in tears and triumph.

The clash of combatants in another battlefield also caused considerable concern, but cricket's casualties were confined to its communal connections. Even so, India's collapse in the eyes of the cricket crazies was cause for country-wide mourning—and the most protracted post-mortem in the passage of the game.

The Reliance Cup ended in tears—and triumph. The absence of India and Pakistan, the co-hosts, in the finals at Eden Gardens, did nothing to dilute the success of the tournament—and the eventual champions from Down Under. In the end, there were important lessons to be learnt.

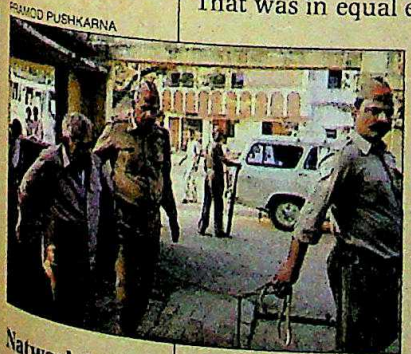
PIB

The SAARC summit sank some differences and surfaced others.

India learnt some at Kathmandu as well, where the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) sank some differences and surfaced others. But, as India's capitulation over the issue of regional terrorism displayed, dominance can be a disadvantage. That was in equal evidence at the subsequent summit—between Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayewardene. By sticking steadfastly to his stand to limit his largesse to the Sri Lankan Tamils, Jayewardene proved that the fox cannot run in harness with the hounds.

That was a lesson that the cub of Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, was also learning the hard way. The jeremiad in Jammu over the diluted durbar has jolted the alliance and threatens to convulse the sensitive state. Yet another accord is entering endangered area.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Natwarlal emerged after conning countless people.

The endangered areas of Punjab endured another extension of President's rule as the bullet-for-bullet battle between the extremists and police chief Ribeiro continues unabated. Ribeiro's oft-repeated reasoning that the terrorists are on the run is beginning to sound like the legend of the shepherd and the wolf.

One legend that suddenly did come to startling life was Natwarlal, the country's king of con. Natwarlal, born Mithilesh Kumar Srivastava, emerged from the shadows when the police discovered that the aging culprit in their custody was the same man who had conned countless of his countrymen—and had his extraordinary exploits duplicated on the silver screen by a superstar. But even with his identification, the difference between fact and fiction will be difficult to demonstrate. In the movie, the villain turns out to be the good guy. In reality, it is usually the other way round.

—DILIP BOBB

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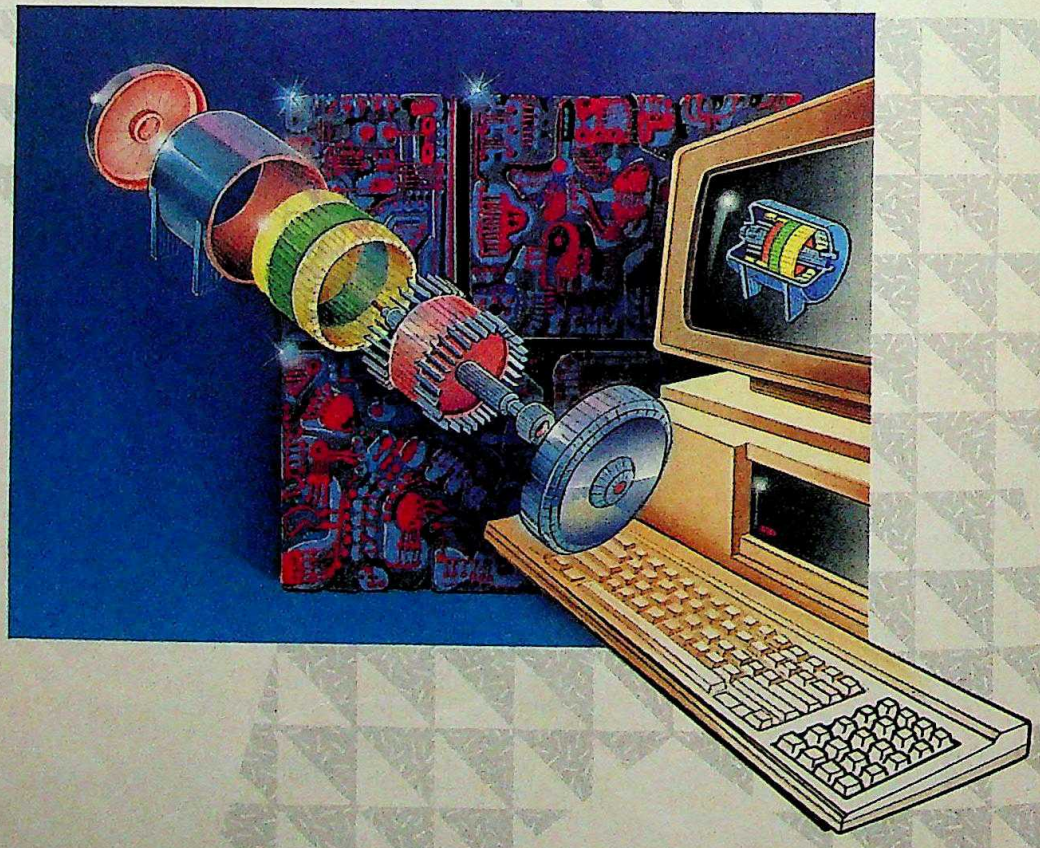

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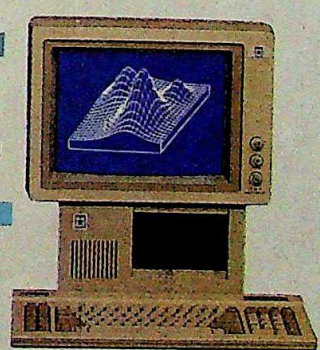

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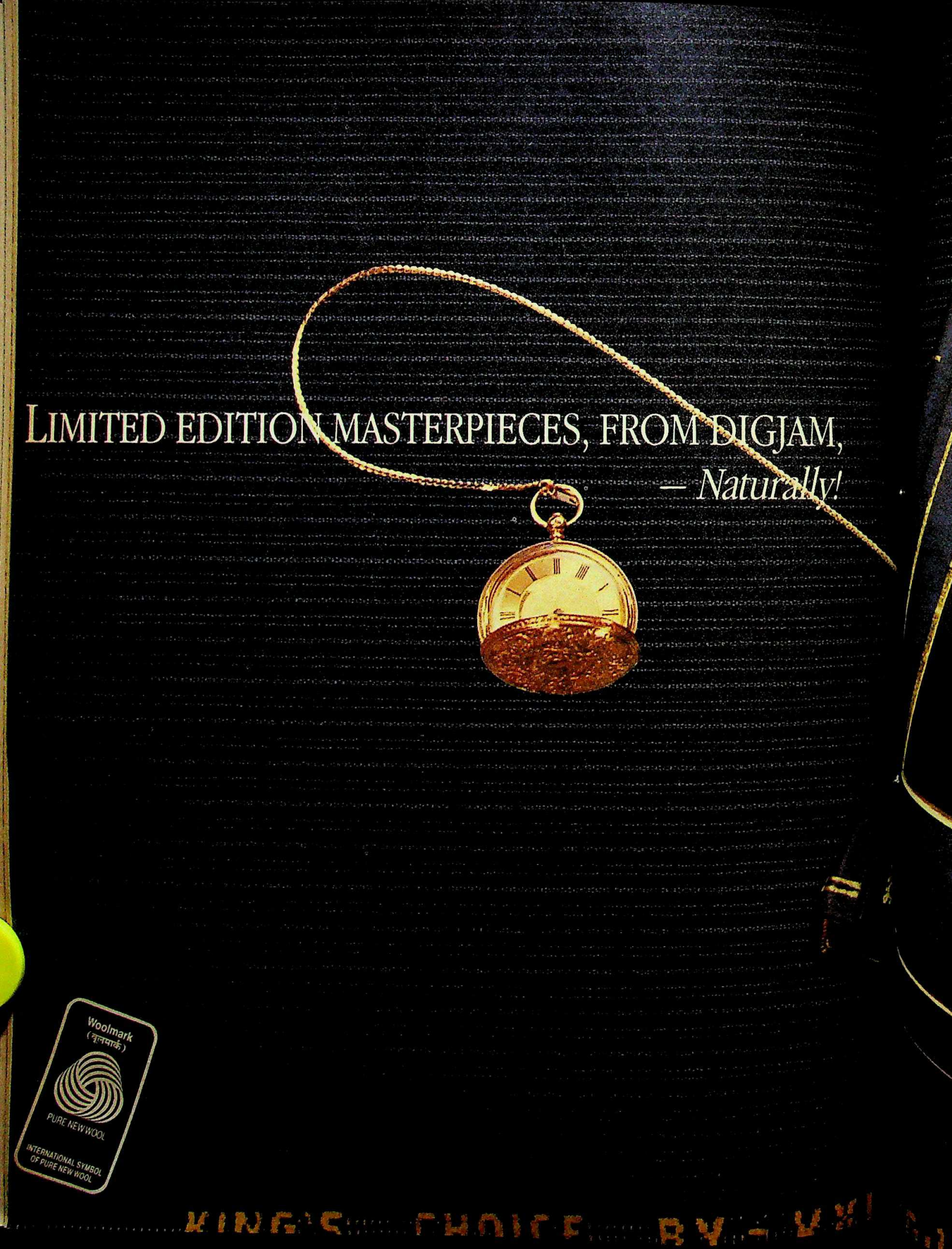
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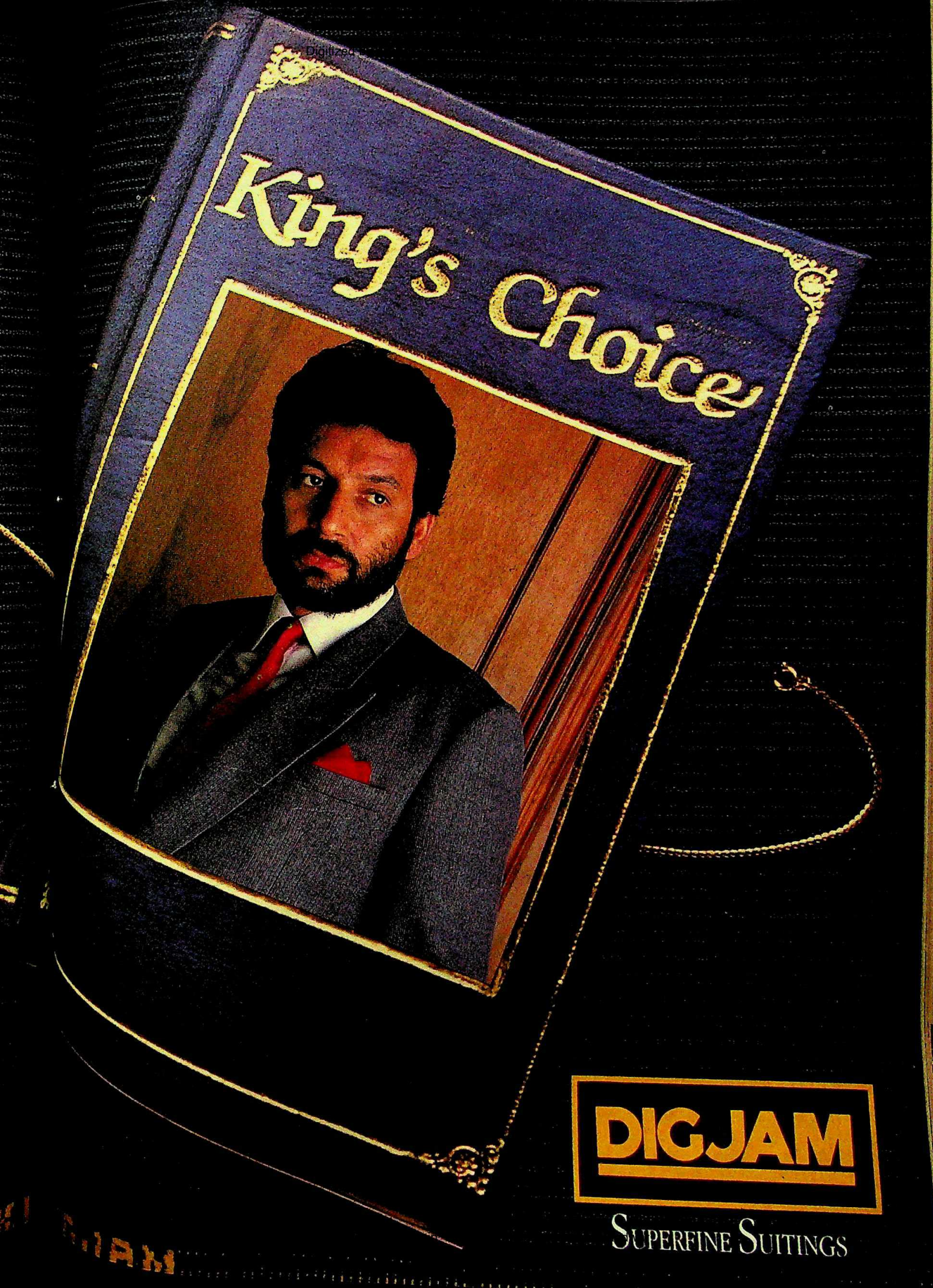

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PRESIDENT-PRIME MINISTER

Fresh Differences

Venkataraman quietly asserts himself

THE folder of daily press clippings was routine. But President Ramaswamy Venkataraman's response was far from routine. On a news item in a Tamil newspaper which talked of strained relations between Venkataraman and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, he wrote "Nonsense!", then despatched it to Rashtrapati Bhavan's archives.

But that irritable noting couldn't disguise the first signs of tension and distance between Venkataraman and Rajiv. The capital city is already agog with speculation about the fresh trouble brewing between Rashtrapati Bhavan and South Block. Some of the speculation is unsubstantiated, but beneath the smoke-screen of gossip there is already a small fire.

Venkataraman was sworn in to office less than four months ago, after a turbulent and sometimes acrimonious relationship between Rajiv and the outgoing President, Zail Singh. Most observers had expected peace to descend. But that, it now seems clear, may be hoping for too much.

Although the prime minister has dropped in to see the President with almost religious frequency (14 times in as many weeks, compared to fewer visits with Zail Singh over two years), sources close to the new President say that he is miffed by Rajiv spending his time talking of frivolous subjects, leaving the more serious issues undiscussed. These include both Sri Lanka and Punjab (where President's rule was extended by six months last fortnight).

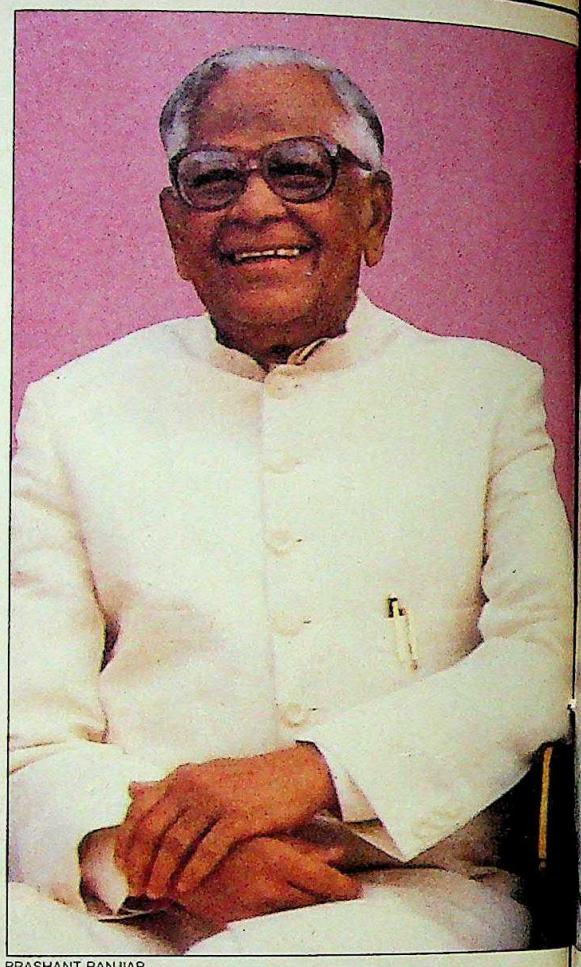
Venkataraman is tight-lipped on the subject, not even discussing it with his senior officials. So the ripples of dissent haven't yet travelled very far, unlike during Zail Singh's tenure, when his differences with the prime minister were openly aired and conveyed to journalists.

But there was no disguising the differences when Venkataraman despatched a terse letter to the prime minister on the now infamous Indian Post Office Bill concerning mail censorship. Written in a formal tone, the President asked the prime minister to seek the legal opinion of Attorney-General K. Parasaran on the issues raised in and outside Parliament on the various aspects of the act. The issue on which Zail Singh had chosen to make his last stand would not, it seemed, go away.

South Block sat up in surprise when the presidential letter arrived. Till then, Rajiv Gandhi and the Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram—who is close to the President—had been under the impression that Venkataraman would clear the act without much ado. The matter was placed before the Cabinet, which decided to refer it to Parasaran. "We had not expected the new President to be a rubber stamp," admitted a senior minister. "But we had certainly hoped that he would clear the bill in good time."

Sources in the Rashtrapati Bhavan argue, however, that the President had virtually no choice in the matter. Explained a Congress(I) MP who is close to President Venkataraman: "How can a person like Venkataraman sign a bill which has been debated by the whole nation? Being an independent head of state, he has to keep the national consensus and not the Goverment's needs in mind. He enjoys a better reputation than his predecessor, and he doesn't want to lose it."

The prime minister's office, meanwhile, is not worried by the President's desire to get the attorney-general's views on the bill. What keeps it on tenterhooks is the course the President may



PRASHANT PANJIAR

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Ugly Dispute

AN incumbent President overturns one of the last decisions taken by his predecessor. And an employee of Rashtrapati Bhavan takes the Rashtrapati to court. Neither has happened before. And history is now being made over something as inconsequential as the personal servants of former President Zail Singh.

Hem Prakash was one of the seven people who had worked for Zail Singh over the last seven years, first when he was home minister and then when he became president. Initially they worked for him in their personal capacity, later they were made temporary government servants. Two weeks before he was to lay down office, Singh made all seven permanent government employees, personally signing their appointment order.

But no sooner had Zail Singh bowed out and R. Venkataraman been sworn in as the new President than all the seven were given marching orders. Undaunted, Prakash has now dragged the issue before the Central Administrative Tribunal. In his affidavit submitted to the tribunal, Prakash has claimed that he was appointed by a proper authority, and that the new order violates the terms and conditions regulating the services of any government employee.

Zail Singh had initially taken in the seven people on the strength of personal recommendations. And as his tenure

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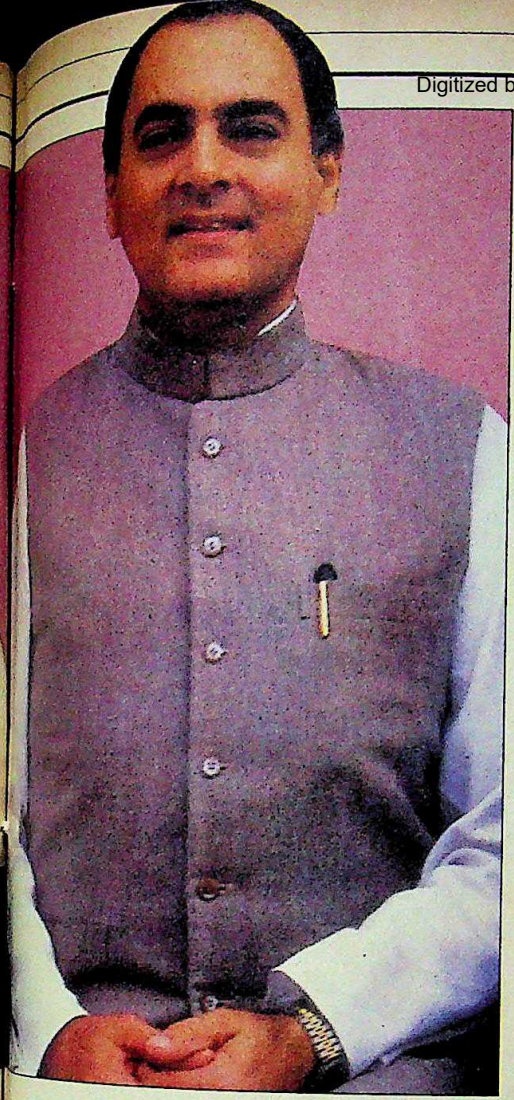


Venkataraman and Rajiv: uneasiness

general clears it.

The President, meanwhile, is asserting himself in other areas. In October, to the mild chagrin of the Central Government, he sent a long letter to all the governors, directing them not to leave their states without his prior approval. Zail Singh had wanted to enforce this too, but had failed because of the strong backing some governors had from the prime minister. But Venkataraman decided to lay down the law when he found that governors like Kumudben Joshi of Andhra Pradesh, Vasantdada Patil of Rajasthan and B.D. Pande of Orissa were spending far too much time outside their states, on one pretext or the other. Some of them were only sending information about their tours to the President after they had left the state capital.

At least some of the governors had engaged in political activity during some of these tours, mostly in relation to Congress(I) affairs, and some of the governors have in fact been summoned by the party high command. Inevitably, the ban on governors' movements irked the Central leadership. Venkataraman has nevertheless insisted that the governors should inform him in advance on their precise itinerary as well as the reasons for the tour.

Venkataraman sprang another surprise when addressing the governors' conference in New Delhi last fortnight. He reminded the assembled governors that law and order was their top prioirty. The Congress(I) leadership felt this was a matter that should be left to the elected representatives of the people to deal with.

These have, of course, been no more than pinpricks. The more serious issues have been the postal censorship bill, and Sri Lanka and Punjab. Congress(I) MPs from Tamil Nadu say that the President has taken umbrage at not being consulted before the Indo-Sri Lanka accord was signed. In fact this happened within days of Venkataraman being sworn in. Rajiv had discussed the Sri Lankan issue, but the accord itself was not discussed in detail—as Venkataraman apparently felt should have been the case. Later, the President was not properly briefed on the army action in Sri Lanka—partly because Rajiv himself was out of the country during the period of the heaviest fighting.

When Zail Singh was the President, and Rajiv was not seeing him regularly, other cabinet ministers used to brief him. At various times Rajiv sent senior ministers like P.V.Narasimha Rao, V.P. Singh and Buta Singh, as well as Rajesh Pilot. But with the prime minister himself taking on the sole responsibility of briefing the President, the other ministers have kept their distance from Rashtrapati Bhavan. This prevented Defence Minister K.C. Pant from briefing Venkataraman on the Sri Lanka question, while Home Minister Buta Singh has also not gone to Rashtrapati Bhavan in connection with the events in Punjab.

Yet again, it is rumoured that when Rajiv asked Venkataraman for advice on a Cabinet reshuffle, the President had suggested the induction of K.Ramamurthy, a senior Congress(I) MP from Tamil Nadu and a former chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Undertakings. The advice was not heeded. But sources close to the President deny it.

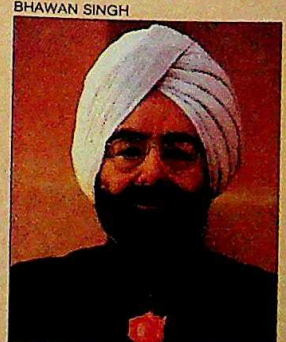
None of these has led to the kind of sharp rupture that existed in the Zail-Rajiv relationship. Venkataraman does not believe in an assertive interpretation of Article 78 of the Constitution (concerning the powers of the President to be kept informed), but he is also a stickler for the rules and for propriety in constitutional relationships. And if he thinks that the prime minister is not showing the courtesies due to the head of state, there could be more serious trouble ahead—even as the postal bill continues to hang fire.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

adopt after the attorney-general's opinion is made available to him. For Venkataraman is quite capable of returning the bill to Parliament even if the attorney-

was about to end, they requested him to confirm them, lest they were thrown out after his demise. Singh wrote a personal note on the file, stating that as President of India, he directed the confirmation of the seven employees, and also waived the age and educational limits normally prescribed for such recruitment. In his order, he also appointed one of his personal servants as a typist in Rashtrapati Bhavan. But all the seven were promptly regarded as loyal to Zail Singh, and not to the Presidency. The Intelligence Bureau reported pressure on the new administration to get them out of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Meanwhile, the new President has prepared his own list of people to be appointed in Rashtrapati Bhavan. For the first time in presidential history, the order from the Department of Personnel contained a list of people to replace specific officials.

BHAWAN SINGH



Zail Singh: overruled

Zail Singh was surprised by the rumpus. He had evidently been assured by the prime minister that the officials working under him would not be 'victimised'. But that hasn't prevented a messy dispute over an inconsequential matter.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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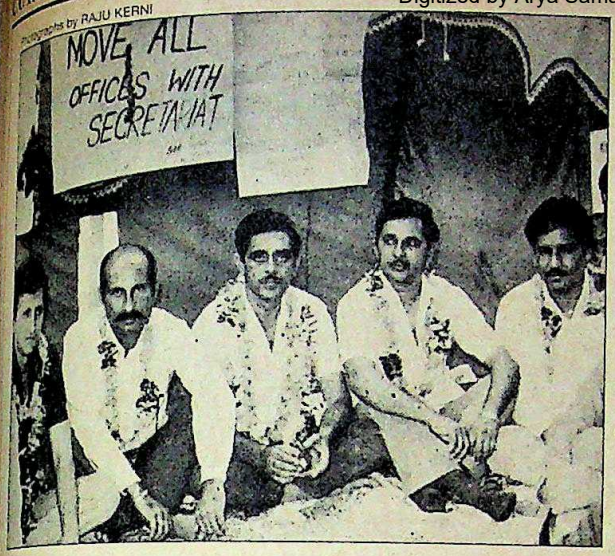

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Capital Strife

Jammu explodes in anger

THIS winter is proving to be a politically warm one for Jammu. The immediate provocation for escalating violence in the region lay in the state Cabinet's decision to permanently locate 29 of the 49 government departments at Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital, instead of moving them to Jammu in winter. But in another sense, the people were also betraying their anger at what they see as the neglect of their area over the years.

So intense was local resentment that last fortnight saw a series of long-drawn-out bandhs in Jammu and half-a-dozen smaller towns. The indefinite bandh called by the Jammu Bar Association entered the sixth day last week even as the state Government warned its employees against involvement and locked up at least 150 agitators.

The violence was alarming and the large-scale arrests had little effect. Over a dozen shops were looted and scores of government buildings stoned and ransacked. A few cases of arson were also registered. In the border towns of Poonch, Rajouri and Udhampur, police lathi-charged unruly mobs.

Although a party to the agitation, the local unit of the Muslim Action Committee (MAC), has been disturbed by the violence and has now urged the state Government to curb miscreants. The MAC and the Awami National Conference (ANC) are represented on the agitators' Joint Action Committee which is controlled by the bar association. Other committee constituents include the BJP, Shiv Sena, Janata Party and International Democratic Front, a youth organisation which is influential in some pockets.

The controversy began last April after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, at an official function in Srinagar, made a fleeting reference to the biannual shifting of the state's capital. He said that the 100-year-old tradition of shifting 'durbar'—government departments and the secretariat—to Jammu in winter needed rationalisation. Soon after came Farooq's statement hinting that the people of the state would soon have their permanent capital in Srinagar. This triggered off protests in the Assembly and Farooq changed his stand, saying that no such move was afoot.

Farooq: unconvincing arguments

Lawyers on hunger strike; police chasing rioters: public ire

Six months later, on October 7, the chief minister suddenly declared that 29 departments would no longer be shifted to Jammu every winter. A series of strikes immediately erupted. The lead was taken by the bar association which struck work in courts on October 10. The strike continues. The Muslim-dominated towns of Poonch, Rajouri and Akhnor also responded to the call of the bar association President, D.K. Khajuria, and observed a bandh on October 16.

So great was the public pressure that even leaders of the Congress(I)—an ally of Farooq's National Conference—including MPs Janakraj Gupta and Girdharilal Dogra joined opposition leaders in condemning the move. Their attitude softened only after Farooq announced that 20 other departments would be permanently located at Jammu.

The agitationists are not impressed. Says Janata Party leader S.S. Lahar: "The Government tried to fool the people of Jammu by giving them totally insignificant departments." While the major departments like that of finance commissioner, industries, cooperatives and forests have been retained at Srinagar, Jammu has been allocated minor offices like those of the joint financial commissioner (agrarian reforms), inspector-general (prisons) and deputy inspector general (railways and crime).

Farooq maintains that the tradition of shifting durbar is obsolete and needs modifications which could result in an annual saving of Rs 6 crore. He vehemently denies the allegation that the step is aimed at appeasing the Muslims of Kashmir valley where the Muslim United Front and the ANC are gaining

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ground. He defends the allocation of departments between Srinagar and Jammu saying that this has been done on a "requirement basis". Moreover, he argues, the move will solve the problem of accommodation in both cities.

If the public resentment in Jammu is a pointer, Farooq's arguments seem to have fallen flat. "Going by the requirement principle, the Industries Department should be stationed at Jammu where most of state's private sector units are situated," says Khajuria. Strong economic reasons fuel the people's resistance to change. Everyone—be it a roadside vendor or a big trader—does several times more business during the six months of durbar than in the rest of the year. Opposition leaders in Jammu are apprehensive that their region will be isolated once the decision is implemented and people fear Kashmiri domination which, they feel, already exists.

The fact that several developmental projects in the past meant for the Jammu region have been abandoned attracts the public's ire, as it is. These include the opening of agricultural and engineering colleges, a HMT watch factory and a unit of the Indian Telephone Industries. Besides, a gas-turbine power generation project and a Rs 120-crore colour picture tube unit are in jeopardy. The Planning Commission has stalled these projects on technical grounds although the prime minister himself had announced them before the electoral victory of the National Conference-Congress(I) alliance.

In the backdrop of the atmosphere of resentment and mistrust, the agitators have rejected the Government's attempts at reconciliation. Even the last offer of the Cabinet Subcommittee—appointed by Farooq following the protests—to give each city an equal number of departments has not been accepted.

Meanwhile, in Srinagar the local bar association has begun a counter-movement—though a much less vehement one—in support of the government move. The Srinagar movement, which is seen in Jammu as being sponsored by the state Government, poses the threat of turning the struggle into a communal one. In any case, how much this will help Farooq is open to question.

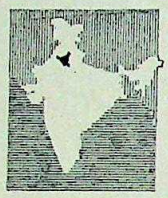
State Congress(I) leaders have appealed to Home Minister Buta Singh to intervene and persuade the chief minister to withdraw the order. But with both the state Government and the agitators sticking to their guns, it is hard to foresee an amicable settlement.

—VIPUL MUDGAL in Jammu

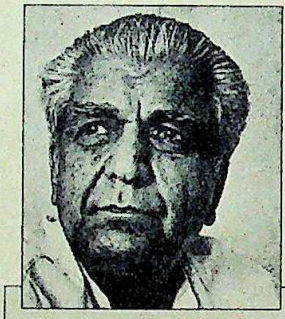
HARYANA

Clean Sweep

Alliance wins by-elections



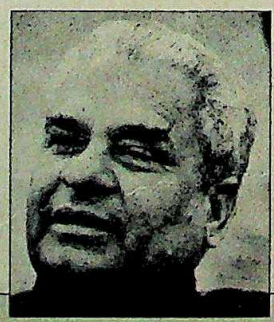
THE victory was never in doubt. Yet Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal was in no mood to take chances. He attached great importance to the three assembly by-elections at Karnal, Jundla and Fatehabad, treating them as indicators of his personal popularity. Not only was the entire state and party machinery mobilised to woo the voters, Devi Lal camped in the constituencies for over a week and supervised the polling as well. But when the results were declared, it was proven beyond doubt that all his efforts have been worth it. The Lok Dal-BJP alliance made a clean sweep of all the three seats in the elections.



Devi Lal's triumph has boosted the morale of the national opposition.

For the Congress(I), it was an ignominious defeat: not only was the margin of defeat larger than before, one party candidate even had to forsake his deposit. Said Devi Lal: "The Haryana electorate has once again delivered a heavy blow to the Congress(I) and its leader Rajiv Gandhi." With these latest triumphs, the combined Lok Dal-BJP strength has gone up from 74 to 77 seats in a 90-member House and that of the BJP from 15 to 17. The victory has also given a great boost to the BJP's morale on the eve of the civic elections due in Delhi early next year.

But the victory in Haryana was not achieved without controversy. The ruling alliance was accused of misusing official machinery, inciting violence and booth capturing. In fact, the Election Commission ordered repolling at three booths in Karnal. Union Minister for Environment Bhajan Lal—who was in charge of the Congress(I) campaign—protested angrily about rigging to the election commissioner, while partymen raised the issue in both houses of Parliament.



The verdict has dealt a severe blow to former chief minister Bhajan Lal.

Inevitably, as the results trickled in, a slanging match erupted between the Congress(I) and the BJP. Charged Naresh Chandra Chaturvedi, AICC(I) general secretary: "The ruling alliance in Haryana has won in an unfair election by coercing voters and rigging the electoral process." Retorted Mangal Sein, president of the BJP's state unit: "By raising the bogey of rigging, these Congress(I) leaders want to convince Rajiv Gandhi that the voters still like him and his party. This is how most of the Congress(I) leaders survive in the party. Just look at the wide margins with which they have lost each seat."

Lok Dal(B) leaders also argue that the huge victory margins nail the Congress(I) charge of rigging. BJP's Balbir Singh trounced a CPI(M) candidate, Prithvi Singh, by 28,615 votes in Fatehabad, which lies in the district of Hissar, Bhajan Lal's home town. The Congress(I) nominee came a poor third. In Jundla, Lok Dal(B) candidate Risal Singh defeated Puran Singh of the Congress(I) by 35,146 votes. And in Karnal too, the Congress (I) nominee, Jai Prakash, lost to BJP's Lachman Das by over 5,000 votes.

The ruling alliance's voting percentage in the three seats rose to 62.7 from 48.4 in the June assembly poll, while the Congress (I)'s slumped from 29.5 to 24.1 per cent. Lok Dal(B) leaders also claimed that by winning an urban seat, a reserved seat and a predominantly rural seat, they had illustrated that their alliance had the support of all communities in the state. Said Industry Minister

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Sampat Singh: "Our victory clearly shows that we have the confidence of both the upper castes and the minorities."

The verdict was yet another blow for former Haryana chief minister Bhajan Lal, whose fortunes are already on the decline. He was confident of victory in at least two—Fatehabad and Karnal—of the three seats and it was at his insistence that Rajiv had put him in charge of the campaign and changed the candidate at Karnal.

From the Congress(I) point of view, party bosses had figured that by using Bhajan Lal, the Hindu votes would be neutralised. These calculations proved erroneous, however, and these votes were eventually garnered by the BJP. In fact, the ultimate humiliation for the Union minister came when the BJP candidate polled more votes than his Congress(I) rival even in Bhajan Lal's birthplace, village Khajoori. The BJP got 717 votes here as against the 144 votes that the Congress(I) won.

Devi Lal managed to repeat his feat in the June assembly elections, when he rode to victory on an anti-Congress(I) wave, and by promising to write off rural loans. On the other hand, the Congress(I) completely failed to exploit the charges of corruption against the chief minister and his relatives.

The by-elections had a lesson for the Opposition too: they proved beyond a doubt that the non-communist opposition alliance is a strong alternative to the Congress(I), at least in part of the Hindi heartland. Though none of the other major opposition parties had put up any candidate, the defeat of the CPI(M) candidate in Fatehabad clearly indicated that the party cannot win in the north unless it is part of the opposition alliance. It had secured a seat in the June elections only because of Devi Lal's support at that time. For the communists, it was also a repeat signal that Devi Lal has been accepted as an alternative Jat leader to Charan Singh.

But the massive mandate may also lead to the surfacing of the contradictions plaguing the uneasy relationship between the Lok Dal(B) and the BJP. Lok Dal(B) President Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna is anathema to the BJP and he may try to pull his party out of the alliance. Devi Lal's patriarchical style of running the state may also lead to tensions. But if he treads cautiously, the latest boost to the alliance should augur well for the entire Opposition.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

PRADEEP SHAH

Raj Babbar at rally: strong support

UTTAR PRADESH

Cine Closure

Protest against tax rates

THE tragedy that faces Uttar Pradesh's film exhibitors is greater than many a filmy one. Eight hundred cinema hall owners—catering to an average of six lakh viewers daily—have downed shutters since October 16 saying that they can no longer afford to pay the taxes that have been imposed on them. Their grouse is against the entertainment tax, which ranges from 125 per cent to 150 per cent.

The losses following the strike have been colossal: the state Government, which pockets Rs 60 crore annually as entertainment tax, is losing more than Rs 16 lakh a day—Rs 4 lakh more than the daily net loss the state's cinema exhibitors are bearing. That the Government's loss is greater than the exhibitors' is indicative of how overtaxed the industry is.

Several petitions to Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh at the early stages evoked no positive response. Though he was to change his attitude later, Singh initially asserted that his government wouldn't bow to pressure and was adamant that he would not "listen to anything unless they call off the strike".

Meanwhile, the protest assumed gigantic proportions. On November 8, in a show of solidarity, cinema halls in New Delhi and several other parts of the country remained closed. Three days later, a massive rally organised jointly by the Uttar Pradesh Cinema Exhibitors' Federation, the Motion Pictures Association, Delhi, and the All India Film Producers' Council, Bombay, was held at Lucknow's Begum Hazrat Mahal Park. An array of leading film personalities voiced strong support for the strikers at the rally. Said Raj Babbar, known for his leaning towards former Union minister V.P. Singh: "We will see to it that either we get justice or the Government goes."

Although the last major entertainment tax increase took place in 1981, declining audiences—due to competition from TV and video—have rendered the business unprofitable. Says a dismayed Gullu Thadani, 60, owner of Lucknow's Mayfair cinema hall: "There is no point in continuing in this line anymore. I submitted plans to the local authorities two years ago to dismantle both Mayfair and Basant (another hall he owns)."

So poor indeed are finances that more than 50 cinema hall owners in the state were in the course of diversifying into other areas even before the strike began. Jaihind Talkies—one of the oldest in Lucknow—was dismantled a couple of months ago and a commercial complex will soon take its place. Owners of six other cinema halls in Lucknow have decided to follow suit.

While as many as 42 cinema halls, including two in Lucknow, have closed down in the last two years, only a dozen new ones have taken their place. The owners point out that even the 40-odd picture halls run by the government-owned Chalchitra Nigam are on the brink of closure—their debts to distributors have mounted to Rs 40 lakh in the last year alone.

Entertainment tax in Uttar Pradesh has zoomed up over time. Thirty years

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ago the tax was a mere 30 per cent. But from August 16, 1981, the entertainment tax leapt to 125 per cent on the cheap tickets and to 150 per cent on the rest. In effect, of Rs 6 paid for a balcony ticket, the Government takes away Rs 3.60, leaving the hall owner a meagre Rs 2.40. In contrast, the entertainment tax in most of the other states ranges from as low as 25 per cent to a maximum 100 per cent.

The 1981 hike in the tax combined with the rapid growth of TV sets and video piracy seems to have sealed the fate of the big screen in Uttar Pradesh. Between 1981 and now, capacity utilisation in cinema halls has dropped dramatically, from about 70 per cent then to a bare 35 per cent now.

Apart from entertainment tax, the strikers have other problems. They want film exhibition to be recognised as an industry in order to get power at a reduced tariff. At present, they are charged Rs 1.15 per unit, while bulk tariff consumers—especially small-scale industries—have to pay only 60 paise per unit. Domestic power costs 80 paise per unit. Exhibitors are also demanding a rationalisation of show tax, the octroi on film prints, generator tax, licence fee, and the taxes on slides and advertisements which fetch them some money.

With their grievances mounting, Uttar Pradesh's cinema exhibitors and distributors had started gearing themselves up for a prolonged protest since early this year. They received encouragement from the film industry strike in Maharashtra which resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in entertainment tax. But the indefinite strike was launched only after successive memorandums to Bir Bahadur Singh elicited no response.

Initially, the chief minister was all tough words, and at one press conference he went so far as to say: "If they behave like this we may even consider taking over cinema halls." But over the days the pressure on him has been building up and he has now changed his tactics entirely. He recently appealed to the strikers to call off their protest in view of the prevailing drought.

The strikers, however, are aware that if they don't press home their advantage now, there may be no second chance. Says S.K. Tulsi, member of the Cinema Exhibitors' Action Committee: "We are perhaps fighting our last battle. If we win, we live or else, we die." Dramatic words but they certainly carried the ring of truth.

—DILIP AWASTHI

MAHARASHTRA

Hotting Up

Campaign to oust Chavan

THE battle, as Vasantrao Patil said while announcing his decision to relinquish the post of governor of Rajasthan, will go on. Indeed, now that the Maharashtra strongman is permanently back in his own state, his struggle to replace Chief Minister S.B. Chavan with his own nominee is likely to be speedily stepped up. This became apparent last fortnight on, of all days, Patil's 70th birthday which turned into a trial of strength. But this time, Patil refused to set a deadline for change, having done so twice in the past, and subsequently he faced the ignominy of seeing his rival Chavan continue in office.

Sharad Pawar

S.B. Chavan

Vasantrao Patil

With Patil, who has made up with Pawar, now permanently resident in Maharashtra, the politically isolated Chavan is unlikely to find peace in the coming months.

But as Patil camped in the bungalow of his son Prakash, an MP, in Bombay before leaving for his home town Sangli, it was clear that even after supposedly retiring from public life, he was unwilling to accept his rival Chavan as chief minister. "If it comes to taking a stand against Chavan, more than 150 MLAs will be willing to openly express their views," he said, maintaining that he had received several complaints from legislators against the chief minister's "vindictive style of functioning".

However, the question of a change in the state leadership remained as mystifying as ever with the Congress(I) high command publicly maintaining support for the besieged chief minister even as it refused to pull up the dissidents for attacking him. The new AICC(I) General Secretary, K.N. Singh, after meetings with several legislators and party workers in the state, merely repeated what had been said for nearly a year—that no immediate change is contemplated in Maharashtra. As for Patil's own claim that at present more than 150 legislators were unhappy with Chavan, Singh said: "That is one man's assessment. If we had found it to be correct, we would have acted on it."

Even so Chavan, who never claimed support in the Congress(I) Legislature Party, has yet to get the high command's full backing. His failure to get permission to expand his cabinet is glaring evidence that his position is far from secure. Nevertheless, he virtually plunged into a head-on confrontation with his opponents last fortnight on the question of legislators attending a farmers' rally organised in Sangli to felicitate Patil on his birthday.

Chavan threatened to issue a whip if he found legislators were planning to absent themselves from the winter session of the Assembly in Nagpur to attend the Sangli rally. This quickly brought the retort from Sharad Pawar, chairman of the felicitation committee, that the chief minister's threat betrayed "a weak mind anticipating trouble where there was none". Pawar insisted that if the farmers' rally had any political motive at all, it was to give a reply to the "misconceptions" created by two simi-

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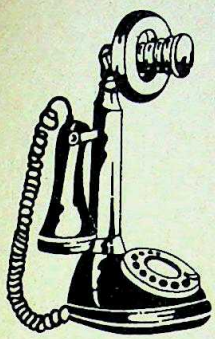

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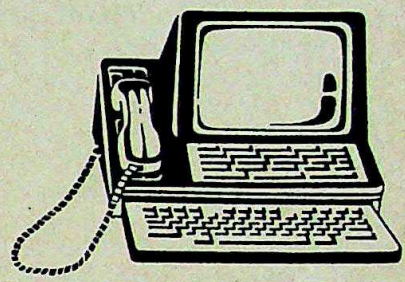

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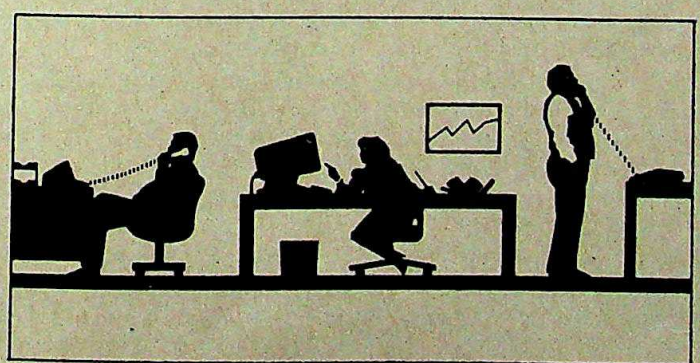

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lar rallies organised in the state for V.P. Singh by Shetakari Sangathana leader Sharad Joshi.

Clearly, Chavan was daring his opponents within the party to pick up the gauntlet. But better sense prevailed and ultimately 153 legislators sent a felicitation message to Patil from Nagpur and only the important leaders went to Sangli to attend the rally. Inadvertently, the birthday greetings from Nagpur seemed to justify Patil's claim that a majority of the Congress(I) legislators in the state wanted a change. But it also exposed Chavan's style of functioning, which, in the past, has earned him the sobriquet 'headmaster'. Though a good administrator, the chief minister steadfastly refuses to play the time-tested game of keeping members of the party happy through a continuous public relations exercise.

Consequently, even though he has been in power since March last year, Chavan is politically isolated within his own party and continues to be dependent on the high command. In contrast, Patil, a consummate politician, has now made up with even old political rivals like Pawar and former deputy chief minister Ramrao Adik. With these two leaders, along with Patil protege and former chief minister Sivajirao Patil-Nilangekar, supporting the birthday felicitation function, a majority of the Congress(I) legislators thought it best to greet the veteran politician even if that invited controversy.

However, what still remained crucial was the party high command's stand. It was learnt that the message from New Delhi to Chavan was to desist from issuing a whip. At the same time, Pawar advised legislators not to make an issue of attending the Sangli rally. Once again, Rajiv Gandhi was demonstrating that his strategy in Maharashtra was to take all groups along, supporting the chief minister even as he reassured the dissidents.

With the zilla parishad elections barely two months away, it has become almost a certainty that Chavan will continue as chief minister into the new year. But an unexpected twist to the political pot-boiler cannot be ruled out, with Patil now permanently resident in Maharashtra. Later in November, Patil is expected to visit New Delhi for another round of parleys with party leaders. Most Congressmen in the state are keeping their fingers crossed, not knowing what to expect next in the on-going saga.

—M. RAHMAN

ANDHRA PRADESH

Crucial Cases

Landmark writs are admitted

IT was an unpleasant moment for Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao. The man who had called himself the champion of self-respect for 60 million Telugus was described as "a self-confessed criminal" in the state high court. That deprecatory remark spread shock waves, made as it was during the sensational hearing on the admissibility of four writs against NTR. Inquiries have been demanded against the Telugu Desam chief who's been charged with corruption and abuse of authority.

The court hearings of Satyanarayana's writs are proving to be a severe embarrassment for Rama Rao

The writs, filed by Congress(I) worker Dronamraju Satyanarayana, are without parallel. Never has a high court been moved, or allowed petitions, demanding a chief minister's removal and the imposition of President's rule in a state. The writs also raised critical questions about the limits of judicial activism vis-a-vis the legislature and executive.

After hearing the arguments for and against the admission of the writs for a record 14 days, the high court last fortnight admitted two of them. It also gave a month's time to file the counter affidavits and fixed December 15 for the final hearing. The orders were passed by a full bench consisting of Chief Justice K. Bhaskaran, Justice Y.V. Anjaneyulu and Justice Syed Shah Mohammed Quadri. On their request, Attorney-General K. Parasaran also assisted the court in resolving this ticklish issue.

Of the writs admitted, one requests the court to issue a directive to the Central Government to order a probe, under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, into the charges against NTR. The second pleads for a court fiat to various enforcement agencies to book the chief minister for alleged violations of foreign exchange regulations, income tax and wealth tax laws. But, the court rejected the two other writs saying that it had no right to sack a chief minister or impose President's rule as these powers rested with the governor and the President.

The Telugu Desam realised the damage the writs could cause. Eminent constitutional lawyer, Nani Palkhivala, rushed to Hyderabad, at NTR's request, to defend him at the writ admission stage. This was after the state's Advocate General, E. Manohar had clarified in court that he was appearing on the state's behalf and not the chief minister's.

Acting at another level, party Parliamentary Secretary P. Upendra rustled up the support of 37 Telugu Desam MPs. They appealed to the President to seek the Supreme Court's opinion on whether courts could entertain "politically motivated petitions" against those elected by the people. Fumed Upendra: "The Congress(I) are spoil-sports. They do not want to fight a political battle but indulge in cantankerous litigation instead. Anybody can play this game and tomorrow's target may be J.B. Patnaik, Motilal Vora or even Rajiv Gandhi."

Meanwhile, in court, Palkhivala cautioned: "Entertaining the petition will be the surest prescription of an unending and gratuitous confrontation between the judiciary, the legislature and the executive. It is not public interest but political interest litigation." He warned it would lead to similar petitions in all the high courts. But Parasaran countered by quoting from Palkhivala's own book *We, the People*, where he had averred that the liberal extension of the doctrine of locus standi would not open the floodgates of litigation.

Both Palkhivala and Manohar questioned Satyanarayana's locus standi to file the writ, and argued that it was beyond the court's powers to remove a chief minister. The charges, said Manohar, "are frivolous, scandalous

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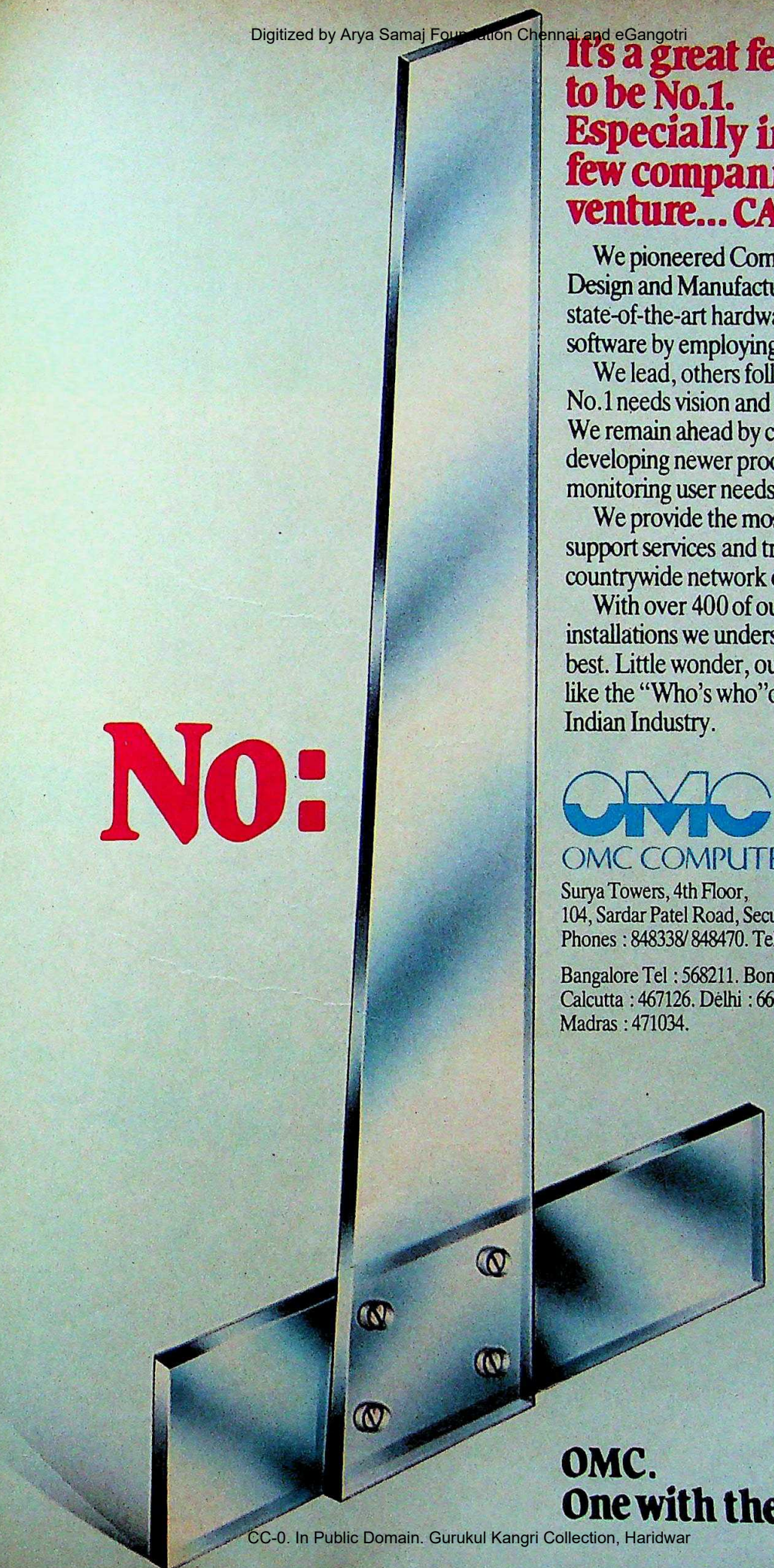

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and ill-merited". At one stage, Justice Anjaneyulu drew Palkhivala's attention to a significant point made by the petitioner's lawyer, S. Ramachandra Rao. The lawyer had contended that Rama Rao, by revealing under the voluntary disclosure scheme in 1985 that he had a concealed income of Rs 59 lakh, was a self-confessed criminal who should not be allowed to remain in office. Palkhivala only replied that this was a question of ethics beyond the court's purview. He added that society had not yet reached the stage of maintaining such high ethical standards.

Even while dismissing the two writs, the court had nothing edifying to say about Rama Rao. Rejecting the plea for a writ of quo warranto to remove NTR, Chief Justice Bhaskaran listed nine allegations including foreign exchange violations, corruption in land purchase by the Hyderabad Market Committee and acquisition of 1.75 lakh sq yards of land in Hyderabad by Rama Rao. He observed: "It is for the chief minister himself to make up his mind in regard to the path he should follow in the face of the allegations. No gratuitous advice, much less specific direction, from this court is necessary." And while rejecting the other writ which asked for President's rule, Justice Anjaneyulu emphasised in the 31-page order that a petition containing serious allegations on matters of public importance cannot be thrown out solely on the plea that it is filed by a political rival.

The legal attack has clearly put Rama Rao on the defensive. On the occasion of the first anniversary celebrations of the state law academy, held the day before the court orders were announced, he declared that the judgements passed against the state Government—at least 29 since 1983—cannot be taken as directed against him but against Telugus as a whole. When verdicts had gone against his ministry's decisions in the past, Rama Rao had argued that the people were the final arbiters. Yet it is more than likely that with details of the charges surfacing in court, his popularity will not go unaffected.

The Telugu Desam, meanwhile, retaliated with P. Appalanarasimhan, MP, charging Satyanarayana with acquiring government land by making false declarations and then selling it. But the answer to Rama Rao's present troubles is unlikely to lie in trying to discredit the petitioner.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

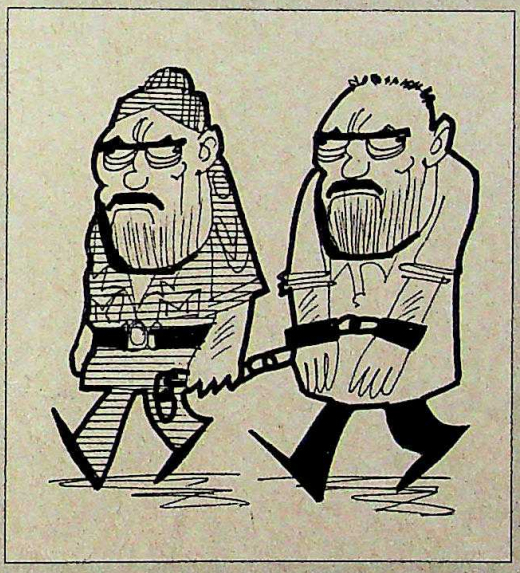
Organised Terrorism

THE prime minister briskly walked into the Cabinet room where the ministers were waiting for him.

"What's on the agenda today?" he asked.

"More incidents of terrorism," Narasimha Rao said. "People were battered and injured at three different localities in Delhi: at Narela, Basant Lok and Sadar!"

Rajiv looked at Buta Singh. "Khalistanis?"



"No sir, the police," he replied.

"Hum," said the prime minister. "This is getting serious. Earlier there were only isolated acts of terrorism by the police, now they are organised like a guerrilla army. What can be done?"

"I wonder if there is a foreign hand behind police terrorists, prime minister," Narasimha Rao said. "Perhaps the CIA or KGB is behind them, trying to destabilise the country!"

"One thing is certain," Buta Singh said, shaking his head profoundly. "This is not a simple law and order problem, we will have to find a political solution."

"Exactly," said Narasimha Rao. "We must initiate a dialogue with these police boys, somehow get them talking, bring them into the national mainstream."

"Does anyone know what these police terrorists want?" asked Rajiv.

"We believe they are separatists, sir," Buta Singh said. "They want their own state."

"What kind of state?" the prime minister asked with a frown.

"A police state, sir."

"That's out of the question," N.D. Tewari said loudly. "We cannot permit any tampering with the Constitution, or any division of the country!"

"Let's not be hasty," Rajiv counselled. "Perhaps the police might accept their state within the framework of the Indian Constitution. We should talk with them and find out."

"I'm against any dialogue with them," Tewari said. "Unless they give up violence and killing of innocent citizens."

"The problem is that if we concede them a police state, they will not stop there," Buta Singh said. "They might next demand a sovereign police state."

"I fear you are all missing the crux of the problem," Narasimha Rao said. "The real problem is economic. These police lads have absolutely nothing to do the whole day, that's why they take to crime and terrorism. We must somehow rehabilitate them in society, give them something to do."

"I'm told that most of them come from poor homes," the prime minister said. "Because they are uneducated, they feel deprived and left out."

"How much popular support do they enjoy?" Tewari asked.

"I'm sure that people like us as much as they like them," Buta Singh said confidently.

"Hum!" Rajiv mused. "Perhaps it's time we signed an accord with the police...."

"That won't entirely end terrorism, sir," Narasimha Rao warned.

"That's true," the prime minister sighed. "I guess we will just have to live with the problem for a while. Look at Ireland...."

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PUNJAB

Dual Strategy

President's rule fails

QUESTION: when is bad news good? Answer: when the number of killings rises under President's rule. Odd though that may sound, Punjab Governor Siddharth Shankar Ray tried to prove just that when he turned statistics on their head on the eve of the expiry of President's rule in Punjab. But no amount of jugglery with figures could hide the fact that President's rule has been extended by six months in spite of Ray's failure to control the law and order situation.

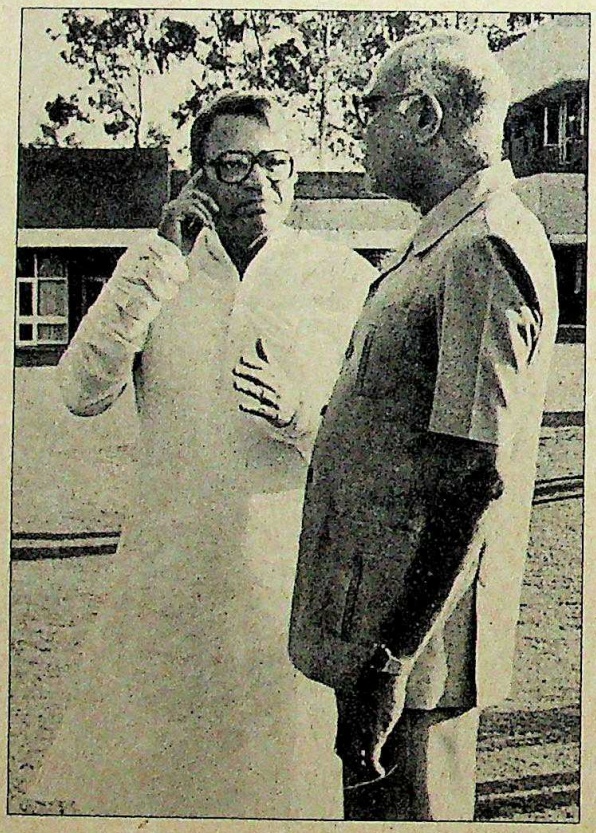
Ironically, Ray took charge after Surjit Singh Barnala's Akali Dal(L) ministry was dismissed because 79 people were killed by terrorists in April. Barnala points out that about 150 people are being killed every month—almost double the maximum toll during his tenure.

This disturbing scenario persists although more than 2,000 people have been put behind bars. This is double the number for the corresponding period last year. Barnala also points to the spread of killings in Haryana and Delhi in spite of the greater deployment of security forces.

Ray's answer to that is extraordinary: he insists on reading signs of the terrorists' desperation in the rising tally. Says he: "They are resorting to wanton killings to prove their existence. They are more frustrated now than ever before."

The governor says that unlike during Barnala's reign, the police is now actively hunting down terrorists instead of merely reacting to killings. Evidence of success, claims Ray, lies in the fact that during the last six months, security forces under J.F. Ribeiro have gunned down 197 terrorists, four times the number over a similar period last year. But how many of them were indeed terrorists is a good question and the constant claims of men being shot in "police encounters" and "while trying to escape" have not impressed everyone. Indeed, of even the 2,000 arrested, how many are actually linked to terrorists is another hard question to answer. Akali Dal leaders feel that large-scale arrests will only prove counter-productive. Barnala argues that the Punjab problem can only be met by taking bolder economic and political measures.

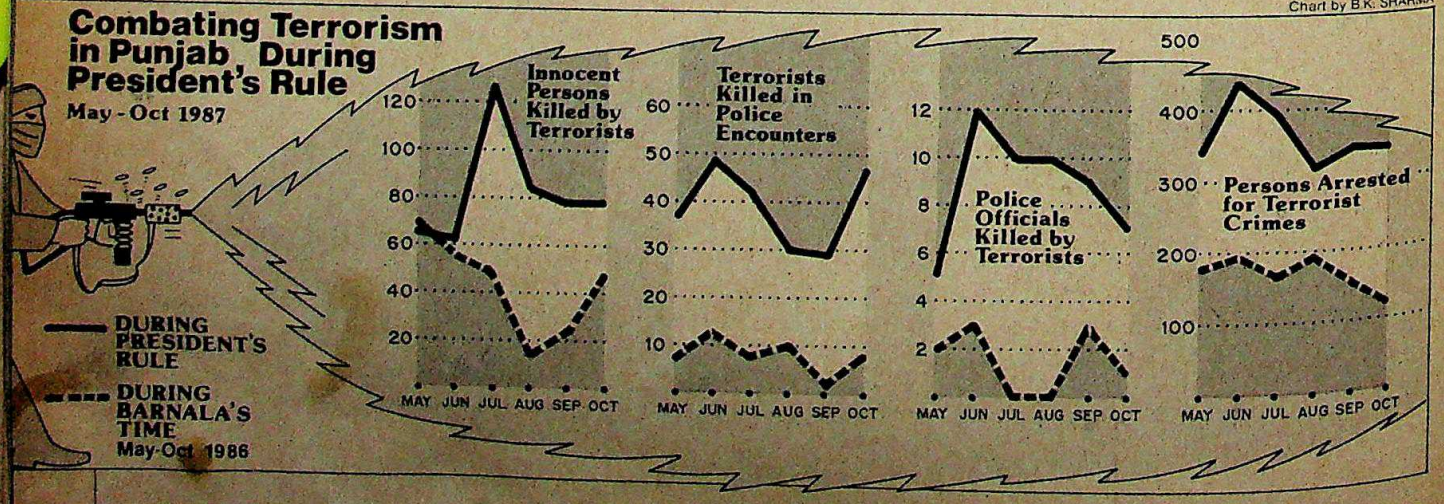
Ray (left) with Ribeiro: satisfied



Ray contends that his administration has realised this and has acted accordingly. The relief operations following the untimely rains in April-May and the drought in August-September have been the biggest in the state's history. Two-thirds of the total 12,088 villages have been covered under these operations, according to official claims. Apart from the Rs 125 crore disbursed after the wheat crop failure, a paddy bonus of Rs 102 crore (at the rate of Rs 17 per quintal) has also been sanctioned. Equally high is the input subsidy of Rs 350 per acre for small farmers on the area left unsown during the rabi season. Over just six months, Rs 300 crore in Central aid has been pumped in.

The message of money is obvious. The Centre is trying to appease the farmer lobby in Punjab to isolate the extremists whose cause gets a natural boost during periods of calamity. Ray only says that the prime minister has a definite policy on Punjab which will "unfold itself gradually but surely". There is little doubt that the Central strategy during President's rule is to appease the vulnerable marginal farmer on the one hand and ruth-

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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lessly suppress extremists—even of the milder variety—on the other.

Ray has been asserting in his public meetings organised by the newly-formed village peace committees that terrorism will have to be crushed before popular rule is restored. While that may indeed be true, the first six months of President's rule have held few indicators that Ray's is the best way of ensuring a return to democracy.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

WEST BENGAL

Sham Schools

Many are without students

SCHOOLS without students. At least several hundreds of them. This situation has existed for years in many of the roughly 4,000 junior high schools in West Bengal and came to light only because of Archana Bhattacharya.

The CPI(M) activist unwittingly drew newsmen's attention to this problem by winning the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) elections in mid-1985 and becoming the mayor-in-council member in charge of public relations. Some ferreting recently sparked off by curiosity about her background—she is a protege of the powerful state Health Minister, Prasanta Sur—revealed that she is on leave from a school in a Calcutta suburb where she is employed as an assistant teacher on a Rs 1,200 salary. Her routine there—like that of her colleagues—had consisted of signing the attendance register and leaving soon after. The Bharati Balika Junior High School, where she is employed, and on which the state Government spends over Rs 10,000 every month, has no students. Said a teacher there matter of factly: "The CPI(M) cannot afford to maintain all its cadres, which is why they are provided government jobs where they can devote their time for party work."

There are five such schools within a few kilometres of where Bhattacharya supposedly taught. Just one of them, the Palli Bharati Junior High School, has a staff of seven and a monthly expense of Rs 13,000. And its building is used to shelter cattle.

Such cases are the rule rather than the exception in West Bengal. Most of the junior high schools have been carrying on sans students since 1978 when the Left Front Government made secondary education free for everyone. Students had abandoned these schools en masse to join high schools (up to class 10) or secondary schools (up to class 12). The continued use of Bengali as the medium of instruction only made the junior high schools even less attractive.

In spite of this, no move has been made to disband these schools. Education Minister Kanti Biswas refuses to acknowledge their redundancy and dismisses allegations that CPI(M) workers are often accommodated as teachers: "Those people who make such allegations are stupid. Our teachers are too busy to take part in political activities." But Biswas has no explanations to offer in the Bhattacharya case.

There seems to have been little questioning on why the state Government spends a whopping estimated Rs 100 crore on schools that have turned obsolete. A senior Education Department official says that though the "minister is aware of the situation, he cannot take a decision unless it is cleared by the party high command". The All Bengal Teachers' Association, recognised as a strong arm of the Marxists, is unlikely to tolerate any such move.

"In today's West Bengal, schools are not for the taught but for those who teach in them," says Saugata Roy, Congress(I) MLA. Manas Bhuina, another Congress(I) legislator, complains that elections to the district school education boards—which recognise privately-run schools—have not been held for 10 years. He alleges that the boards recognise only primary schools run by CPI(M) activists.

Faced with criticism, there is some talk of the need to streamline the education apparatus. Biswas says that junior high schools which lack the requisite number of students will be derecognised. Whether this is meant sincerely or is only bluster is a good question.

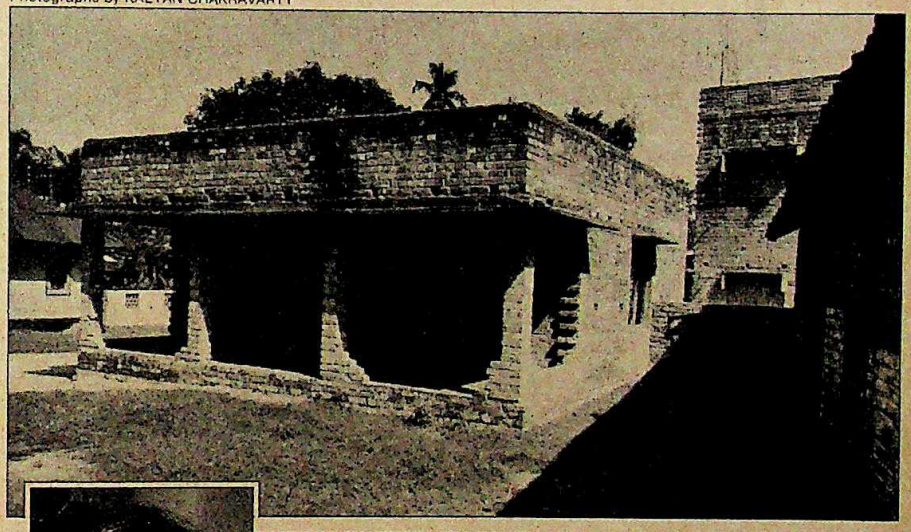
Biswas, though, also places the blame on the Centre for taking years to secure the President's assent for an amendment to the West Bengal Primary School Education Act 1973, without which elections to the boards could not be held. And now, the state Government says it will hold them only after NCERT's (National Council of Educational Research and Training) All India Education Survey Report, expected in early 1988, becomes available.

Going by the state Government's record, however, any early and meaningful action seems unlikely. The irony is that such indifference exists in a state where every fourth legislator is a teacher by profession.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

An underutilised school: exposed

Photographs by KALYAN CHAKRAVARTY



By getting elected, Bhattacharya unwittingly drew attention to the fact that thousands of schools had become a drain on the state exchequer.

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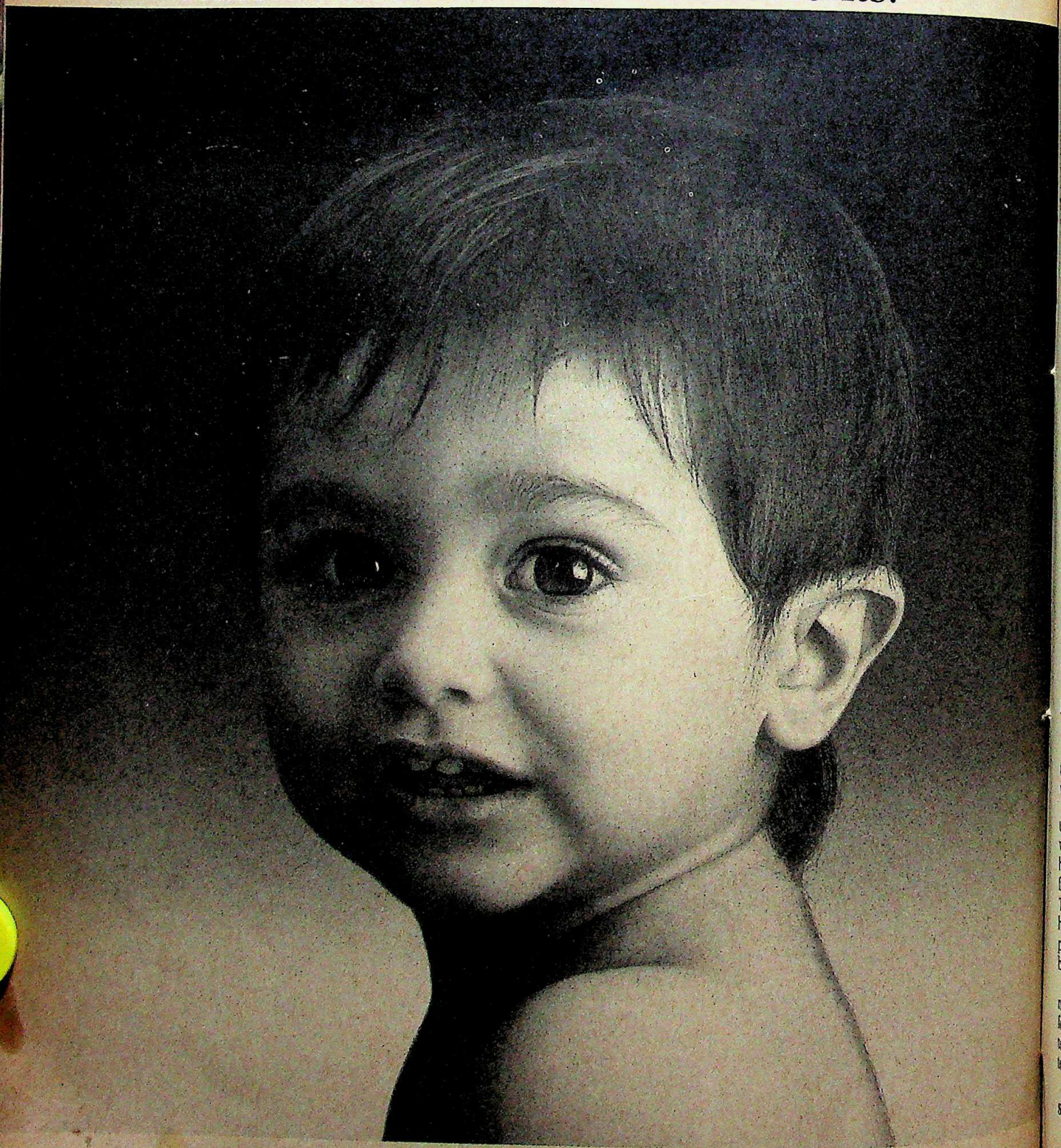

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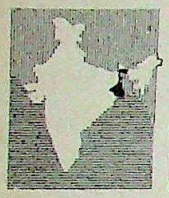
WEST BENGAL

Rising Anger

Violence in the hills again



WEST Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's decision to hurriedly announce the agreement supposedly entered into with the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) seems to have backfired. Last fortnight, the Darjeeling hills saw another bout of violence and GNLF leader Subhash Ghising threatened a fresh agitation if he did not get a satisfactory response from the Centre to his demands before November 22.

The district authorities are already finding it hard to control the situation. The state Government's concern is reflected in Basu's seeking the redeployment of eight companies of the CRPF which were withdrawn recently.

The violence began after Ghising dismissed Basu's offer of a hill development council (HDC) whose formation had been backed by an all-party resolution in Calcutta on September 18. When the agreement was announced, both Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Union Home Minister Buta Singh were still issuing statements that an accord was round the corner.

Many see the resolution as Basu's attempt to force an agreement on the GNLF. Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee, however, refutes this. "Basu called the meeting only after the GNLF had agreed to drop the demand for a separate state and accept the formation of an HDC. All the three parties—the Centre, state Government and Ghising—are signatories to the agreement," he insists.

At his Jalapahar headquarters, the GNLF leader denies signing any agreement. "How can I accept anything without getting it ratified by my people?" he asks. Ghising says he only agreed to examine the HDC offer but Basu announced that an agreement had been reached. Says Ghising: "He will have to pay for his attempt to outsmart others."

When Ghising picks holes in each clause of the 'agreement', he is essentially laying out the fresh demands he made late last month to Buta Singh. To begin with, he insists that 'Gorkha' or 'Gorkhaland' should be included in the name of the council. The council has been proposed as an autonomous body with control over all government institutions, municipalities and gram panchayats in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong. It has been suggested as a 42-member body, one-third of the members being elected and the rest nominated. Ghising wants the number of nominated members to be restricted to seven.

His more serious contention relates to the territory under the HDC, the powers it will enjoy, and its funding. The proposal empowers the West Bengal Government to supersede the HDC and specifies that all Central aid meant for the hill region should be routed through the state Government. "We don't want to be at Basu's mercy," argues Ghising.

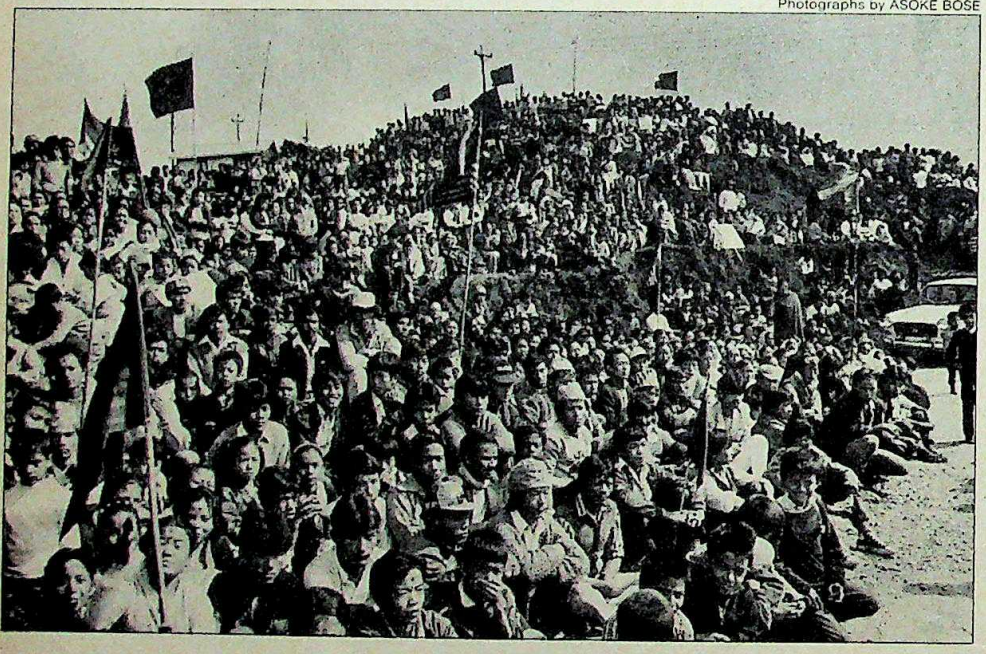
According to the plan, all departments except law and order, administration, tea gardens and reserve forests, will fall under the council. Ghising maintains that without law and order and administration, the HDC will be "like a man without a heart". Demanding the inclusion of Siliguri, parts of Dooars and Jalpaiguri district in the proposed council, he says that to fully develop any hill area, a sizeable stretch of land at the foothills and the plains is essential. His dissatisfaction also stems from the fact that almost all the local offices of various departments are located in Siliguri.

The CPI(M) had moved a bill in Parliament in 1982 and 1985 for an autonomous region comprising "the district of Darjeeling and the neighbouring districts where the Nepali speaking people are in a majority". Ghising says he is asking for roughly the same area as proposed in the bill. He adds that he is under pressure from his supporters to reject the agreement and launch a fresh agitation.

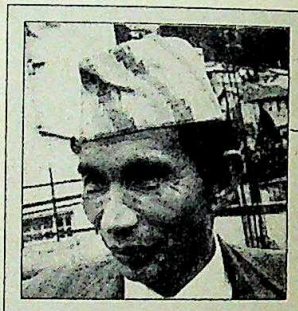
Basu, however, says that the bill had not specified the exact area at all. Asks Basu: "How can he claim Siliguri and Jalpaiguri where the Nepalis are not more than 7 to 8 per cent?"

Basu is in no mood for a compromise and has blamed the Centre for encouraging the GNLF by discussing what he says are fresh demands. In an angry letter to

Photographs by ASOKE BOSE



A GNLF rally: adamant stand



"Basu will have to pay for his attempt to outsmart others."
SUBHAS GHISING

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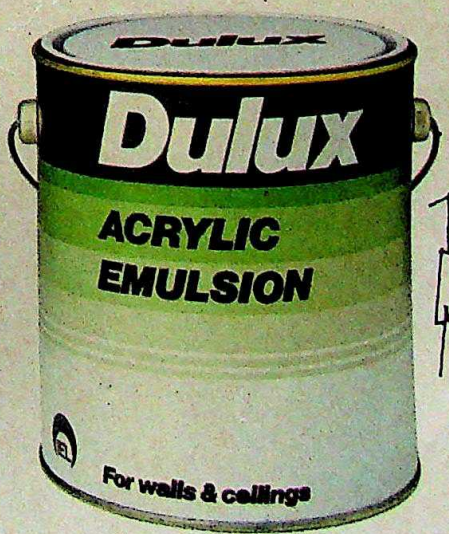

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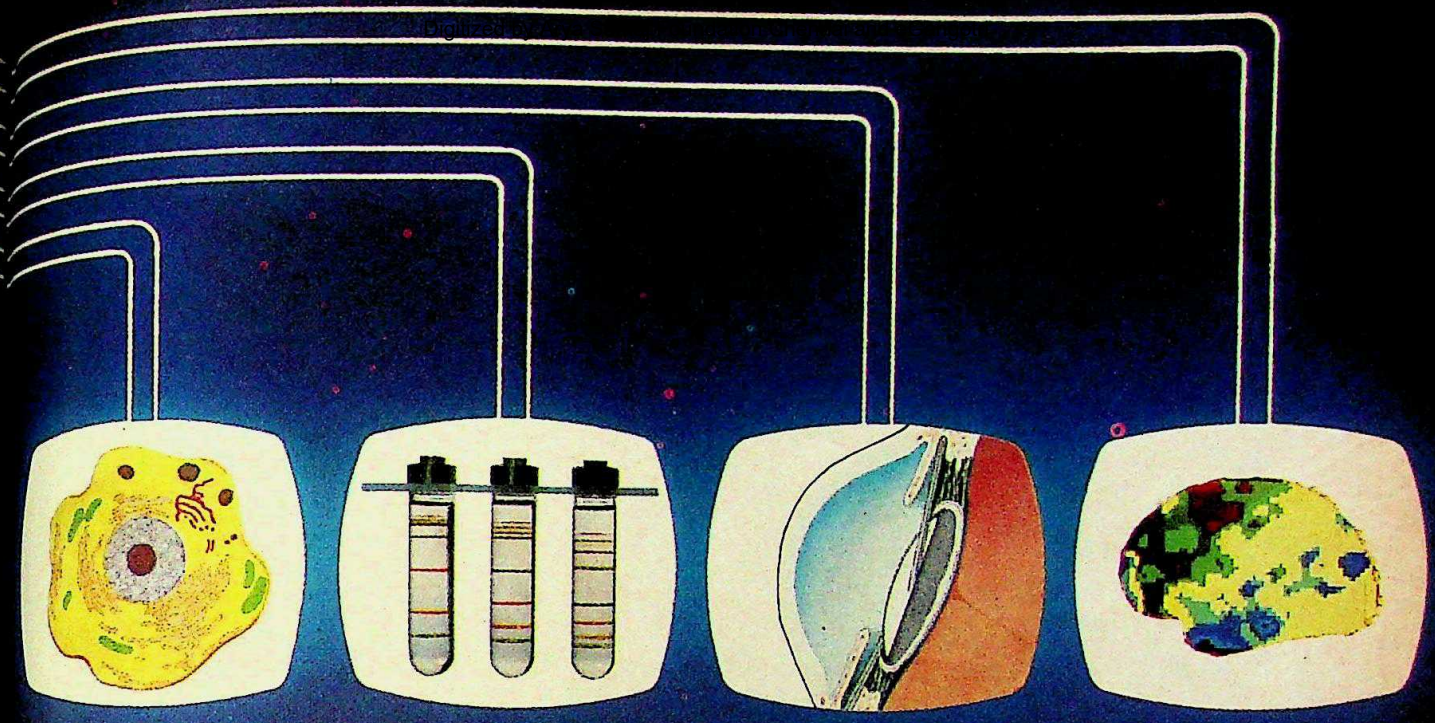

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Rajiv on October 28 after the GNLF leader's talks with Buta Singh in Delhi, he said: "Subhash Ghising might be finding it difficult to carry the people with him. The price for this cannot be conceding further to his demands." Indeed, Ghising's insistence that the demand for Gorkhaland has not been dropped indicates the pressure on him from militants within the GNLF.

Ghising can seek comfort in the fact that he has at least made new friends. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) has decided to back the GNLF along with the North Bengal Adivasi Kalyan Samiti. Samiti leaders had accompanied Ghising to meet Buta Singh.

With Basu and Ghising both firm on their stands, there seems to be little hope of peace returning to Darjeeling.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN in Darjeeling

JYOTI BASU

"I call Ghising a double-talker"

INDIA TODAY *Senior Correspondent* KAMALJEET RATTAN *met West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, 73, to gather his views on the Gorkhaland issue which seems to defy solution. Excerpts:*

Q. *Will the state Government make any fresh concessions to the* GNLF?

A. I have nothing more to offer because the agreement involves the prime minister, home minister and myself. All the political parties have endorsed it. It is also based on resolutions passed twice in the Assembly. Ghising's demands on the area of the HDC were rejected outright by the Centre in June-July. Ghising's argument was that people in these areas have supported his movement. How can he claim Siliguri and Jalpaiguri where the Nepalis are not more than 7 to 8 per cent?

Q. *Do you mean Ghising had agreed to an* HDC *with only three sub-divisions of Darjeeling?*

A. Absolutely. He gave an undertaking to the Centre on this. But he asked for some time to convince his people because he had roused their passions. And so an eight-point agreement was handed to him in which no mention was made of the territory.

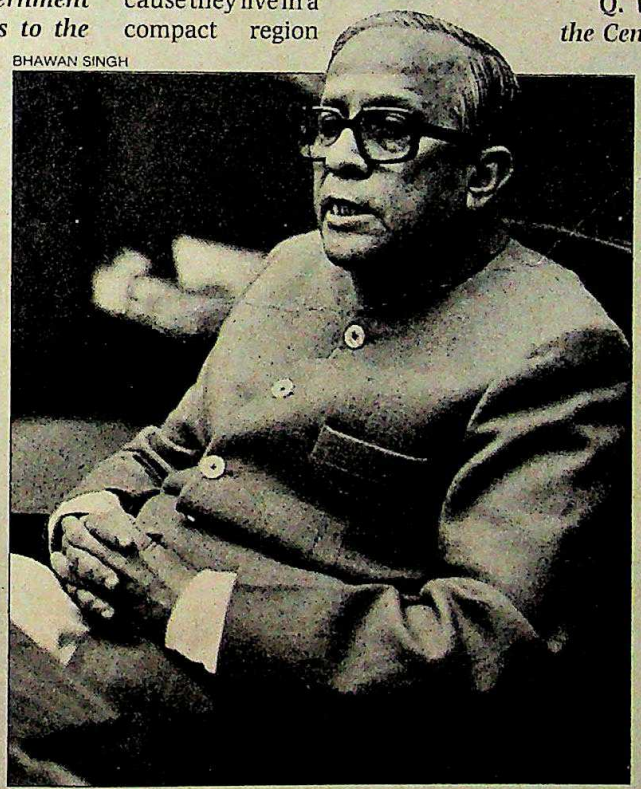
Q. *Ghising says it was understood that both the Centre and the state had agreed to the areas marked by the* GNLF *in its map for Gorkhaland.*

A. No, no. Ghising had mentioned all this but it was rejected outright. The idea was to discuss issues in detail later. But everything has gone awry after Ghising led another delegation to Delhi with fresh demands.

Q. *Are you concerned only with the Gorkhas' economic aspirations?*

A. No, with all their aspirations. We have been fighting to get them regional autonomy for 20 years because they live in a compact region where 90 to 95 per cent of the population is Nepali. But the areas Ghising is asking for are not contiguous with the Nepali-populated hill areas. Viability of the HDC. What does he mean? The HDC will not be a separate state; the question of viability does not arise.

BHAWAN SINGH



Q. *But isn't Ghising asking for the same area which the* CPI(M) *had asked for twice through bills in Parliament?*

A. No, we never gave any details of the geographical composition. Our bill asked for an "autonomous region comprising such areas as may be specified of the district of Darjeeling and neighbouring districts where the Nepali speaking people are in a majority". We find that nowhere are they in a majority in any area adjacent to the proposed HDC. They are not and Ghising knows this. He has given the names of some far-flung *bustees* dominated by Nepalis but there is no contiguity between them. Now we cannot have corridors of links while forming such a council. It would be absurd.

Q. *What are your comments on the Centre's role?*

A. Just before the assembly elections in March we came to an understanding with them. We are sticking to the understanding and I hope the Centre is also sticking to it. I do not object to their meeting Ghising but I only want that he must be categorically told that he cannot ask for any expansion of territory, nor can he come up with any more unreasonable demands. He says one thing in Delhi and forgets about it after returning to Darjeeling. That's why I call him a double-talker.

Q. *It is alleged that you tried to force the* HDC *proposal on the* GNLF *by making it public.*

A. Don't we have a right to tell our people about the progress of talks? I did so only after the Centre said that they have sent the message to Ghising. And in any case the matter is settled between us and the Centre.

Q. *If the agreement is rejected by Ghising, then?*

A. If he rejects it, then it is all over. We will have to see; he has already started violence. He is asking for compensation for those who have been affected. But who will compensate the state Government for a property loss worth Rs 8 crore? Our 42 comrades have been killed. All of them were Nepalis. Anyway, we are showing patience. Let us see what happens.

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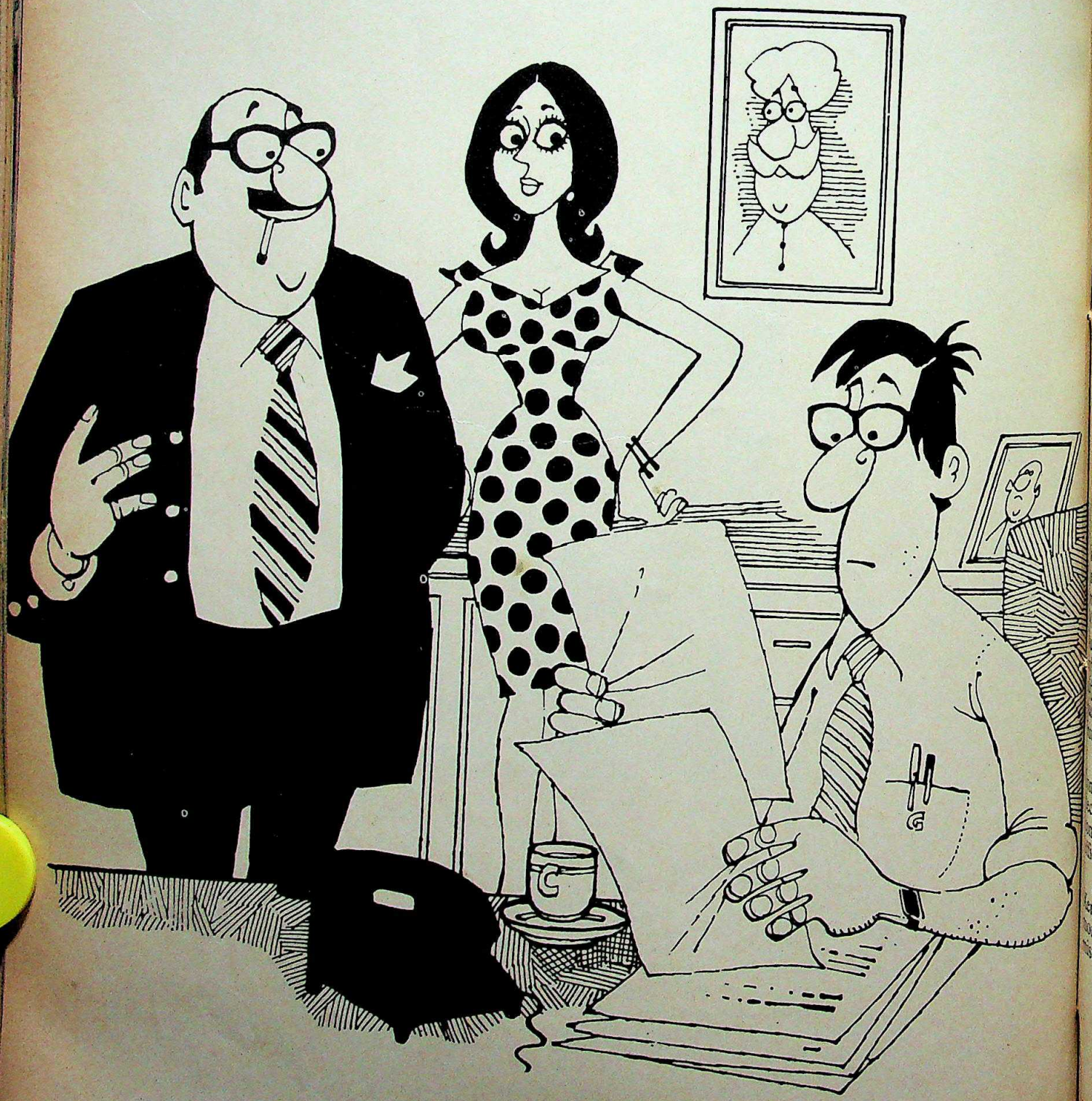

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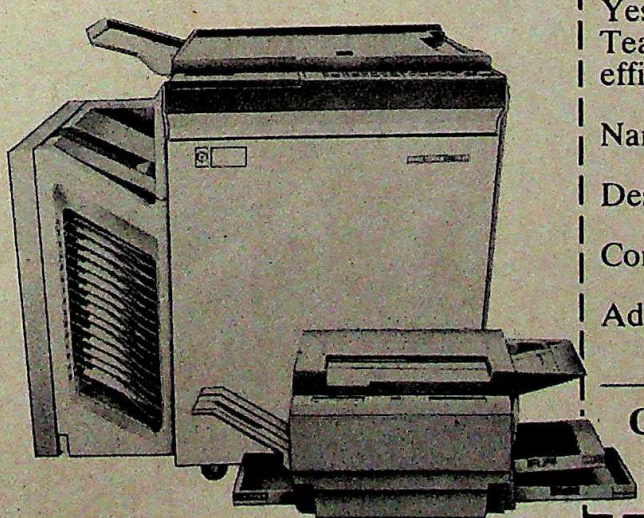

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TAMIL NADU

Hard Times

Drought strikes Thanjavur

STARVATION in Thanjavur? The very idea should have been unthinkable in Tamil Nadu's famed rice-bowl. But the great drought of 1987 has not spared this district either. With the earth parched and dry as dust, there has been little sowing this year. Neither has there been any work for the district's six lakh landless agricultural labourers. There is rice in the district's grain markets, but its price has shot up from Rs 2.50 to Rs 4 per kg, and the poor of Thanjavur have no money. After eight months of struggle, the daily battle to survive is beginning to take its toll.

The Harijans in Agaranirmala village have been forced to catch rats, crabs and snails, which they fry with a sprinkling of oil. Some even sell the rats, at 50 paise a kg, but as demand has increased, the price has doubled to a rupee. Many have been forced to begin eating roots, leaves and wild berries.

There have been reports of starvation deaths too. In Sadayam Kottagam village, in Nagapattinam taluk, 60-year-old Raman Veeramuthu had not eaten for three days, then stumbled and fell while trying to cut down a tree which could have been sold as firewood. He fell against a stone, was injured, fainted and was soon dead—either from the injury or accumulated weakness, or both.

At Serankulam village in Vedaranyam taluk, three-year-old Vetriselvi died in August after prolonged hunger, dysentery and a diet of leaves and roots. Her father, 30-year-old farm labourer Ratnam Nagooran, searched everywhere for work that would fetch the money with which he could buy food for his daughter, but he had very little luck. When Vetriselvi got dysentery, he rushed her to the local doctor, but after a few days she died.

And in the remote Pirinjamulai village in Thiruthuraipoondi taluk, the villagers talk of the death from starvation of 60-year-old Govanna Adiyappa Poriyaru who, along with his wife and niece, had been eking out an existence on an old-age pension of Rs 35 a month. His widow Muthamma is now ill too, and is in hospital.

There is no proper medical record of what exactly happened to Poriyaru, or to Vetriselvi; and District Collector M. Ramu denies that the deaths have been because of starvation. "Deaths owing to other natural causes were mistaken or were even deliberately portrayed as due to starvation," he said. But the real plight of the people is such that they either live or die in conditions of virtual starvation.

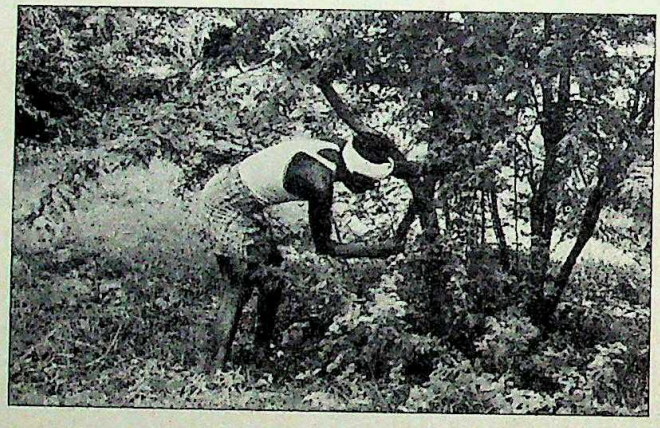
In the initial stages, the villagers had sold what jewellery they had, and then they pawned even their few brass and copper vessels. Said Sana Neelamegam, a pawnbroker in Arunthavambulam village: "The villagers have been so desperate that they have sold me their vessels for 50 paise a kg." In the next stage, the villagers started hacking down trees to sell as firewood. The tree-felling assumed such widespread dimensions that the price of wood crashed. Then came the resort to catching and selling rats. Said V. Thangayyan, vice-president of the Sadayam Kottagam village panchayat: "No one can help even the worst-affected families because all of us barely manage to subsist."

The collector says the district administration has provided 2.34 million man-days of work through various drought relief programmes this year. But even he admits that the people in the district face extreme difficulty in earning their livelihood because of the drought.

Last fortnight, the rains came to Thanjavur, and water was finally released into irrigation canals from the Mettur dam. But the landowners in the district decided to go ahead with direct sowing instead of transplantation. This means that farm labourers will get only a week's work instead of two months. Then they will have to wait for the harvest season for the next round of work. Rain or no rain, the hard times will continue.

—S.H.VENKATRAMANI in Thanjavur

Photographs by N.R. KAUSIK



Villagers digging for rats to eat (top) and felling trees: in dire straits

Though the collector denies that lack of food caused the deaths, villagers live in conditions of virtual starvation.

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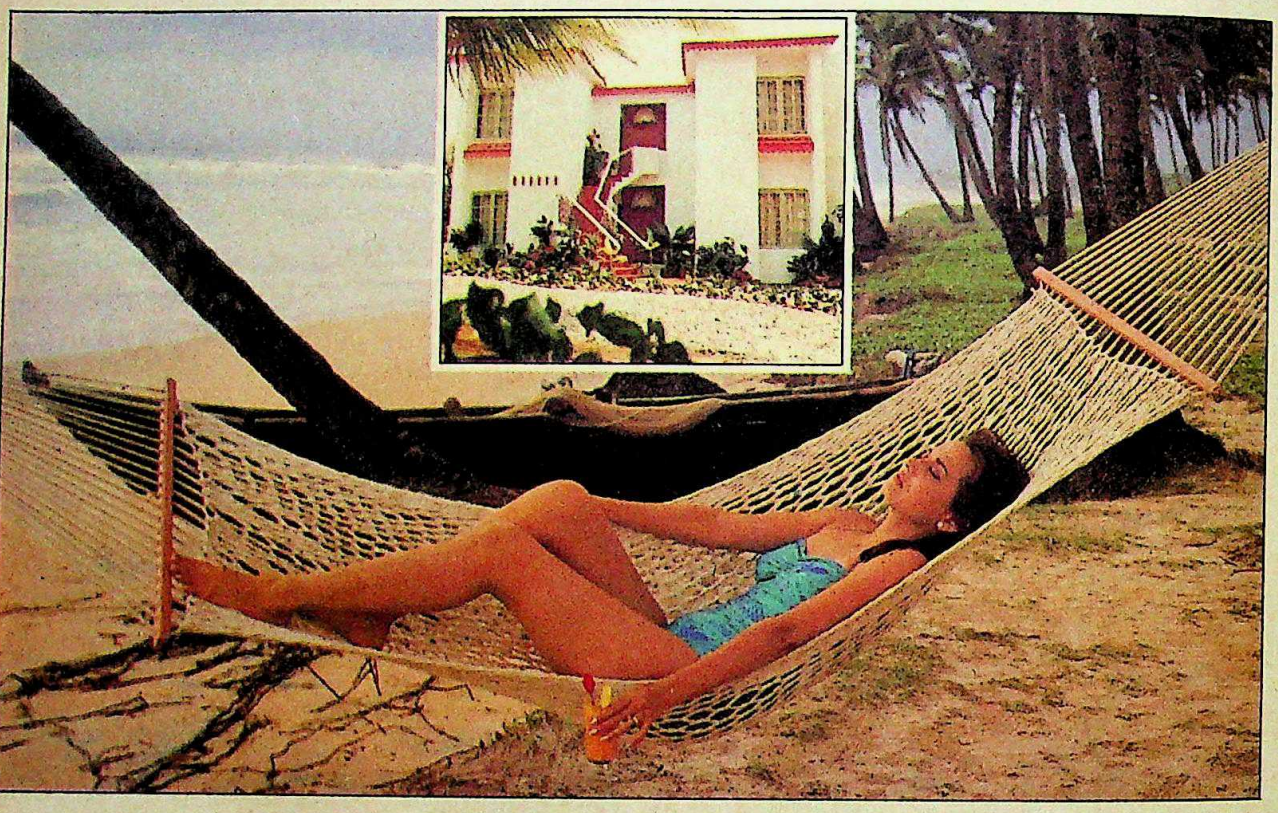

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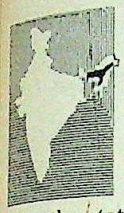
ASSAM

Timber Trail

Saikia on the mat



FORMER Assam chief minister Hiteswar Saikia is back in the news, and fairly unpleasant it is too. Late last month, Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta placed before the state Assembly a 48-page report indicting Saikia of being party to dubious ad hoc allotments of timber. On the report's recommendations, the Government has suspended two chief conservators of forests, K.K. Barua and D.P. Neog, as well as forest secretary K.K. Barua. It also plans to cancel all the ad hoc allotments made by Saikia, who held the forest portfolio while he was chief minister, on the grounds that they were illegal.

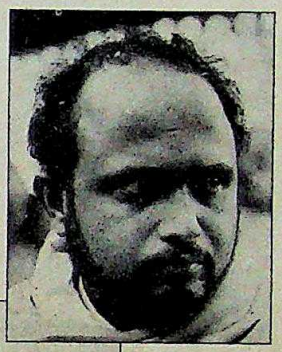
The report—made by Shashikant Phene, a senior bureaucrat—recommended criminal prosecution of Saikia and a few high-level forest officials under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Indian Penal Code. Saikia was found to have personally okayed 208 of the 481 allotments which allegedly resulted in a loss of around Rs 13.50 crore to the state exchequer.

Though the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government may have a good case on its hands, it cannot prosecute Saikia—presently governor of Mizoram—for at least another four years. Article 367 of the Constitution states that no criminal proceedings can be instituted against the President or the governor of a state. Even so, the charges can do him considerable political damage.

Though the rules clearly specify that forest produce should be disposed of only after inviting tenders, in some cases—in "public interest"—direct negotiations with buyers are permitted. But Saikia had repeatedly dealt directly with buyers, and had varied the rate of timber from one customer to the next. In fact, according to the report, timber was sold at 30 different rates. The report also questioned the "public interest" involved in making ad hoc allotments to businessmen and timber contractors at prices lower than the market rates.

But more grave is the charge that Saikia had personally allotted timber to many non-existent saw mills and individuals. Though the Phene Committee was already looking into the matter, Mahanta asked the chief minister's vigilance cell to conduct an independent investigation in March last year. The police inquiry that followed was revealing—of the five cases investigated, three were found to be fake mills, all of which had applied for timber on the same day. Moreover, the same typewriter was used to type out all three applications. After the timber was allotted to them, these applicants asked for a reduction in the price, and this too was granted by Saikia.

Finding a prima facie case, Mahanta then asked Padmadar Bania, superintendent of police in the vigilance cell, to investigate the cases even more thoroughly. Bania found that on November 7, 1984, Jagdish Serawgi of the New Hansara Saw Mills, Shyam Sunder of Assam Timber Udyog and Satyapal Goel of Jagadamba Wood Products had applied directly to Saikia, who had allotted them 4,000 cubic metres of timber. The modus operandi of these fake mills was an obvious one: to buy the timber cheap and sell it at market rates.



Prafulla Mahanta

The Mahanta Government has presented a report which indicts Saikia for misusing his powers to allot timber.

Hiteswar Saikia

On the same day, Ved Prakash Goel of Mittal Saw Mills from Haryana had also applied for 1,500 cubic metres of sal. This was not only okayed by Saikia, but a special reduction of Rs 3.44 lakh was made on the final price. When asked what "public interest" he saw in slashing the price for a Haryana businessman, Saikia's reply was: "He was doing business in Assam and it would have benefited the state." But according to Forest Department estimates, the timber which was sold to these four mills for Rs 35 lakh would have fetched Rs 92 lakh in an auction.

On the basis of these inquiries, in September last year the police had filed a criminal case against Saikia, Ved Prakash Goel, Divisional Forest Officer Prafulla Kumar Barua, Forest Ranger Ranji Patoaari and timber dealer Jagdish Bansal. Says Bania: "What we have found is only the tip of the iceberg. More will emerge when the police inquires into all the allotments." Though none of the cases have come up for hearing, Goel has had the investigations against him quashed by the Guwahati High Court. The AGP, however, will soon challenge this decision in the Supreme Court.

Corruption in the Forest Department is not new to Assam. Much before the AGP came to power, in May 1984, the Centre had appointed a committee to look into the ad hoc allotments of timber and the arbitrary felling of trees. But the state Government under Saikia had engaged in dilatory tactics and had not even replied to a questionnaire sent by the committee.

Saikia can still considerably delay matters. Last month, he filed a writ petition in the Guwahati High Court saying that investigations should be immediately quashed as the first information report had been filed on account of "vindictiveness and political vendetta". Retorts Mahanta: "There is no question of vendetta. We found enough evidence to file a case against Saikia and other officials who had caused a loss to the state exchequer."

Saikia, in defence of his actions, has little to say. His only argument is that discretionary powers have been utilised not only in Assam by former chief ministers and ministers, but have also been brought into use in other states in a variety of areas. But he fails to answer the basic question of how his ad hoc allotments were in public interest. The AGP will try to squeeze as much political mileage as possible out of the case and, from the look of things, Saikia will be able to do little about it.

—RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

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Innovations, over Ages
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Electric Telegraph to Videotex

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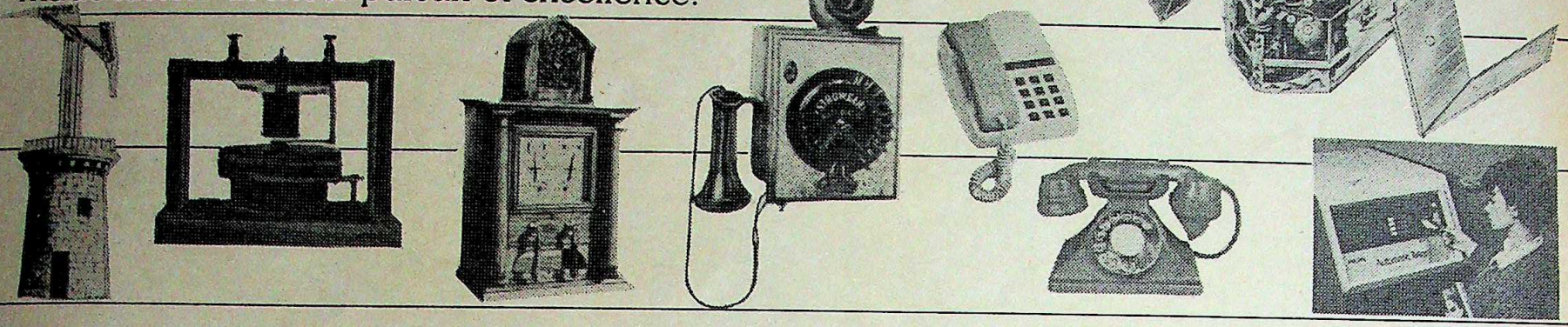

As you put down your telephone receiver, after enquiring about your bank balance - did you for a while wonder at the amazingly growing technology of communication?

From telegrams, telephones, radio and television, the scene is making room for Integrated Services Digital Networks (ISDNs) like Videotex, Cable TV Channels, Databanks, Electronic Mail and newer forms of Electronic Fund Transfer. This is but a reflection of man's constant quest to *improve* methods to communicate, impart, transmit and gain instant access to information.

The crudest conceptions of **Telegraph** or 'to convey message without somebody having to carry it' took birth in 1753. The idea was to electrically attract each English alphabet with the press of buttons at distant places. Later on it was **Semaphore line,** an optical relay system, with structures atop hills, with suspended arms positioned to indicate letters, phrases invented by Claude Chappe (1792).

It was with the American, **Samuel Morse's** practical coding of every letter by **dots and dashes** (1838), telegraph became a reality, leading to improvements like the **Piano Key Board type machine** by Prof. David Hughes (1855), **Punched-Tape system** for high speed by Charles Wheatstone (1858), **Duplex Telegraphy** for two-way communication by J.B.Stearns (1872), **Quadruplex Telegraph** designed by Thomas Edison (1874), Operator controlled **subscriber dialling service** (1903), Switchboard linked teletypewriter (1931), introduction of **telex service** (1932). With emergence of word processors, recent years have seen **Teletex** service, an inter-link of word processors whereby letters, reports and other business documents written in one office will be sent simultaneously to be typed out or to be displayed on a VDU screen at their destinations **(electronic mail)**.

On the **Telephone** front, whereby, one talks across distances to convey, instead of a written/printed/displayed message, great strides have been achieved. Beginning in 1876, when **Alexander Graham Bell** invented the first telephone devise to today, when there are over 500 million telephones throughout the world capable of inteconnection, the stage is interspersed with many innovations like, separate **mouth piece** by Thomas Alva Edison (1877), **telephone exchange** with 21 lines in Connecticut (1878), **long distance line** between Boston and New York (1884), **automatic exchange** in Kansas (1889), **cross-bar exchange** in Sweden (1926), using of **Short-wave** radio for transatlantic telephone signals (1926), and **micro-wave** (1946), **sub-sea cable** between Scotland and New Found Land (1956), **electronic exchange** in Illinois (1960) launch of **Telstar-communication satellite** to handle over 13000 simultaneous calls (1962) which threw open a vast scope for satellite communication system, like INSAT in the latest Indian context, also conducting of inter-continental teleconferences like 'Space Bridge', propounding of **optical fibres** for telephone link (1966), and introduction of **video telephones** (1972).

With growing computer technology and adapting it to communication systems a variety of **videotex** opportunities have emerged like **Prestel** (1979), whereby instant access is established through the telephone/television network with a vast central computer system by which shopping and business/banking transactions are made possible from home.

Today, particularly to financial transactions and banking, the growing communication technology has helped immensely by cutting distances and time, enabling extended instant reach and adding newer dimensions to service like credit cards, cash dispenser terminals,automated teller machines, automated payment systems, automated clearing systems, etc.

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The Return of Rambo

FOR a film that had stormed the box-office worldwide, it was a singularly quiet comeback. Last month, *Rambo—First Blood II* was released for the second time in India, in remote Malappuram, 70 km from Calicut, Kerala. The warm reception given to the block-buster by villagers in the state was strikingly different from the heated

Advertising Rambo in Kerala: unnoticed

opposition to it earlier in Calcutta.

The American film had met with such fierce resistance from the Marxists in West Bengal for its alleged anti-Soviet propaganda that the Centre had banned it for two months beginning April 28. This decision came following threats that the Calcutta theatre screening the film would be burnt down.

Now, after six months, the film has been screened in Kerala. The state Home Department says it cannot contest this as the ban was a limited one. While the Regional Censor Board in Trivandrum is tight-lipped, film industry sources say the film's comeback has to do with pressure from the powerful NRI film lobby. Says Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar: "If the West Bengal Government finds it objectionable, we will definitely look into it." Meanwhile, *Rambo-II* continues to draw full houses in rural Kerala. The difference in the reactions of the Marxists in West Bengal and Kerala has not been missed by many.

A Serious Allegation

FORMER MP and general secretary of the Delhi PCC(I), Sajjan Kumar, is in trouble. A quasi-judicial committee set up on the recommendations of Justice Ranganath Misra—who had inquired into the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in the capital—has asked the Delhi Police to file fresh cases against the guilty who had gone undetected earlier. Kumar's name figures on this list. A member of the committee, former high court justice M.L. Jain, has also expressed his displeasure at the delay in filing the case.

Sajjan Kumar

With elections to the Delhi Metropolitan Council due in February, the Opposition has seized this chance to attack the Congress(I). And within the ruling party, disgruntled leaders are using this opportunity to discredit Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat, who is also Kumar's mentor. Bhagat himself has repeatedly been accused of instigating violence in the Delhi riots of November 1984. Besides, the police image has suffered too.

Surprise Comeback

LAST fortnight, soon after returning from the US where he had gone for medical treatment, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran established that his political instincts were intact: he reinducted R.M. Veerappan into the Cabinet and gave him the important portfolios of local administration and labour, till now held by Veerappan's arch-rival, Food Minister S. Ramachandran.

Apparently, Ramachandran fell from favour because Rajiv Gandhi—during his recent visit to the US—suggested to MGR that he should take complete rest and delegate responsibility to his food minister. MGR saw in this a conspiracy by Ramachandran to overthrow him by pulling strings in New Delhi. Ill-health has prompted MGR to look for a dependable number two. Veerappan fits the bill, having been with MGR for over 40 years.

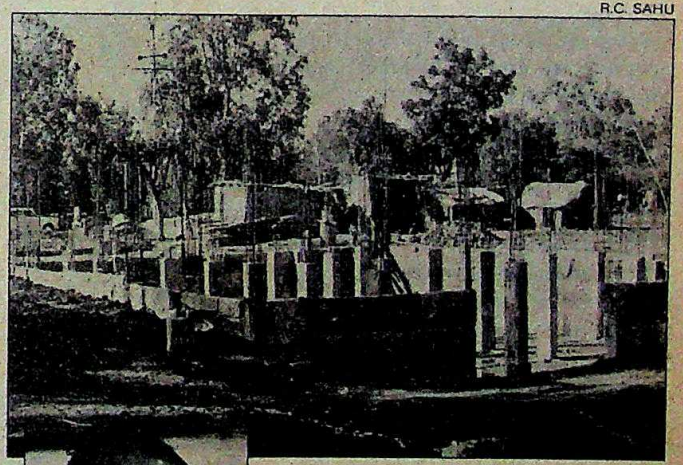
Veerappan

A Dream Gone Bust

YAGYA Dutt Sharma, former speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, is in the news once again. In 1983, the Congress(I) politician was forced to quit his post following charges of corruption and land grab. In the 1985 assembly elections, he was denied a party ticket.

Having acquired from the state housing board a prime piece of land in Bhopal at concessional rates for residential purposes, he worked out a cosy deal with a real estate developer. The developer carved out—and then booked—

R.C. SAHU



Sharma and his incomplete project

eight flats (some costing as much as Rs 3 lakh) on the land. Sharma, who got a free flat, said: "I see nothing wrong in the deal."

But the spanner in Sharma's works came from party colleague and former MP Gufran-e-Azam, who occupies the adjoining plot. To expose Sharma, Azam deliberately sought permission from Minister of State for Housing Mahesh Joshi to raise "a similar building, on the same terms and conditions" as offered to Sharma. Joshi admitted that the clearance should not have been granted. Sharma is now stuck with a further tarnished reputation—and no flat.

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NATWARLAL

The King of Con

The life and crimes of a master criminal

FOR more than five decades Natwarlal's name had become synonymous with cheating in the country. And so when the Uttar Pradesh Police nabbed the legendary criminal last month, the over 100 cases pending against him were reopened. But despite the voluminous police dossiers the master conman still remained a mysterious figure. To trace his hoary history of crime Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *travelled to Varanasi, Patna and to Ravia Bangra, Natwarlal's village. His report:*

IT was a routine cross-check. The Varanasi police had sent word to the Patna Criminal Investigation Department (CID) asking for details about a certain Ambika Pandey, alias Shankar Lal, alias B.N. Mayur, who was involved in several cases of cheating in Uttar Pradesh and claimed antecedents in Bihar.

The file was marked to Bhola Prasad, deputy superintendent of police, CID. A bored Prasad flipped through it till he saw a snapshot of the offender. He instantly recognised him and sat up, excited. The person whom the Uttar Pradesh police had nabbed was no ordinary cheat. He was Mithilesh Kumar Srivastav, better known as Natwarlal.

Wanted in over 100 criminal cases in eight states and sentenced for an incredible 113 years by various courts, Natwarlal had made eight daring escapes from various jails and was the ultimate confidence trickster. He was last seen in 1979, when he audaciously escaped while being taken for a trial in Bombay and since then had been believed dead.

So when Arvind Jain, superintendent of police, Varanasi, received Prasad's message he was stunned. The man they had in the Cantonment police station lock-up seemed a harmless, pot-bellied old man—a far cry too from the dashing hero played by Amitabh Bachchan in *Mr Natwarlal*, based on his life. Only after intensive questioning did Srivastav reveal who he was and say proudly: "There are hundreds of thieves who posed as me. But I'm the real Natwarlal."

Immediately the security around him was tightened. Two armed constables were placed round-the-clock to guard his cell and a sub-inspector was asked to send hourly reports to Jain. Meanwhile, policemen fanned out to Allahabad, Patna, Lucknow and Ranchi to gather more information. They struck gold in Allahabad when they arrested three of his alleged accomplices. One of them had a printing press where Natwarlal had had forged bank drafts printed. The other two helped him dispose of his booty.

Even as the police spent hours questioning Natwarlal, reports of his recent escapades poured in. Although his recent jobs did not match his impressive past (in the last three months he had struck at four places, duping people of Rs 1.2 lakh in all) it was clear that Natwarlal was alive and conning. As J.P. Roy, Varanasi's bespectacled deputy inspector general of police, said: "We are trying to tie up the loose ends but every day more cases are coming to light. The master forger and conman has been up to his old tricks."

Natwarlal's modus operandi has hardly changed from his heyday. Only the yarn he spins has been updated. Three months ago, dressed in a spotless white shirt and trousers, he posed as D.N. Tiwari, personal assistant to the Union Finance Minister N.D. Tiwari, and went to a watch dealer in New Delhi's busy Connaught Place. He told the proprietor, Surendra Sharma, that the Congress(I)

Natwarlal in a Varanasi police lock-up: in and out

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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Parliamentary Party was having an important meeting in which the members were to be presented watches.

The next day he came back in a chauffeur-driven car and told Sharma to pack 93 watches and send an employee with him to North Block, where he would issue a bank draft. At North Block, the old man strode in confidently, asking Sharma's employee to wait outside. He soon returned with an authentic looking draft for Rs 32,829 and took the watches. Two days later Sharma's bank reported that the draft was a forged one.

He used the trick with variations in different cities. To a watch dealer in Varanasi he presented himself as Ambika Pandey, purchase officer of the district judge, looking for watches to present to the employees. He made off with 80 watches worth Rs 25,000, again by presenting a forged draft. A Shajahanpur watch dealer was stung for 48 watches. And in Kanpur, a watch dealer in the busy Sadar Bazar even bribed him with a VIP suitcase, while parting with 83 watches. But he tried the trick once too often. Last month when he approached a Gorakhpur watch dealer with the same story, the alert owner called the police, who arrested him.

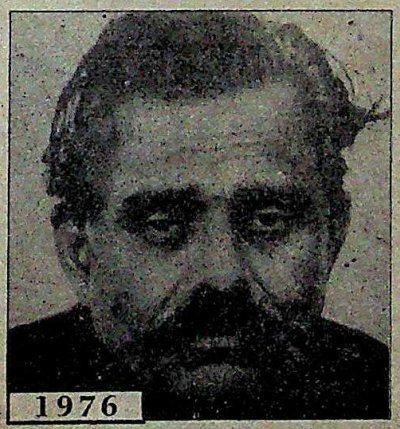
The police then discovered that last year, Natwarlal was doing the rounds of jewellers, taking even larger sums. To Raja Jewellers in Delhi he was personal assistant to the then Union finance minister V.P. Singh. He told them that Singh wanted to purchase jewellery for his son's wedding. He selected some expensive necklaces and took one of the shop owners in his car to North Block. He brought out a forged draft worth Rs 82,000 and decamped with the jewellery.

But it was clear that age was finally catching up on the master criminal. The Natwarlal that the police had in custody seemed a shadow of his former exuberant self. In his heyday, he jet-setted across the country, planned elaborate deals, acted big and conned people out of huge sums of money. But now, at a doddering 73, Natwarlal concentrates on smaller jobs. And it was apparent he was slipping. He tried the watch trick so many times that police believe he was desperate for money.

When they nabbed him he wore a sloppy shirt and trousers, and they could find none of his other belongings. He seemed frail and constantly complained of dizzy spells. He limped badly and his face was etched with lines of tiredness. He spoke several languages fluently and his command of English was good. But his voice quavered, he tended to ramble on and his mind constantly wandered. His lack of concentration could have been because of the week-long police interrogation that gave him little rest.

Yet, he still boasts that he can lift money at will and seems totally unrepentant. He portrays himself as a modern day Robin Hood, claiming he robbed only from "rich capitalists" and distributed the money to the poor. He talks of a constant communication with God and seems to believe that he is on some divine mission. It is only when talking about his past escapades that his eyes light up mischievously. And when he chuckles, flashes of the old Natwarlal are evident. It would be foolish to underestimate him. His eyes always remain watchful. His addiction to crime seems as strong as ever.

With a hoary history of crime spanning five decades and sentenced for an incredible 113 years by various state courts, Natwarlal was the ultimate confidence trickster.



The police are unconvinced about his poor-old-man act and believe this might be just another of his games. In custody he was cooperative and readily admitted to crimes. He said: "I don't want to be tortured so I'll tell them what they want. But I know that what I say in custody cannot be used against me in court."

Nevertheless, the police are now finally making an attempt to piece together Natwarlal's incredibly hoary history of crime, spanning five decades. With the master conman striking in several states, the Varanasi police were confronted with mounting problems. His files with the Lucknow CID had been washed away in floods and there is nothing left of the man after 1956. The Bihar police case history ends with Natwarlal being only 44. Other states have some more details but despite the voluminous dossiers, Natwarlal still remains a shadowy figure.

The police have still no idea where he has stayed in the eight years that he was out of jail. They do not know where he has stashed away the huge sums he had made or who his numerous accomplices were. They know little of his family life too. He claims that his wife and only son died some years ago. But that seems to be a bluff because his wife, Lalitha, is said to be living somewhere in north Bihar and his only daughter (not son as he claims), is married and lives abroad. After questioning him for more than 12 hours, Jain said: "He is remarkably clever. I don't believe that he was a pauper, as he claims to be. Or the stuff about distributing his money to the poor and having no vices. We need to probe more intensively into his past."

So despite having spent more than 20 years in jail and being nabbed by as many as 10 state police departments, the life and crimes of Natwarlal still remains hazy. And over the years, myths about his daring deeds have mixed with facts, making it even more difficult to piece his criminal history together. As S.K.Saxena, a deputy inspector general of police, CID, Patna says: "He seems to believe in national integration, striking at every state. And as a conman he is unmatched in the annals of Indian crime."

The older of two sons of a rich zamindar in Ravia Bangra in north Bihar (the late President Dr Rajendra Prasad's village is located a kilometre away), Natwarlal's early life seemed innocuous. The village folk remember him as an average student. Says Maheswar Prasad, 72, who was his class-mate in middle school: "He seemed more interested in playing football and chess than in studies."

Mithilesh or Natwarlal is said to have first discovered his prodigious ability to

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forge when his neighbour, Sahay, sent him to deposit his bank drafts. Mithilesh discovered he could forge Sahay's signature and withdraw money regularly from the account. The game was up when Sahay discovered that his account was overdrawn by Rs 1,000. Mithilesh Kumar fled to Calcutta, where he enrolled as a student for a bachelor of commerce degree. Simultaneously he worked as a broker in the stock-market. He tried to set up a cloth business in the Burrabazaar area, but failed and took up work as a casual broker.

IN 1937, he first came to the notice of the Calcutta Police, when he was arrested for the theft of nine tonnes of iron. The iron joints were lying on Metcalfe Street. Using forged documents, Natwarlal pretended that the iron belonged to him and had them sold to a dealer. The police caught up with him and he was convicted for six months rigorous imprisonment. His jail term didn't deter him.

Then began a little-known activity of Natwarlal, which the police called "prostitute poisoning". The police alleged that he visited prostitutes regularly and doped them with spurious liquor before decamping with their jewellery and money. He was arrested when a prostitute identified him. But she mysteriously committed suicide a week before the trial.

Finding "prostitute poisoning" a dangerous game, Mithilesh Kumar went back to conning people. Several factors helped him. Since his father was once a station master, he knew the flaws in the mammoth railway freight movement. His claim of having a commerce degree and a stint as a stock broker gave him an intimate knowledge of the banking rules. And his ability to forge any document or signature helped him pull off the con jobs.

He started by making small heists. He would stroll into the railway freight office and check out the goods waiting to be lifted. He would then issue bogus release orders and cheques to the railway authorities and vanish with the goods. Among the items he lifted were a harmonium valued at Rs 135, a Benz engine, and a box of screws worth Rs 1,000.

In the '40s, Mithilesh Kumar, cashing in on the shortage of textile goods, moved into the big time. It was then that he earned his name Natwarlal. He posed as a purchase officer to the textile commissioner in Bombay. With an associate, a Gujarati named Natwarlal, they approached manufacturers who were keen to get out-of-turn allotments of cotton. The two would take large advances, issue false railway release certificates and ask dealers to collect the goods from the Azamgarh station. When the dealers arrived at the station, there were no goods waiting for them. While Mithilesh was caught, his ally Natwarlal escaped. But the police thought he was Natwarlal. The name stuck and soon became synonymous with cheating in the country.

The '50s and '60s saw Natwarlal moving rapidly across the country, conning jewellers, bankers and traders. He planned his strikes meticulously. No minor detail was ignored. Every document was brilliantly forged. The house he hired, his lavish life-style, the contacts he maintained all were designed to win the confidence of his victims. He was wanted in seven different states under 30 aliases.

One of his best-known stings was in Darbhanga in Bihar in the '50s. He gained the confidence of a manager in the Punjab National Bank by posing as a big businessman. He would book one bag of pulses or rice to be sent by freight to Calcutta by the railways. On the railway receipt he changed one bag to 100 or more and obtained advances from the bank on these receipts. He rapidly built up such advances, honouring only a few of them, and even got their Patna branch to advance money. When the total reached Rs 6.5 lakh he abruptly closed the account and vanished.

But Natwarlal was not the kind to keep his ill-gotten wealth a secret. He drove one day to his native village with three cars, wearing princely clothes and a

INTERVIEW

"It's a God-given gift"

AT 73, Mithilesh Kumar Srivastav, hardly looks like the legendary Natwarlal, India's most famous conman. Lines of tiredness etch his face, he walks with a shuffle, and looks like a kindly old man. But he has lost none of his wit or verve as Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *found out when he interviewed him for two hours at a Varanasi police station. Excerpts:*

Q. *How did you get caught this time?*

A. With my brains, nobody could catch me. It's the mercy of the almighty father. I don't know what he has in store for me.

Q. *Do you believe in God?*

A. Oh, I have a strong faith in God. Whenever I run into difficulties, I turn silent and pray to the almighty father. He comes before me and after that all my troubles are removed.

Q. *For a man who has cheated so many people, isn't it contradictory speaking of God like that?*

A. No, no, no. Who said I cheated? I have never threatened people to give me money. People gave me the money with folded hands. They forced me to take the money saying: 'My dear sir, take the money.' And I took it. Where is the crime in that? The almighty father doesn't make these laws. We make the laws and we change them.

Q. *What makes you so sure that what you did weren't crimes?*

A. I know I'm not doing anything bad. I have not killed anyone. I don't smoke, drink or chew tobacco. I've not harmed the poor. I sing bhajans. I know that the capitalists are a burden. That is why our country is going from bad to worse. They keep collecting big money while our poor brothers are starving. So I get them to give me the money. And whatever money I've earned, I have distributed amongst the poor.

Q. *Is that justifiable even if the means are illegal?*

A. Tell me sir, is it really a crime if, from an ocean of wealth, I take only a glassful? That's all I have taken. And whatever I earned, I have given to the poor. This is not an offence in the constitution of the almighty father. In fact, when I go to heaven I will demand an honoured place next to Him.

> "Tell me sir, is it really a crime if, from an ocean of wealth, I take only a glassful? That's all I have taken."

Q. *Haven't you kept some money for yourself?*

A. No, because I know that whenever it is needed by me I can take it from any source (chuckles). If they can leave me free for one hour I can make thousands and thousands of rupees. I won't tell them anything. I will sit in a car

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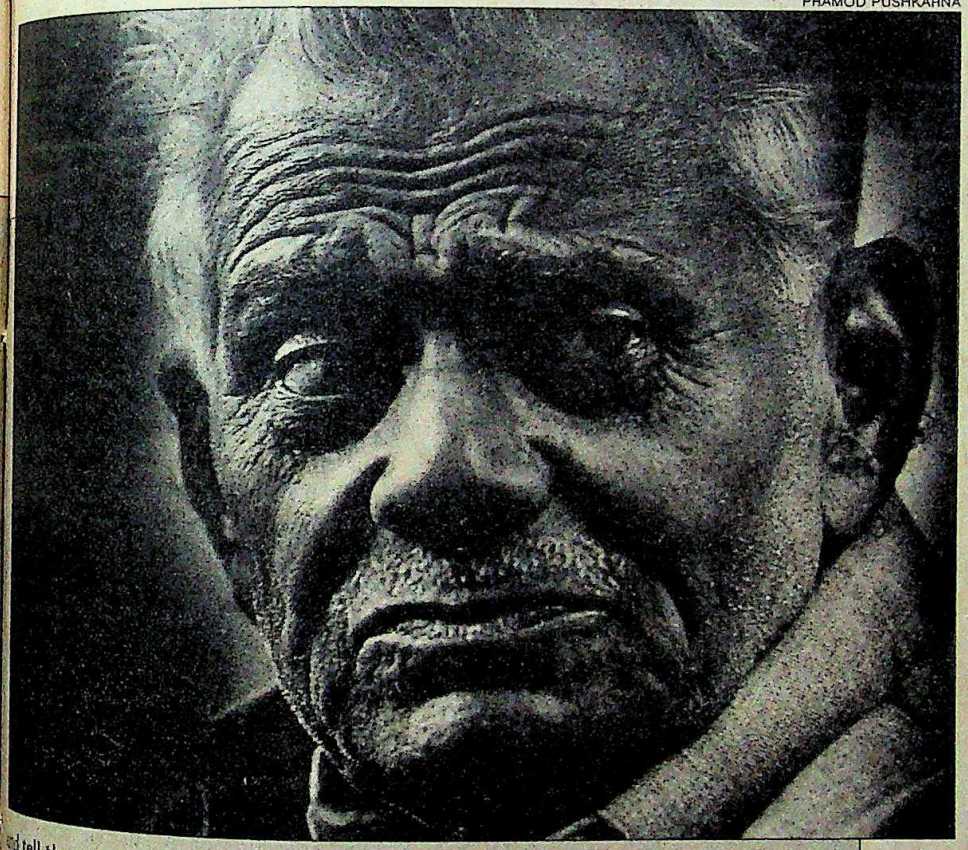
perfume that, as one villager said, "smelt for miles around". He set up a pandal, got some cooks to prepare a grand meal and entertained the whole village. He even distributed Rs 100 each to the poor folk of the village and then vanished.

In fact even now his village thinks he has done nothing to defame them. Banke Biharee Prasad, 76, who had known Natwarlal from his early days, said: "He did not commit violence. He has not harmed anyone. He robbed only the rich. He was a twisted genius. In fact, we say that Bihar has produced three famous people: Rajendra Prasad, Jayaprakash Narayan and Natwarlal."

But his crimes finally started catching up with him. The Darbhanga court put him behind bars for 17 years and fined him Rs 2 lakh. The Singhbhum court sentenced him to 19 years of rigorous imprisonment. A Patna judge sentenced him to five years. And soon, in Bihar alone, he faced 14 convictions and sentences running to over 100 years. But Natwarlal has served hardly 20 years of his various sentences, making daring escapes on most occasions.

His 1957 escape from the Kanpur jail is rated to be one of the most famous jail-breaks in the world. Natwarlal had a sub-inspector's dress smuggled into his cell. He got his cell guards to open the door by handing over an attache case filled with money and he walked out wearing the sub-inspector's uniform. Thinking he was a police officer, the guards at the gate saluted him and let him out. He got into a car and drove away with his accomplice. On the way the car broke down but, unfazed, Natwarlal stopped a hearse and headed towards Kanpur, where he disappeared. He had the final laugh too: when the jailors opened the attache case they found it to be full of newspapers, instead of money.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



From 1977 onwards he was lodged in the Indore jail pending trial—probably his longest ever stint in jail. Finally in February 1980 the Indore sessions judge sentenced him to 26 years of rigorous imprisonment for duping a bank of Rs 4.5 lakh in 1956. He was then sent to Bombay, to be tried for the 30-odd cases the Maharashtra Police had against him. It was while he was in police custody that he faked a kidney ailment. On the way to the doctor he got the constable to take him to a five-star hotel on the pretext of getting some money. There he disappeared and only came to the limelight again when he was caught last month.

Apart from being tried by various Uttar Pradesh courts for his more recent offences, Natwarlal is still on the wanted list of over seven other states. His pending jail sentences would also mean that he would be confined to a prison cell for the next 20 years.

But for a man who once boasted that no jail could keep him for long, the police don't underestimate his prowess. And Natwarlal is still capable of making one of his great escapes.

The man himself still brims with confidence about his abilities: "Leave me free for an hour and I'll get thousands and thousands of rupees from the same street where I took money. And the people would give it to me willingly." And judging from his past, Natwarlal is certainly not conning himself.

and tell them to bring money and they will bring it with folded hands. Even from the street where I took money earlier.

Q. *How did you learn to take money from people so easily?*

A. It's a god-given gift. I was never taught.

Q. *How do you choose your victims?*

A. You can easily come to know who is a capitalist. You know that Birla is a capitalist. So many people are capitalists here and it's not a difficult task finding them. I have got the art to turn them my way and give me money.

Q. *Your favourite trick seems to have been making forged drafts and railway receipts.*

A. I used to be a commerce student and I can teach the banks for years and years. In fact, if the country used my brains we would not be in such a bad financial position. I would have solved it easily.

Q. *How did you manage to escape from jail so many times?*

A. I never escaped. They took me from the cell, opened the gate and allowed me to sit in my car and drive away. Have you ever heard anywhere in the world of someone walking away from jail in broad daylight at noon?

Q. *Did you see the movie* Mr Natwarlal *based on your story?*

A. No. When I'm the real hero why should I see the artificial one?

Q. *Do you have any regrets?*

A. I know that what I'm doing isn't bad so I feel no shame. Nor do I feel sad. Why should I? This is just the drama of life. I'm just an actor. When Natwarlal goes the scene goes with him. I came to this world alone and I will go alone.

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FARMERS' MOVEMENTS

The Gathering Storm

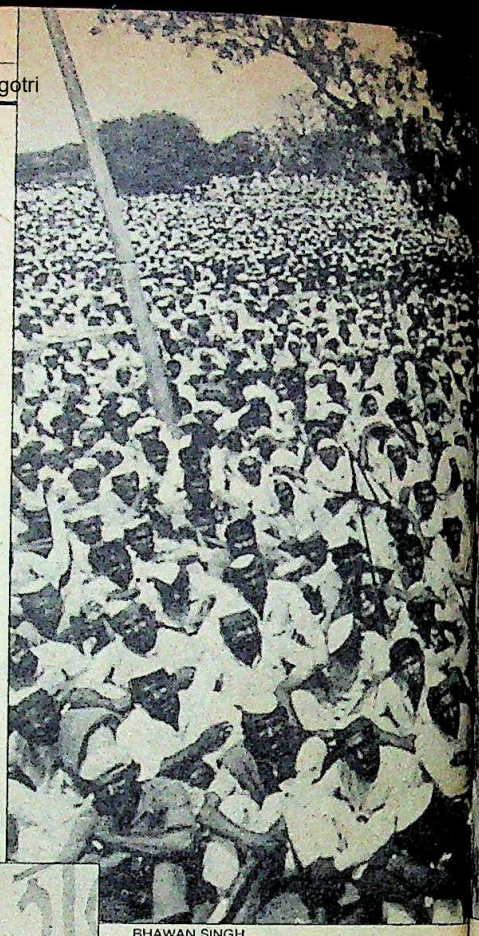
A powerful force rises on the political horizon

DESPITE their overwhelming numbers, the country's peasants have traditionally depended on political parties to safeguard their interests. No longer. Farmers' organisations have sprung up across the country, wielding rapidly increasing clout. The last year in particular has seen a new militancy creep in. INDIA TODAY *examines the movement.*

MOMENTOUS happenings are taking place in the otherwise placid Indian countryside. Consider those events: a nobody becomes the messiah of farmers in western Uttar Pradesh; in Maharashtra, the chief minister succumbs to a "rasta roko" agitation organised to demand a better price for cotton; the Gujarat Government gives in to several demands after a year-long stir; in Karnataka, farmers will form a new political party. Consider also that next March, Delhi will probably see the most amazing demonstration of farmers' unity ever. About five million people, backed by organisations in 14 states, will declare India's ryots "debt-free" and demand a better price for their produce. If this show of strength comes off, it will mark a watershed in national politics.

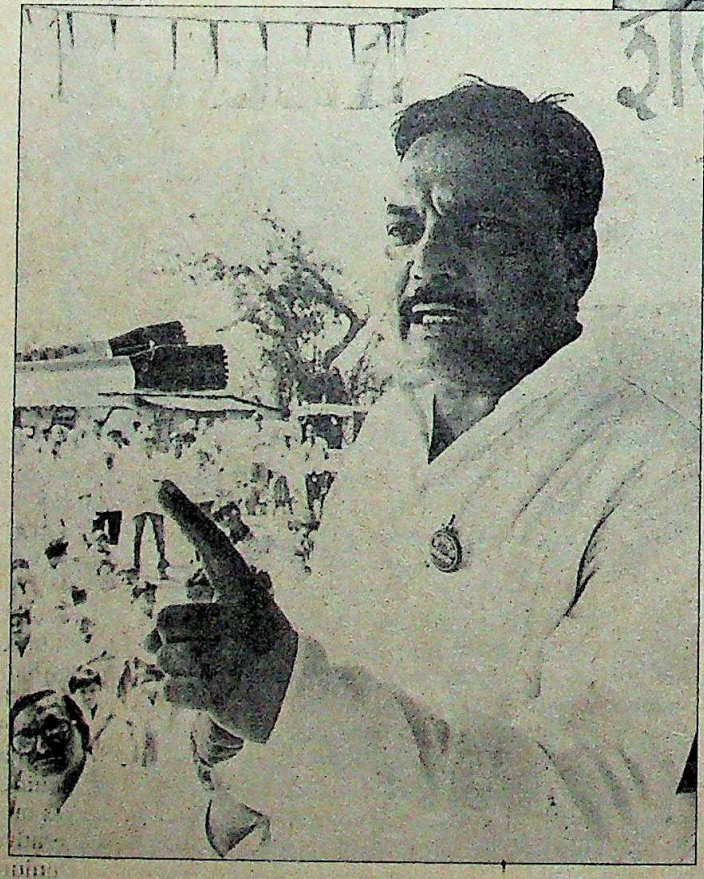
While a majority of the farmers at the proposed March 12 rally will come from neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, large contingents are also expected from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In fact, Shetkari Sanghatana leader Sharad Joshi, 52, whose name has become synonymous with the farmers' struggle, plans to mobilise five lakh people from Maharashtra alone, nearly a lakh of whom will undertake a 50-day-long march to the capital. Says Joshi: "The rally will mark the beginning of a national civil disobedience movement comparable to Bardoli." Joshi says the rally will focus on three main issues:

- A declaration of freedom from indebtedness. Farmers will refuse to pay all crop, land development and poverty alleviation loans, amounting to an estimated Rs 8,000 crore (loans of Rs 5,000 crore are from the cooperative sector and the rest from public sector banks). Only loans taken to buy trucks, tractors and drip irrigation equipment will be exempted.
- A reassertion of the demand for more remunerative prices for agricultural produce.
- Higher minimum wages for farm labourers. Joshi has proposed a "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" formula, which will mean roughly doubling the minimum wage to Rs 25 a day—which is what a jawan gets on joining the army.



BHAWAN SINGH

PRAKASH PARPIANI



Joshi feels that the formation of an all-India farmers' body is a much less distant dream now than it was five years ago.

Though major farmers' agitations have been launched since the early '80s, the organisations had until now failed to come together at the national level. For the past three years, a national coordination committee of farmers' organisations has been meeting intermittently, but it was only at the last meeting in Delhi two months ago that a decision to hold a massive rally jointly was taken. Even this new-found unity was threatened by a squabble between Joshi and Mahendra Singh Tikait, 62, the mercurial new farmers' leader from Uttar Pradesh. The disagreement occurred over Joshi's decision to back V.P. Singh.

Though the rally was to have been held in October, these differences led to a change of plans. Tikait first announced that a separate rally would be held on October 17, the first anniversary of the formation of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU),

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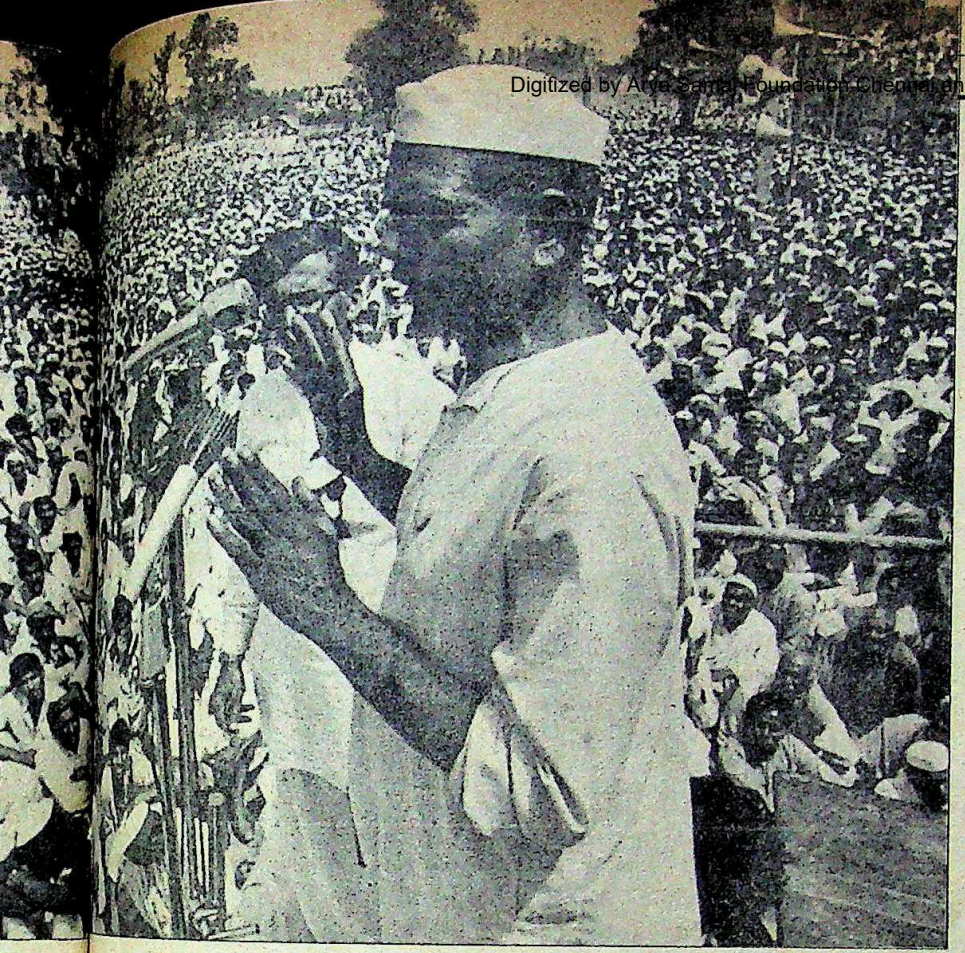

Tikait's remarkable rise in Uttar Pradesh is proof of the influence farmers' groups have been able to acquire by keeping political parties at an arm's length.

which he heads. Eventually other leaders intervened and the joint rally was scheduled for March.

"Tikait's warning about keeping aloof from politicians was timely," says M.D. Nanjundaswamy, 51, who heads the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha. He adds: "We don't want farmers to be hoodwinked by such political developments."

The transformation of Tikait from a simple peasant into a powerful leader with a substantial following in 11 districts of Uttar Pradesh is proof of the influence farmers' groups have been able to acquire by keeping political parties at an arm's length. The BKU is headquartered in Sisauli, Tikait's village in Muzaffarnagar district, but since its formation last year, it has spread rapidly through the prosperous districts of western Uttar Pradesh. "Today, every meeting addressed by Tikait draws a minimum 50,000 people," says a government official in Meerut.

Like many other such organisations, the remarkable growth of the BKU was set off by a shortage of power for lift irrigation. The BKU shot into prominence after the gherao of an electricity sub-station at Shamli, leading to the death of two people in police firing. "No political party, no government has time for us. We will show them what we are worth," declared Tikait, as the BKU sowed the whirlwind of farmers' discontent.

IN Vidarbha and northern Maharashtra, Joshi reactivated his movement last December when the Shetkari Sanghatana organised a large-scale "rasta roko" agitation in the cotton-growing districts, demanding a higher price under the state Government's cotton monopoly procurement scheme. After managing to extract concessions from Chief Minister S.B. Chavan, Joshi has been busy organising rural women whose participation he sees as essential for any civil disobedience movement to succeed.

But it was his support to V.P. Singh, for whom he has organised huge rallies, that invited controversy. Joshi, however, remains confident that the sharp differences over support to political parties will not endanger the movement. "The formation of an all-India farmers' body today appears to be a much less distant dream than it was five years ago," he says.

Belatedly, Joshi has also made an entry into Gujarat where the predominant force is the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), which is widely seen as a wing of the BJP. Last fortnight, the BKS demonstrated its clout when, after a year-long stir, it arrived at an agreement with the Amarsinh Chaudhary Government which will have to bear a Rs 11.5-crore burden annually. Over a dozen major BKS demands have been conceded, including the lowering of power tariff, an increase in power supply and the withdrawal of police cases against farmers.

If Chaudhary was jubiliant afterwards, it was easy to see why. During the past year, the BKS had organised a series of rallies, culminating in the gherao of the vidhan sabha in March. This had resulted in the death of six people in police firing and led to six days of statewide violence. Besides, the BKS, backed by an estimated five lakh farmers, had sustained a successful campaign of refusing to pay government dues. Consequently, the state electricity board alone had suffered a loss of about Rs 70 crore, and other government agencies had lost another Rs 40 crore.

The rise of the BKS has clearly signalled the political re-emergence of upper caste farmers under the BJP, after years of Congress(I)-sponsored backward class domination of the districts. The organisation had also asked for changes in the implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and the Urban Land Ceiling Act, thus inviting the charge of it being a rich landowners' body. Because of its political links, however, it has been excluded from the national coordination committee and will not participate in the Delhi rally.

While the BKS has kept up the pressure on the Congress(I) Government in Gujarat, the Raitha Sangha's relationship with the Ramakrishna Hegde Government in Karnataka has been less stormy. The Raitha Sangha played a crucial role in the Congress(I)'s debacle in the last assembly elections. All the same, in 1985, it did force Hegde to back down on the question of auctioning the property of farmers who default on tax arrears or loans given by cooperative societies.

Nanjundaswamy has now decided to start a regional party in alliance with Dalit and Kannada language activists. Its name and manifesto will be announced at a farmers' rally in Hubli on December 21. "Keeping away from politicians and political parties does not exclude us from launching a new political force," says

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Nanjundaswamy somewhat contradictorily, and adds that all the governments—including Hegde's—have neglected them. "The main objective of forming the new regional party is to destroy national parties," he says.

Nanjundaswamy has not been discouraged by the experience of another prominent farmers' leader, the late Narayanswamy Naidu, in Tamil Nadu. It was Naidu's decision to form the Farmers and Toilers Party in the early '80s which led to the disintegration of his powerful organisation.

structure of democracy."

Until now, Joshi has been content to use the Shetkari Sanghatana's enormous clout to support other politicians—first Sharad Pawar before he left the Congress(S) and joined the ruling party, and now V.P. Singh after his ouster from the Congress(I). Joshi's support was considered crucial in at least 30 assembly and a couple of parliamentary constituencies during the last elections in Maharashtra, highlighting the fact that the growth of farmers' organisations has been at the cost of traditional

The Bharatiya Kisan Sangh demonstrated its clout when, after a year-long agitation, it finally forced the Gujarat Government to arrive at a settlement.

Although Nanjundaswamy feels that a national farmers' organisation is unviable because of regional peculiarities, he supports Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's thesis that a confederation of regional parties could rule at the Centre. Says he: "At the national level there could be a confederation of political parties launched by farmers in various states. We have reached the stage where we feel that we have to launch an alternative political movement to solve our problems."

But Joshi feels that farmers' bodies should desist from directly entering politics. "I will never contest elections, but at the same time I subscribe to a dynamic concept of remaining apolitical," he says. "Farmers' organisations must use their strength to restore the content and

Congress(I) hegemony in rural areas.

"Clearly, the loser is our party," admits Annasaheb Shinde, a prominent Congress(I) leader and former Union minister of state for agriculture. "The farmers' constituency is in turmoil, and these organisations have come up wherever the Congress(I) has weakened." Shinde believes that for the ruling party to survive, it must take up the problems of the farming community. Along with Sharad Pawar and other party leaders, he, therefore, organised a massive milk producers' rally in Maharashtra recently, demanding a higher price from the government milk scheme.

However, with 500 million people dependent on agriculture, with 55 per cent of farm holdings less than one hectare, and with more than a million farms fragmenting every year, there is tremendous potential for farmers' movements to capitalise on rural discontent. Though the terms of trade are tilted against the agriculturist, economists argue all the same that paying more for agricultural produce could prove disastrous.

"High prices are the biggest enemy of the poor," says M.L. Dantwala, former chairman of the Agricultural Prices Commission. And he adds: "Half the rural households are net purchasers of food. If wheat prices go up by 50 per cent tomorrow, the number of poor will increase by 10 per cent." Dantwala argues that the best way out is to increase the efficiency of the industrial sector and raise productivity levels in agriculture by further subsidising inputs.

But the one demand on which movement leaders remain united is a higher price for their produce. And in the face of an unyielding government, the cry for writing off loans is spreading. Tikait has demanded that, as promised in Haryana, all loans to small farmers in Uttar Pradesh too should be waived. In Karnataka, the Raitha Sangha has already announced the launching of a no-tax campaign from January 26. And after the Delhi rally, the refusal to repay loans will spread to other states too. "The consequences will be terrible and will unsettle the whole banking system," predicts Dantwala. "In any other country, these leaders would have been arrested for economic treason."

"A government which holds loan melas to distribute political patronage has already destroyed the sanctity of the credit system," responds Joshi. "We have decided to take this step—even though the ramshackle credit system will be affected—after trying for several years to make the Government see reason."

Clearly, as the demand for a better deal for the nation's farmers gathers momentum, the Congress(I) will find itself surrendering the political initiative to mushrooming organisations like Tikait's in Uttar Pradesh. How far this will alter the political map will depend on whether the farmers' leaders can come together. For now, the differences between them appear as strong as the desire for unity. But if the March rally is successful, it could go a long way in convincing farmers of the potential for a nation-wide stir.

—M. RAHMAN with ANITA PRATAP, UDAY MAHURKAR and PANKAJ PACHAURI

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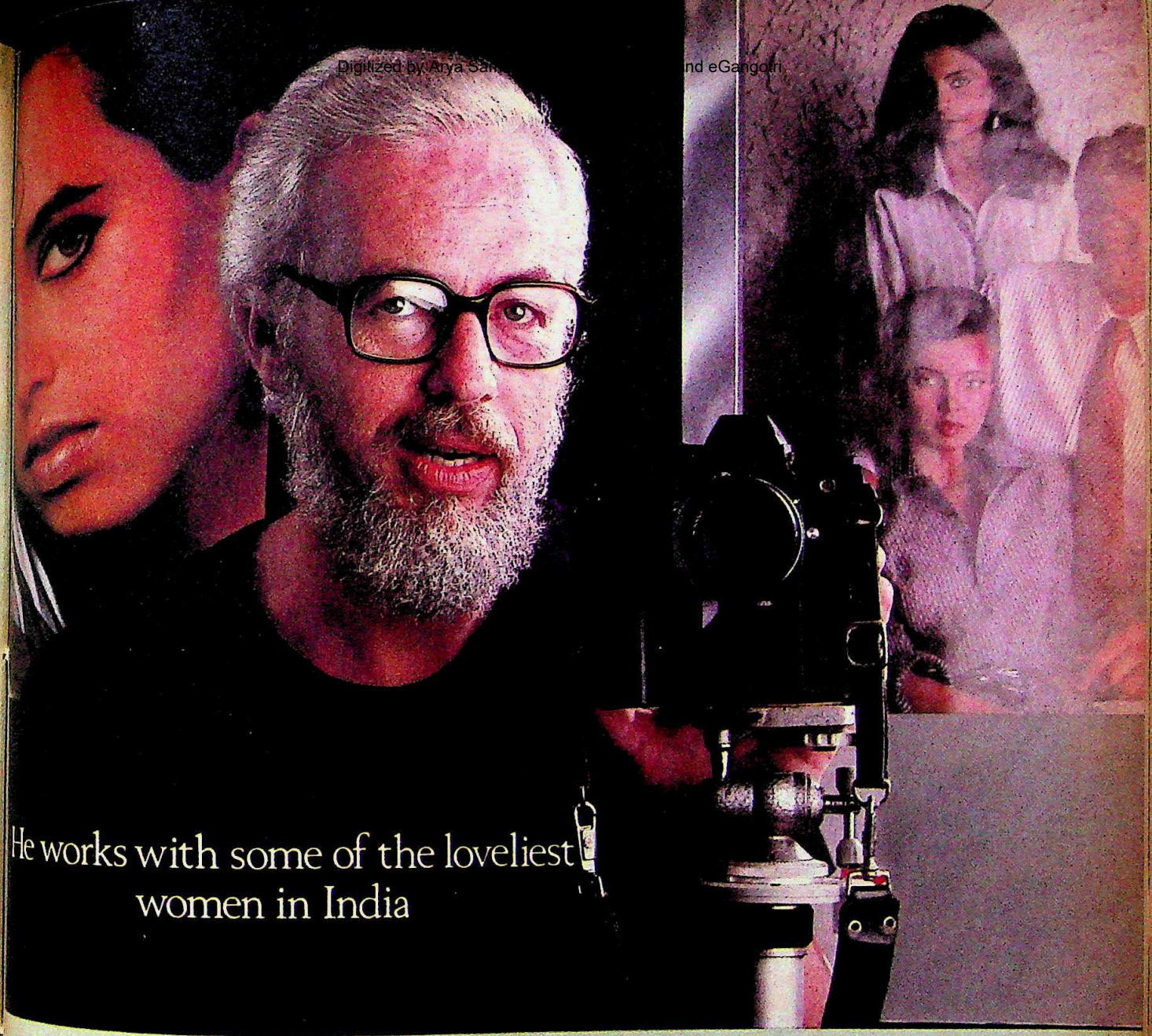

One photograph by Glamour Photographer Adrian Steven, says more about a beautiful woman than a thousand words.

Adrian transforms the fashion model from a mere clotheshorse to a warm, intelligent, exciting woman, one who celebrates the glamorous life. That she is beautiful to boot merely adds to her desirability.

With what does Adrian work his wizardry?

A battery of cameras, though his favourite format is the 35mm, which he says gives him the sharpest results.

I notice, not without pleasure, that there are a few cartons of Konica colour film on his table.

I ask him how he finds Konica.

"You tell me", says Adrian.

He opens a folder and carefully removes a set of new portraits he says he's just done on Konica film, Konica paper.

I whistle softly. Glowing skin, soft red mouth, silken fabric... they look almost touchable. I leaf through the prints slowly.

When I look up, Adrian is loading a camera for another assignment, due in minutes.

And joy of joys, he's using Konica.

New

Konica

SR-V 100

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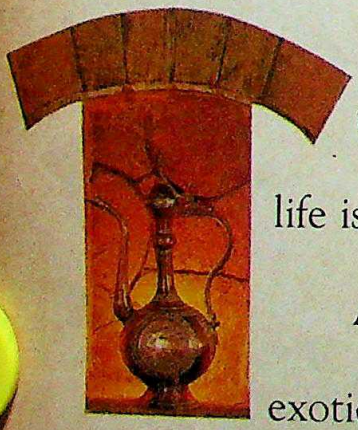
How to enjoy an authentic Frontier meal in more hospitable surroundings.



The North-West Frontier. Here, amidst mountains that touch the sky, bottomless gorges, sudden blizzards and cyclones, life is a constant battle for survival.

BUKHARA

And yet, this is where you will come upon one of the most exotic cuisines in the world. Created and perfected by a race of handsome, daring people with an effusive hospitality that is in total contrast to their hostile terrain.

Welcomgroup has captured this rare combination at the Bukhara, Maurya Sheraton, Delhi and now, also in New York.

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Here, amidst log-hewn tables and seats, and pitted walls, you will experience the same warm hospitality and exotic fare. Sikandari Raan, leg of lamb, marinated and roasted to a juicy tenderness Murg Malai Kababs, choice morsels of chicken, grilled and laced with cream. Dal Bukhara. And flat breads that occupy an entire table.

Similarly, each one of Welcomgroup's speciality restaurants offers you a truly singular and authentic cuisine. Dum Pukht, once the indulgence of royalty, at the Maurya Sheraton. The catch-of-the-mornin

at the Lobster Pot, SeaRock Sheraton. The exclusive table d'hôte fare at the Maurya Sheraton's Towers Club.

However, there are some things that never change. The warmth of a smile. The friendly handshake. The genuine desire to please. You see, it's not just the cuisine we got from the Frontiersmen.

WELCOMGROUP

The wonderful world of Welcomgroup

Ⓢ Sheraton in India, exclusively with Welcomgroup.

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Enterprise/D/W

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Starting now, cars will benefit from engineering that has nothing to do with cars

MODI RUBBER LIMITED

Modi

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Introducing!

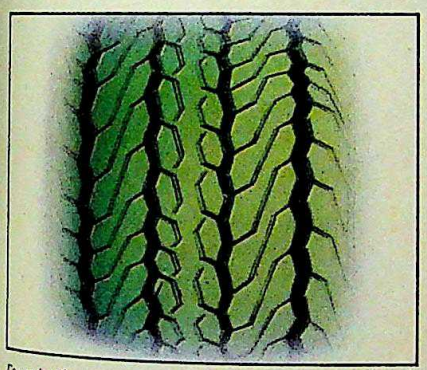
The new R90 Executive Car Tyre

All this engineering didn't even begin with engineers. It began two years ago, with test drivers. On some of the most discouraging terrains in the country: rain-swept Khandala, snow-bound Darjeeling.

Their mission: to help study conclusively the road conditions in India.

The outcome is a tyre engineered to improve riding comfort by carrying your car on a cushion of air. A tyre which accurately responds to acceleration, steering, braking. And outlasts all tyres that came before it. The new R90 Executive.

Even its looks set it apart. Not one air bubble. No hairline crack. Perfect contour.



Four tyre 'footprints', each no larger than a shoesole, have to control a 1½ ton car! The R90 does it best.

It can't be otherwise.

Not with a manufacturing plant cleaner than a hospital operation theatre (inside pressure is maintained higher than atmospheric pressure to keep dust out, *permanently*).

Not after 511 quality inspections.

Yet we know inspections, no matter how many, can't guarantee quality if it isn't there.

That's where technical expertise gained from our world-leading collaborators—Continental Gummi Werke of West Germany—helps us build quality into the R90. As do our 62 Quality Circles (QCs).

The QC motto : "Quality in & Quality out"

QCs are based on the idea that people actually like to use their brains in addition to their labour.

Result? The very people who handle the R90 on the shop floor—from raw materials through processing to the finished tyre—ensure that every process, every machine works like clockwork.

This means that R90 is born the best. Quality inspections simply reaffirm this fact—or facts like the following:

Endurance married to flexibility

Tyre makers have long assumed that the same rubber will do for every part of the tyre body. Ignoring evidence.

We listened. And built into the R90 tread a heat-and-cut-resistant compound. And a flex-durable one into the sidewall (which is also beefed up with a sidewall protector rib).

For the body plies we chose a nylon polymer with exceptional temperature tolerance.

Contrary to another convention, we heat-set the nylon not once, but twice—giving the R90 greater flexibility, both across and along its body. And therefore greater ability to cushion impact from potholes and bumps.

More mileage

For one thing, the R90 tread has much more rubber.

In addition, increased mileage also results from the R90's reduced revolutions, lower rolling drag and decreased tread wear.

Safer on rainy days

The R90 tread, being aggressive, pumps out water so fast that even in the monsoons the grip area is almost always dry.

Which explains R90's super-excellent traction in mud and rain.

Providing just one more reason why it may well be the best performance car tyre you've yet had the opportunity to buy.

R90 EXECUTIVE
Car Tyre

The new-generation tyre

OBM/259

Tyres

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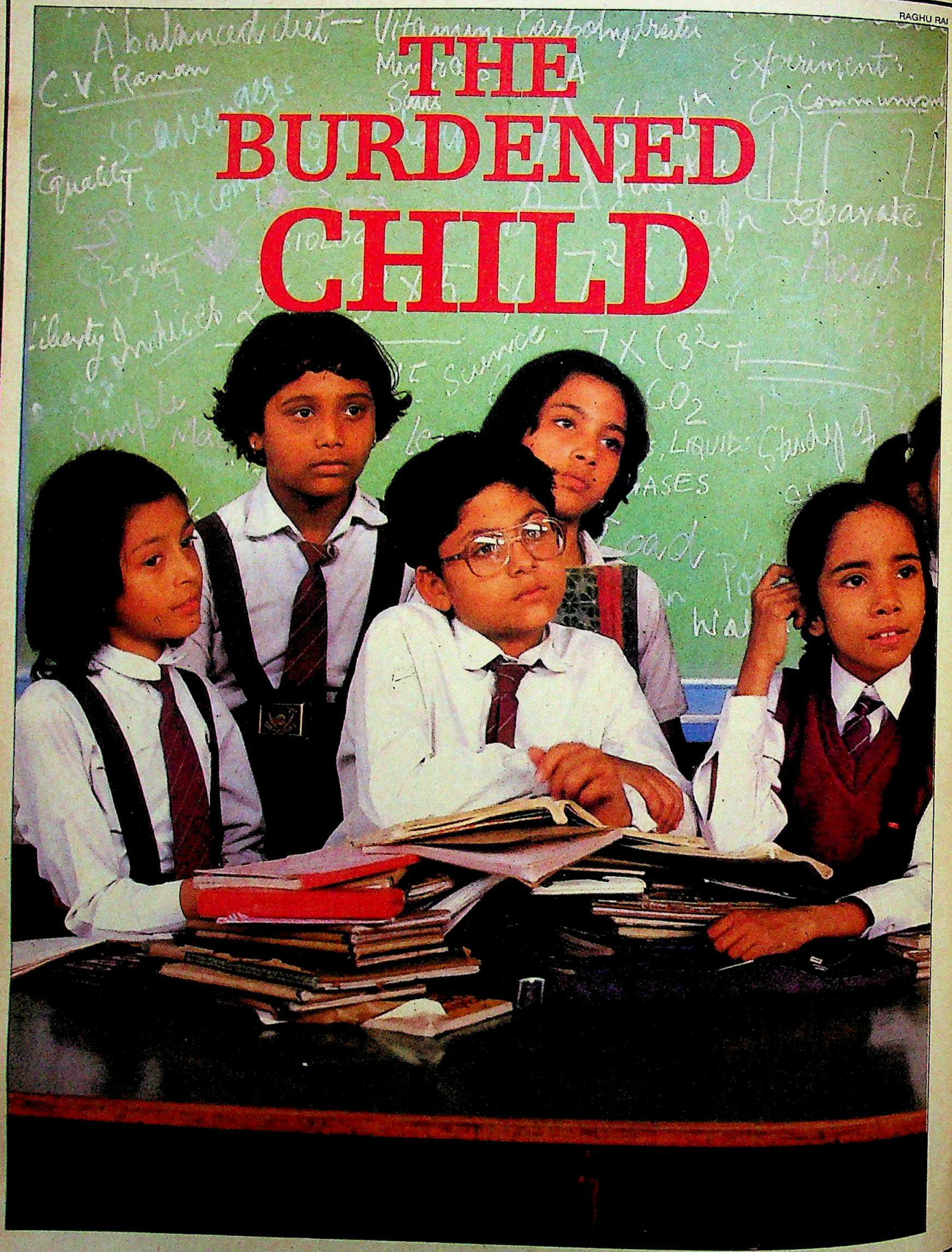
RAGHU RAI

THE BURDENED CHILD



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Where is the Mariana Trench?
Why do camels' humps sometimes collapse?
What instrument would you use for weighing small amounts?
What are the tiny vessels by which arteries and veins are joined?
Define the energy a body possesses by virtue of its motion?
Where is the international dateline?

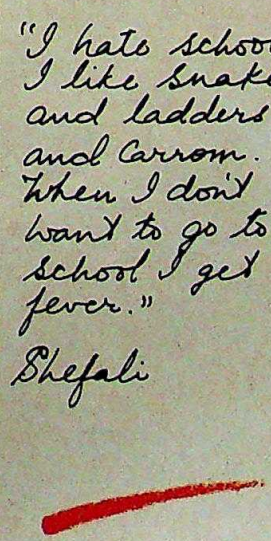
GIVE up? Chances are you've just flunked the science and general knowledge examination given to 10-year-olds for entrance to Class VI of the nation's leading public schools. If you are already in Class VI and can't define—after four months of study—terms such as Dyanspitar, barter system, pictographs, poverty, cooperative society, and local bodies, you've plugged the first semester. And in Class VII, in 'basic science', if you are unable to write an essay on: "How can you say that a force is an interaction between two or more bodies?", you're a loser. As far as ninth grade biology is concerned, you'd better know a whole lot about chromosomal patterns and the cellular structure of leukaemia if you want to make it to the next grade. In the tenth, be ready to bid farewell to childhood and plunge into a daily routine of 15 hours of study, if you want to get into a good engineering, commerce or medical college after two more years of board examinations.

And 80 per cent marks won't do. You can get 90 per cent after back-breaking diligence and still be counted a failure. While greater numbers seek admission to the better known colleges, the number of colleges has remained more or less constant. Competition is so cut-throat that marks often have to be in the 90s. Last year, for example, the cut-off point for admission to the Delhi Engineering College was 92 per cent. Admission is as difficult to the medical colleges and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), for whose 2,000 seats several lakhs had applied. Even at Delhi University's St Stephen's College, the cut-off percentage for economics honours was 85.

Millions upon millions of this country's children are today engaged in a rat race to the finish—a debilitating competition for college seats, and ultimately for the better paying jobs. Not surprisingly, this is taking its toll on the quality of life and mental well-being of families. The sacrifice of childhood at the altar of pedagogical rigours begins sometimes even before the age of three, in nursery school where children are given homework—numbers to learn, alphabets to decipher—and then subjected to tests. The child is already being prepared for what will form the parameters of a depressing existence until the age of 17—schoolwork, homework, tuitions, percentages, success and failure.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Shefali Singh, 7, (Class III), with grandfather



Somali Devgun, an English teacher in Dehra Dun's Cambrian Hall School, which has grown from 300 students to about 1,700 in the last 20 years, says: "As a teacher, I'm a part of the system, but as a mother, I'm appalled that my son Rohan, who is two-and-a-half and goes to nursery school, receives regular report cards. On the one hand, I don't like it at all, yet I feel he should do well." Meena Singh, a New Delhi businesswoman, whose seven-year-old daughter, Shefali, attends Delhi Public School, echoes her sentiments: "My heart just breaks when I see Shefali loaded with homework. The tragedy is that she has no childhood left." Adds Shefali's grandfather, A. Prakash, a retired IAS officer who tutors her every evening: "She just does not understand in class, and the teachers don't have the time to explain properly. So she learns by rote, by mugging without actual comprehension. What she has learned thoroughly is to hate school.

Meena says the little girl rebels, throws tantrums. And Meena admits that, like other mothers, she has been pushing the child. "But

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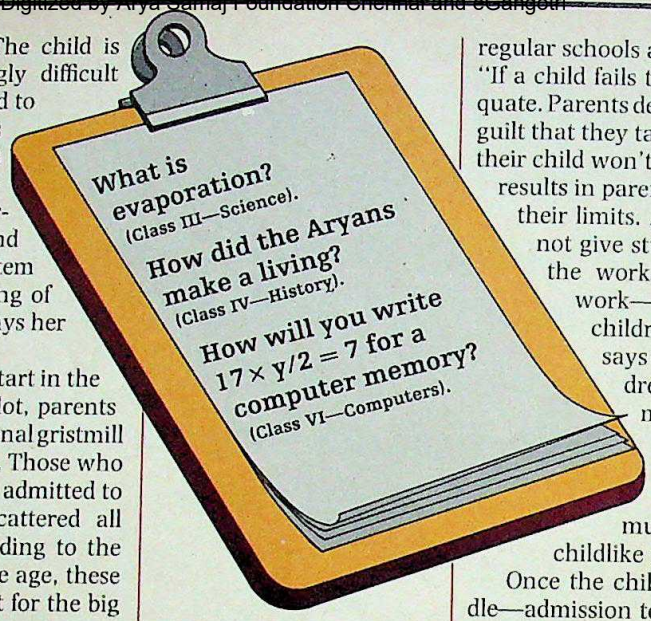
what can one do?" she asks. "The child is expected to complete a shockingly difficult syllabus before she can be admitted to primary school for which there is also an exam." During the first class entrance exam, Shefali failed to answer part of her spelling test correctly. She simply broke down and bawled. At the age of five, the system had already taught her the meaning of failure. "She felt like an outcast," says her mother.

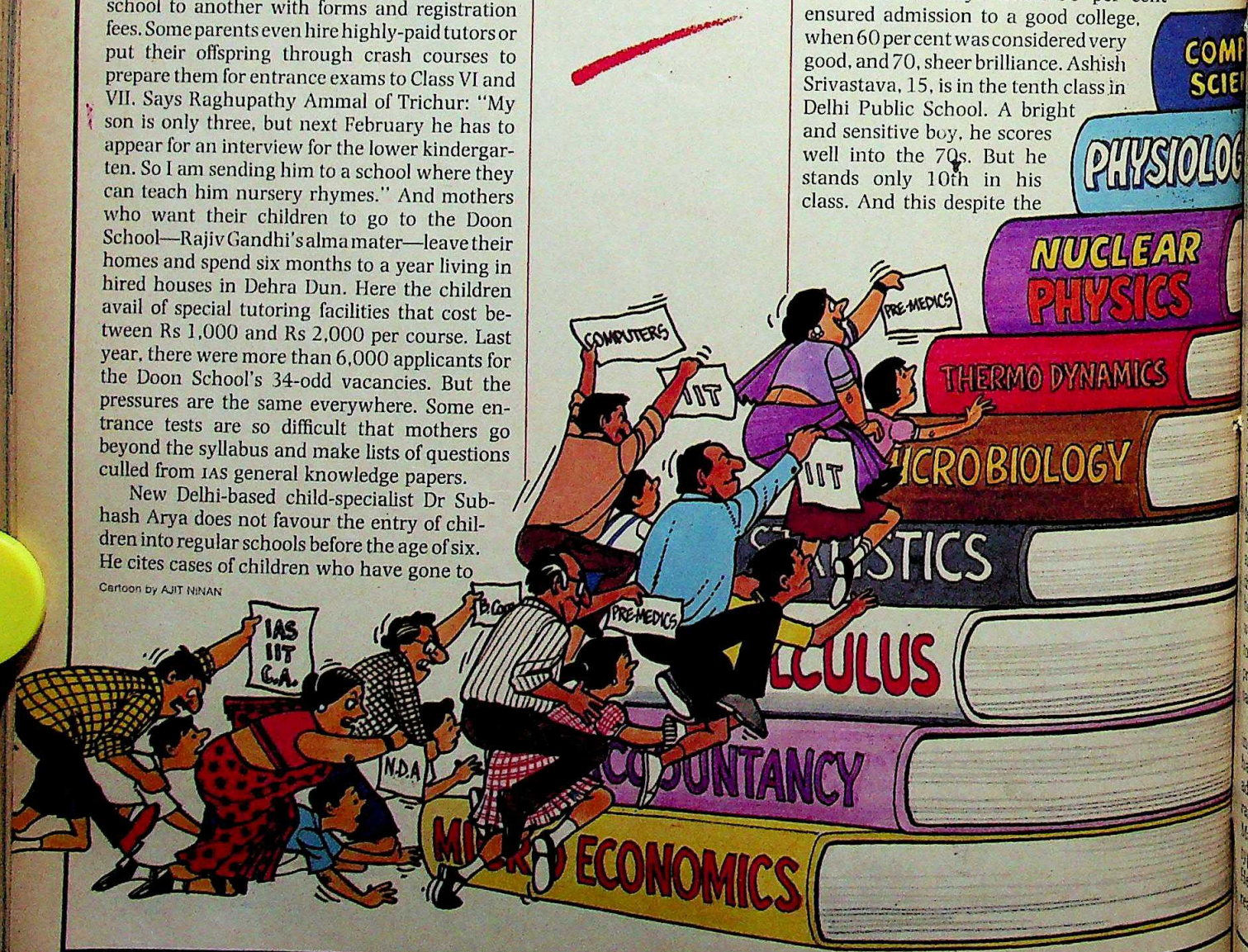
In order to give children a headstart in the rat race that will one day be their lot, parents begin pushing them into the educational gristmill when they are barely out of infancy. Those who can afford it try to get their children admitted to English medium public schools scattered all across the country. Because, according to the prevailing competitive wisdom of the age, these churn out the best and the brightest for the big name universities and colleges.

And admission time has become a nightmare for parents and children, as they trudge from one school to another with forms and registration fees. Some parents even hire highly-paid tutors or put their offspring through crash courses to prepare them for entrance exams to Class VI and VII. Says Raghupathy Ammal of Trichur: "My son is only three, but next February he has to appear for an interview for the lower kindergarten. So I am sending him to a school where they can teach him nursery rhymes." And mothers who want their children to go to the Doon School—Rajiv Gandhi's alma mater—leave their homes and spend six months to a year living in hired houses in Dehra Dun. Here the children avail of special tutoring facilities that cost between Rs 1,000 and Rs 2,000 per course. Last year, there were more than 6,000 applicants for the Doon School's 34-odd vacancies. But the pressures are the same everywhere. Some entrance tests are so difficult that mothers go beyond the syllabus and make lists of questions culled from IAS general knowledge papers.

New Delhi-based child-specialist Dr Subhash Arya does not favour the entry of children into regular schools before the age of six. He cites cases of children who have gone to regular schools at an older age and done better. "If a child fails to get admission he feels inadequate. Parents develop resentment and a sense of guilt that they take out on the kid. The fear that their child won't get admission in a good school results in parents pushing youngsters beyond their limits. And overcrowded schools cannot give students individual attention. So the work-load—in the form of homework—further burdens parents and children. It's a vicious circle." Dr Arya says that all these pressures on children have given rise to psychosomatic illnesses. "They arrive in my clinic with constipation, vomiting, fevers, even chest pains. They are under so much strain that there is nothing childlike about them."

Once the child has overcome the first hurdle—admission to a good school—the constant struggle to get high grades begins. Even students who score in the 70s are often judged failures. Gone are the days when 50 per cent ensured admission to a good college, when 60 per cent was considered very good, and 70, sheer brilliance. Ashish Srivastava, 15, is in the tenth class in Delhi Public School. A bright and sensitive boy, he scores well into the 70s. But he stands only 10th in his class. And this despite the





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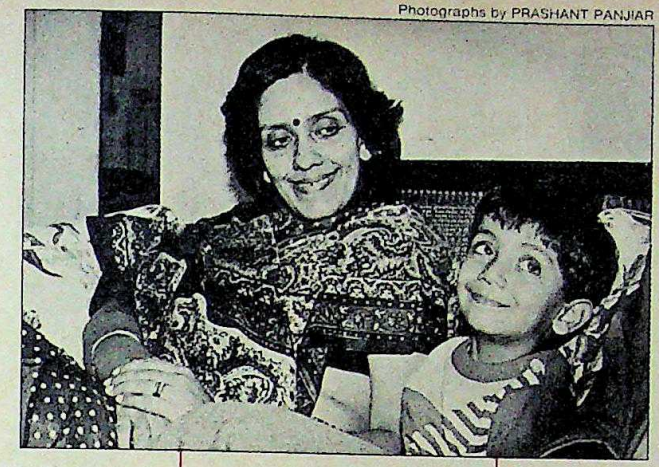

Rohan Devgun 2½ (nursery) with Somali

"As a mother I'm appalled to see that Rohan has already started getting report cards in Nursery schools."

Somali

"I don't know what childhood means. All I remember is mom teaching me the 14 times table."

Ashish

Ashish Srivastava, 15, (Class X) with mother

fact that he often studies till 2 a.m. "My next board exams are approaching," he says. "They are like an ominous presence. I live with the constant fear that if I don't do well, I won't get my subjects, and that after finishing school I'll end up as a clerk after so much slogging." If Ashish gets 90 per cent in his next board exam, he will be able to study subjects of his choice. "If I score in the high 60s, maybe I'll get commerce. If I score less, I may as well go jump in a well."

The students' burden is compounded by a shortage of good teachers. Because teaching competence is often low and teachers often don't understand the ever-changing syllabi, many like Ashish are "self-taught students". They augment school hours with correspondence courses and additional books. At any given time, Ashish is saddled with 25 books. Ironically, however, he cannot follow his own reading inclinations. Pointing to a hard-bound volume of Shakespeare's collected works, he says regretfully: "The book I most want to read, but have no time for, is this one." The overwhelming sense is of fierce competition which seems to be inspired not only by the quest for jobs but also by the lure of money. "I hate to admit it," says Ashish, "but I just want to get rich." As for childhood, Ashish remembers little of it. "What childhood?" he scoffs. "I don't know what that means. All I can remember is that even when mom would take me for a walk to the market, she would be reciting the 14-times table with me. And I guess I resented her for that."

Says his mother, Sulekha, who works for Air-India and lives in a modest south Delhi government flat: "Our whole life-style now seems defined by the school system. I have a college degree and I couldn't teach Ashish after Class VII. There is this constant feeling of inadequacy on the parents' part and children sit in judgement of you. I know I push him, as I'm doing this year. I keep telling him if he doesn't do well and enter IIT he's doomed. A mere B.A degree won't take him anywhere." Mothers like Sulekha even sacrifice their vacations in order to stay at home and support their children when they are studying. "I want to be near him so that he eats properly or doesn't fall sick," says Sulekha.

During their tender, growing-up years, children already have the worries and cares of adults. V. Selva Muthukumaran, 15, who attends Class X in Madras' Don Bosco school, is typical of the competitive child. He used to write, play games, read, take karate lessons. With three tuitions a day—his goal is IIT and then Caltech (California)—he says he's too tired to even strum on a guitar at night. "But," he says, "I don't feel deprived, because I know I'm doing it for my own good." He now stands fifth in class but feels that the competition is catching up, so he has to gear up further. Says Selva: "We have to face pressures and tensions in life. We can't get away from them." His definition of success: "When you go for something—and get it." What he wants most out of life: "A good job, a huge big house, a chauffeur-driven imported car." His role model : "Napoleon. He had bad aspects to him but I admire him for his drive and ambition."

And now, meet a 90-plus percenter. Sandeepan Gangopadhyaya, 17, who is doing his final boards in computer science and engineering from Delhi Public School. Compared with yesteryears' laid back school-days, his schedule is nightmarish. But for him, it's all in a day's work. Last month, while preparing for his exams, he'd come home from school at 2.30 p.m., have lunch, sleep till 5 or 6 p.m., talk to his parents for a while, then study till dinner, and after dinner, study all night long, right into the morning, then wash, and take a bus to school. Besides his boards in March, he is studying for the entrance exams of engineering colleges like Rourkela and IIT. "If I can't get in, its not the end of life. But it is the main thing, and all of us just fight (a word they use for competition) each other to the hilt," he says.

And even at this stage, fighting students who have been scoring in the 90s are plagued by insecurities. Their papers are checked by examiners of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) at random, all over the country. And a less-than-competent examiner, who may not understand a level of excellence higher than the norm, may give low marks to a 90-percenter. In other words, a student, say from Delhi, who has consistently scored over 90 per cent at school, might find himself receiving no more than 70 per cent in his final boards examined by a teacher in some other town. "It's a period of total uncertainty," says Sandeepan. "I've known some science students who have been 100 percenters in maths, opt for commerce in which 70 per cent will at least get them admission to a good college. They fear that some unknown examiner in a rural area who gets their paper may not give them the needed percentage to pursue a science career. This is usually a shattering experience."

And as the going gets

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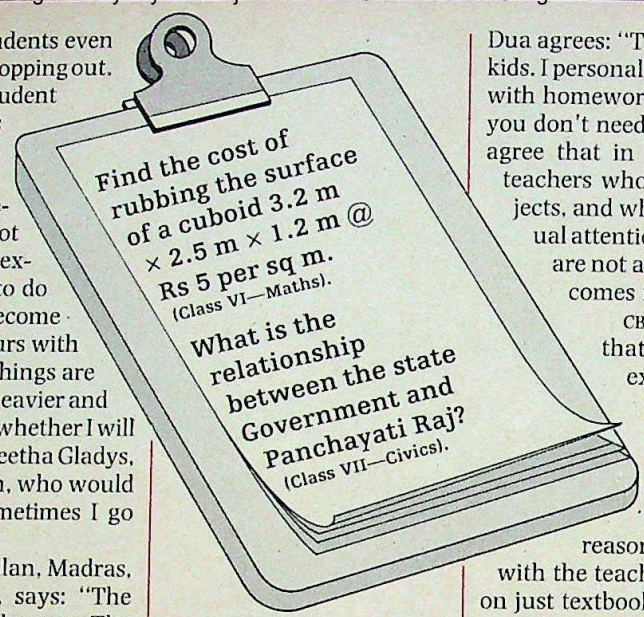
tougher, many above-average students even in junior school begin to think of dropping out. Vineeta Dwivedi, 12, a Class VII student in Lucknow's Cathedral School, is a meritorious student and a monitor in a class of 53 students. "Many of my teachers often give us homework on topics they have either not taken up in class or have hardly explained. They expect our parents to do the dirty work." Vineeta wants to become a doctor. Says she: "I spend 10 hours with my books every day. But the way things are going and the way school bags get heavier and heavier each day, I wonder at times whether I will be able to cope with the burden." Preetha Gladys, 14, of St Teresa's Convent in Cochin, who would rather be painting, exclaims: "Sometimes I go mad just studying and studying!"

Mini Krishnan, editor of MacMillan, Madras, dealing with children's textbooks, says: "The bane of the educational system is the CBSE. The men and women of the CBSE may be great educationists, but they have no clue to a child's capacity." Strangely, most teachers seem to agree. Admits Chinnakutty Skaria, school headmistress in Kerala: "The syllabus is too much. Children are really taxed." With the standard of education being upgraded and the CBSE taking the lead in this matter, the child has now become the target of bombardment by a non-ending barrage of facts, figures and information.

Josephine Austin, principal of St Teresa's Convent says: "I feel that the ideal load for a child was crossed sometime in the '70s." In New Delhi's Modern School, maths teacher Raminder Dua agrees: "This is too much pressure for small kids. I personally do not believe in stuffing people with homework. I think if the teaching is good, you don't need a tutor or parents to help you. I agree that in many of the schools there are teachers who can't cope with advanced subjects, and who can't find any time for individual attention as classes are so huge. But they are not always at fault. The pressure often comes from parents."



CBSE Director H.S. Singha believes that due to the massive information explosion during the last decade, new concepts and knowledge have to be worked into the system. "Naturally it is more complex than before," he says. "But we think the syllabus is reasonable. Some of the fault may lie with the teachers because they rely too much on just textbooks. The syllabus calls for a more rounded-out education."

But the question is not only of too much work. The methodology adopted to teach children is even worse. Says Reverend V.V. Abraham, principal of Don Bosco: "We are only testing children on what they can remember and not on knowledge. Education has become marks-oriented, not knowledge-oriented." The curriculum, agrees Dr P.L. Malhotra, director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), lays emphasis on memory rather than on the development of the intellect. "The system is not necessarily turning out better and well-rounded students, but it is turning out successful students," he says. And because of the emphasis on facts rather than concepts, life in schools, as most children complain, is just mug, mug, mug.

Exams, once an annual feature, have now increased alarmingly from term exams to monthly, weekly, and now daily tests. As Dr Arya says: "A child's sense of his worth seems a numbers' game now, and his worth is judged in terms of exams." Dr Malhotra observes that excessive exams are not prescribed by the NCERT and that they have in fact recommended no more than six hours study a day, and 220 days of work for students. Says Dr Malhotra: "We've suggested that there should be no more than two subjects for Class I and II. But, they often carry around about six books on six subjects."

Intense competition is one reason children are scoring higher these days. With computers and technology becoming the new religion, maths and science have become the all-important rituals in school. More and more students

Loaded with books, children await transportation

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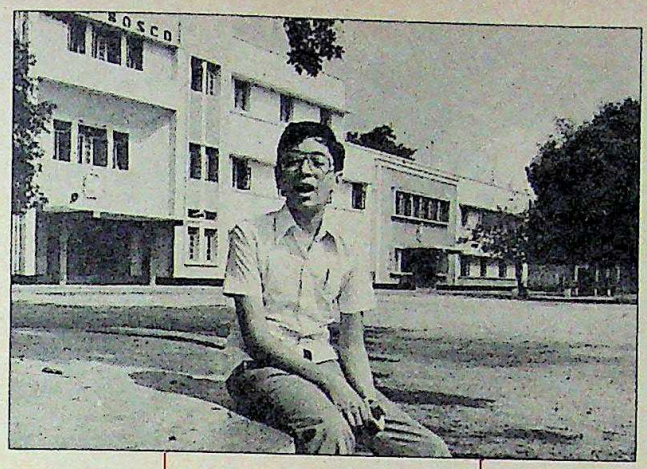


V. Selva Muthu Kumaran, 15, (Class X)

"Life is full of tension. I am aiming for a good job and a Chauffeur driven imported car."

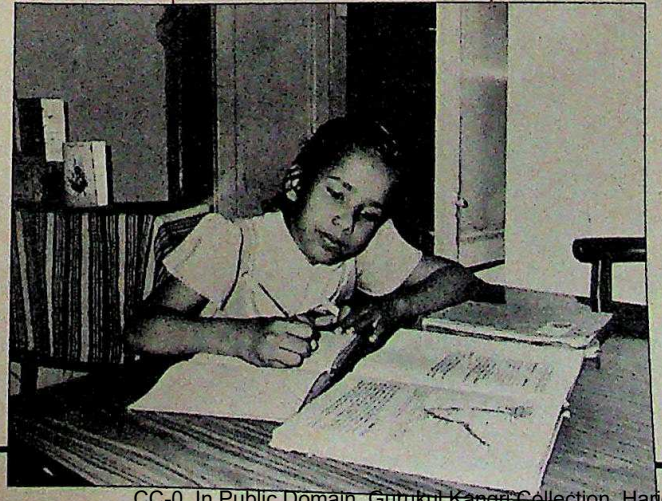
Muthukumaran

"I want to be a doctor. I study 10 hours each day. I wonder how long I can cope."

Vineelā

Vineeta Dwivedi, 12, (Class VIII)

PRADEEP SHAH



...ntitate towards these subjects. ...d as it is possible to score ...gher in them, students receive ...gher percentages. The system ...f marking has also changed ...mewhat. Earlier, if the answer ...was wrong, the mark was a zero. ...today, a student may receive ...most full marks if his approach ...d methodology are correct, ...ever mind the answer. Even ...ough psychologists opine that ...t all children have an aptitude ...r maths, tenth standard-level ...ildren are loaded with ...gonometry, calculus and an-...lytical geometry. In several schools, 13 year-...ds are saddled with linear programming, statis-...s and coordinate geometry of a calibre that ...achers supposed to be teaching them never ...en learnt in college.

Also, with the exaggerated importance given ...science and maths, other subjects like litera-...re, grammar, short stories, and poetry that ...re pleasurable to learn, are downgraded. Says ...cMillan's Krishnan: "The subtleties of lan-...age are escaping this generation. As a result, ...cking is coarse, degraded to jargon." And ...cause insufficient attention is being paid to the ...s at the school level, says K.V. Thomas, a ...rala school vice-principal: "Maths is raising a ...neration of robots, unexposed to the richness of ...man emotions and feats captured so wonder-...ly in literature and history".

The sociological bias which has changed the ...e of education is reflected in the way children ...e brainwashed from childhood that computer ...ence, engineering, and medicine are the only ...rthwhile professions. These professions have ...w become status symbols, are lucrative, en-...re secure futures, and raise a boy's dowry value ...the marriage-market, while lowering the ...wry to be given for a girl.

But the competition for and in these subjects ...s not precipitated a corresponding increase in ...e number of junior schools, universities and ...leges. And this is the primary cause for the ...ademic pressure-cooker existence of today. It is ...ically a question of supply and demand—the ...d scrambling for that extra ...rk to give a child a compet-...e edge in a good college.

When the 10-plus-2 system ...s adopted in the mid-1970s, ...e idea was to let all children ...dy till the age of 16 in school, ...o the tenth grade. The two ...ra years were to be a bridge ...tween school and college dur-..., which selected students ...uld be tutored for higher ...rning instead of plunging into ...versities at age 16. It was ...ed that after the tenth standard, some students would go into jobs while others would divert to vocational education and polytechnics, and the remaining would prepare for college. But it didn't happen that way. The jobs were scarcely available, and vocational training proved a miserable failure. So most students simply joined Class XI, and began competing fiercely for college admissions. And even though all schools were not supposed to go upto Class XII, just about all secondary schools added the plus-2 level, thus increasing competition. In most western countries, a sizeable number of high school students go straight to vocational schools, and college is only for the competent elite. But in degree-obsessed India, everybody wants to go to college because a B.A or B.Sc degree is a status symbol, and often a passport to a job.

Between 1980 and 1985, enrolment at the primary, middle and higher secondary levels grew from about 77 million students to 110 million. Meanwhile, institutions grew from a total of 653,000 to about 700,000, with the bulk of the increase coming at the primary school level. And while university enrolment in this period grew from 2.7 million to 3.4 million, the number of universities only grew by 12—from 123 to 135. While nearly 85 million children are enrolled in primary schools—with a high drop-out rate—16.8 million are in higher secondary schools from where they try to enter the universities and the 1,500 professional colleges which can accommodate about 3 million students.

As Dr Malhotra puts it, the major competition is in the roughly 1,200 public schools and 600-odd Central Schools of the cities from where students aspire to the cream of the higher learning institutions. "But the most serious problem," he notes, "is that the bulk of our schools have no load at all—there are no textbooks, blackboards, or even teachers. In fact, 40 per cent of our primary schools are single-teacher schools." Bihar, for example, is a virtual graveyard of education. Even though 92 per cent of the state's children are enrolled at the primary and secondary levels, the drop-out rate is excessively high. Ninety per cent of them cannot even fill out application forms for secondary schools. And the child who goes to a government school—already disadvantaged due to competition from elite English medium public schools—faces an altogether different kind of burden. He goes to school with expectations of a better life, but gets nothing in return.

Ravi Shanker, 12, is the son

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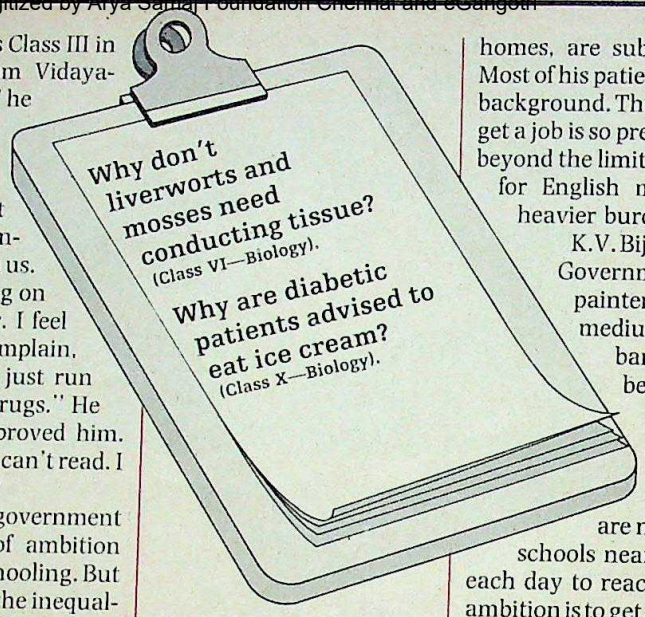
of a Delhi house-maid, and attends Class III in the government-run Nagar Nigam Vidayalaya, Andrewsganj. "By studying," he says, "I can get into the military, or sit in an office, in a chair." His subjects are supposed to be Sanskrit, Hindi, science, and maths. But he laments: "After all, this is a government school, so teachers don't teach us. They just come and write something on the blackboard and then disappear. I feel angry, I burn up inside. But if we complain, they thrash us. So many children just run away from school or even take to drugs." He does not believe schooling has improved him. Says he: "I can't even write a letter. I can't read. I can only copy from a black-board."

Children in municipal and government schools may have a deep sense of ambition awakened within them because of schooling. But they often have to suppress it due to the inequalities of the real world. Daya Ram, 17, is from a Scheduled Caste family and studies in Class X in a government higher secondary school in Lucknow. His late father was a peon in government service. Daya Ram will be appearing for his boards with commerce as his subject, but his only aspiration is to land a job—any job. "I will keep studying," he says. "But as soon as I can get even a peon's job, I will quit studies. I know that a student from my type of background is never fit for any good service or competition. And I don't have money to afford extra tuition."

According to Bangalore-based psychiatrist Ajit Bhide, children studying in vernacular schools, often from economically backward homes, are subjected to maximum pressures. Most of his patients are from this socio-economic background. The need to pass an exam in order to get a job is so pressing that they are often pushed beyond the limits of endurance. And the craving for English medium schools imposes even heavier burdens on them.



K.V. Biju, 14, is in Class X, in Ernakulam Government School. His father is a painter. He switched to this English medium school, though he can still barely communicate in English, because "it will stand me in good stead. I will be able to communicate with big people like the chief justice. Society will respect me more." But, as there are no English medium government schools near his home, Biju travels 22 km each day to reach the school he is now in. His ambition is to get any good job he can land. Asked how he feels when he sees richer teenagers indulging in chocolates and ice-creams, he responds: "There is no point envying other children. It won't improve my condition."

And then there is the materialistic world of consumerism to contend with. Children from modest backgrounds have an especially difficult time trying to withstand peer pressure. Says Laura Sambadam of Madras: "My sons want fancy things just because their friends have them. If they don't get them, they sulk and throw tantrums." Unlike yesteryears, rich children take fancy gadgets like electronic pencil-boxes and musical water bottles to school, and wear Puma and Addidas shoes and jeans, to the envy of their schoolmates. Unable to afford any of these expensive items, or match their friends in pocket expenses, children develop complexes and cause tension at home.

Most parents blame TV commercials and slick magazines for the financial pressures exerted by children. They don't want water, they want Limca. They don't want home-made sweets, they want Cadbury's milk chocolate. Birthday parties are another source of parental headaches. No longer can the children be dismissed with a bag of toffees—bars of chocolates must be distributed to friends in class, with a cake thrown in for the class teacher. And birthday celebrations at home include cartoons on video and return gifts to every guest at the party.

This is not all. In many schools, particularly in the cosmopolitan cities of the north and the south, boys and girls at 12 and 13 are subjected to sexual pressures from their peers. Says a 15-year-old boy from Bangalore: "My classmates bring girlie

Last minute cramming before a science test

SHYAM TEKWANI

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pictures and brag about masturbation. I hate to be a part of this tradition. I am ridiculed as a mama's boy and a sissy." Schoolmates admire a boy who has "made it" with a girl, while a girl often rises in her friends' esteem if she has a steady boy-friend. Says Shivani Singh, 13, of Tagore International School in New Delhi: "When I was in Modern School, a couple of years ago, you just had to have boy-friends or the girls would call you a *behanji* or a creature from the Medieval Age. We were never comfortable going with boys at that age. We knew inside that it was wrong, but it was difficult to take all the teasing. It is so much better now to be able to play sports and look upon my friends as fellow-children, rather than as boys and girls."

Because of the pressures of the school system, urbanisation and the spread of the consumer culture, psychologists report that neurotic disorders among children are on the increase. Experts say that the increase in the number of people, especially children, seeking professional help from psychologists, has increased by more than 100 per cent in mofussil towns in the last decade. In Madras, they have increased 30 per cent and in a fast-growing city like Bangalore, by a whopping 50 per cent. The most common symptoms displayed by these child neurotics is depression, withdrawal, mournfulness, avoiding school, and anxiety. The anxieties often manifest themselves as renewed bed-wetting, stammering, nervous tics, trembling. Sometimes, as the pressures mount, the child gives up or becomes the victim of negative motivation—doing badly deliberately to get even with parents, or taking to drugs.

And doctors report an increasing number of suicide attempts among children. Recently, a boy from a leading school in Madras began to drink ink from his fountain pen when he failed in his maths paper. While no scientific studies have so far quantified the increase in attempted suicide, most doctors agree that their numbers are on the rise and that in most cases they are due to academic and related pressures. As one doctor put it: "Children not proficient in maths and the sciences feel discouraged and fall in their own esteem. But they don't realise that entering IIT or a good medical college is not the end of all problems." Many ignore the fact that there is at least one suicide in the IITs and top medical colleges every year for the sole reason that the student who stood first all his life, now competing with the best, comes at the bottom of the ladder.

And parents, not just TV commercials, are to partly blame for the materialistic pressures on children. In the old days, parents bribed their offspring to do well by promising to take them to the circus. But now such a treat requires too much time and effort on the parents' part. So, depending on age, the child is promised a BSA Champ, a remote-controlled car or a music system. And with so much work and mental fatigue, children prefer to watch television—that requires the least amount of work—rather than read a book. Says Mini Krishnan: "We are raising a generation of zombies, a generation of semi-literates."

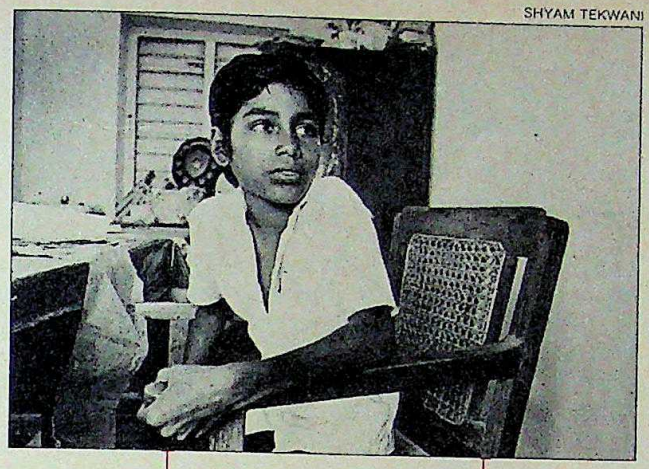
Experts who have studied the problem are united in their opinion that as children don't have the time to develop hobbies because of schoolwork pressures, they do not have a safety valve to let off steam. As Dr Bhide notes: "The child has less capacity to tolerate frustrations and setbacks, and so reacts radically to situations. A seven-year-old Bangalore boy from an upper class home recently attempted to commit suicide because his parents could not take him to an entertainment show.

Some parents try to fight the pressure and instead they encourage their children to go to alternative or free schools where the emphasis is not merely on exams but on overall intellectual and personality development—schools like Rishi Valley, Aditi, Aurobindo's school in Bangalore, and J. Krishnamurthy's school in Madras. But even from some of these schools, though the pressures are far less, the drop-out rate is high because parents pull out their children. "Let's face it," said a Madras housewife, who removed her son from one such school: "All this idealism is fine, but ultimately the fact is that my son has to enter the rat race."

Pending major systemic changes all around, it seems imperative that parents should first make a determined effort to improve the quality of communication in their homes; encourage and appreciate their children; and think seriously about campaigning for a new holistic approach to education. But the reality is that most children realise darkly that they must trudge on—trapped in the rut of competition that deepens as they grow older. Heads hung low, they walk on, their shoulders weighed down by a ton of books, their childhood oppressed by their parents' anxieties, and insecurities of the future. There seems no escape from this burden: like Atlas, the children cannot shrug.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with ANITA PRATAP and bureau reports

SHYAM TEKWANI



K.V. Biju, 14, (Class IX)

"Taking English will help me to communicate with big people and earn respect."

Biju

"In some schools there is pressure to have boyfriends. If you don't you're branded backward."

Shivani

Shivani Singh, 14, (Class IX)

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

Fishing for Trouble

A maritime dispute involves innocent fishermen

THE waters off the Kachchh-Karachi coast have never been an area of conflict except, briefly, during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. But the two countries have now found something here to fight over—fish. With both sides laying claim to it, this bountiful fishing ground has in recent months come to resemble the Spanish Main. Churning up the waters in search of intruding fishermen, Indian Coast Guard cutters have, in a year, impounded more than 40 Pakistani trawlers and detained nearly 500 crewmen. In retaliation, Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency (MSA) has towed 17 Indian fishing boats to Karachi and imprisoned 133 fishermen so far this year.

This "fishing war"—as it has been labelled by the Pakistani press—was identified as a potential flash-point when the Indian and Pakistani armies faced each other in an eyeball-to-eyeball stand-off this February. In an internal noting made at that time, a Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official admitted that "there was also a real possibility of a clash between the two coast guards". With renewed tension following the armed clash at Siachen, decision makers in India and Pakistan are keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that the fishing war will remain just that.

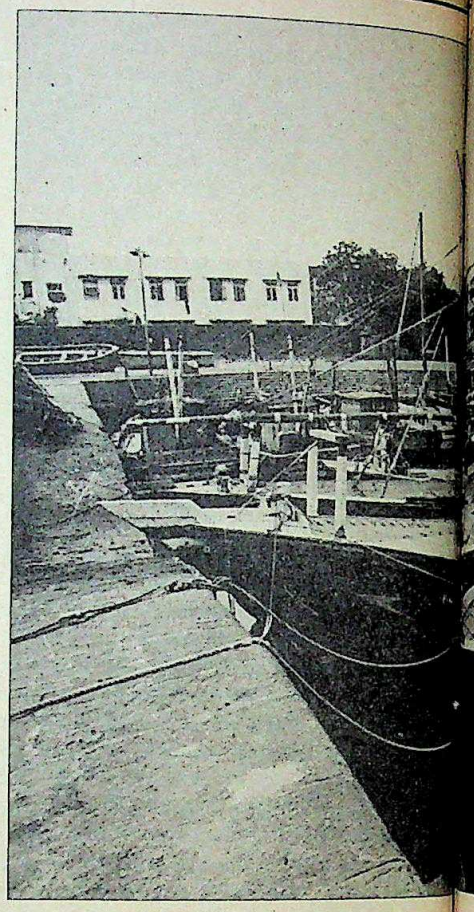
The trouble stems from an undelineated maritime boundary. In Kachchh, the international boundary is formed by the Sir creek which meanders between mudbanks before discharging its waters into the Gulf of Kachchh. Pakistan says the boundary lies along the southern bank of the creek while India claims that it lies mid-stream.

The mid-stream point would be easy to decide but for the presence of a small island at the river mouth. Pakistan argues that the main stream flows between the island and the southern bank while India feels the mid-point lies between the island and the northern bank. At the river mouth, the difference between the two claimed lines is only a few hundred yards but when the boundary line is extended into the exclusive economic zone, it creates a disputed area measuring several hundred square kilometres.

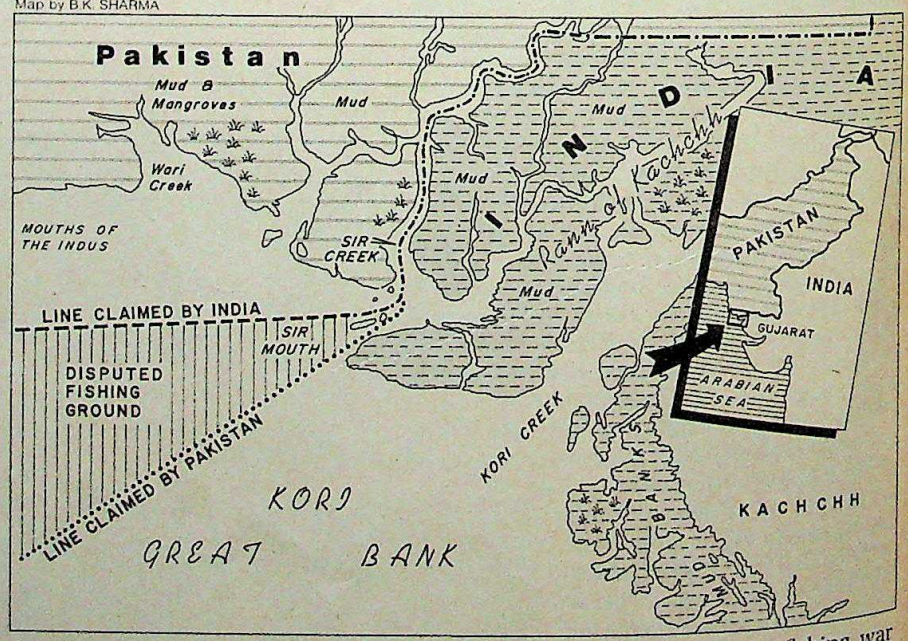
Meeting in Kathmandu in early November during the SAARC summit, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his Pakistani counterpart decided to order the surveyor generals of the two countries to meet and demarcate the Sir creek boundary. The presence of fish in abundance is what gives the two sides reason to contest the issue. "The fishing grounds to the south of the disputed boundary line are richer in fish and prawns than the north," explains an officer of the Indian Coast Guard which patrols the area. Having overfished in their coastal waters, Pakistani trawlers are now forced to venture further out in search of a good catch. As Gujarati and Kachchh fishermen did not traditionally fish in these distant waters, Pakistani trawlers went unchallenged.

This changed after October 1986, when the coast guard launched operation Khabardar. It aimed to prevent poaching and infiltration by smugglers and subversive elements who had been driven to the sea route by the tightened vigilance along the Indo-Pakistani land border.

Predictably, the arrest of fishermen raised an outcry in Pakistan. *The Nation*, based in Karachi, called it an "unofficial declaration of war by India on our fishing vessels". The MSA, set up this January, launched retaliatory raids and captures.



Map by B.K. SHARMA



There was a lull in the fishing war during the monsoons. Now fishing—and poaching—has resumed, at a time when Indo-Pakistan relations are in a frosty state following the Siachen clash. Last month, Pakistan impounded 10 Indian boats and arrested 34 fishermen near Jakhau, on the Kachchh coast.

But it's not fish alone that is at stake.

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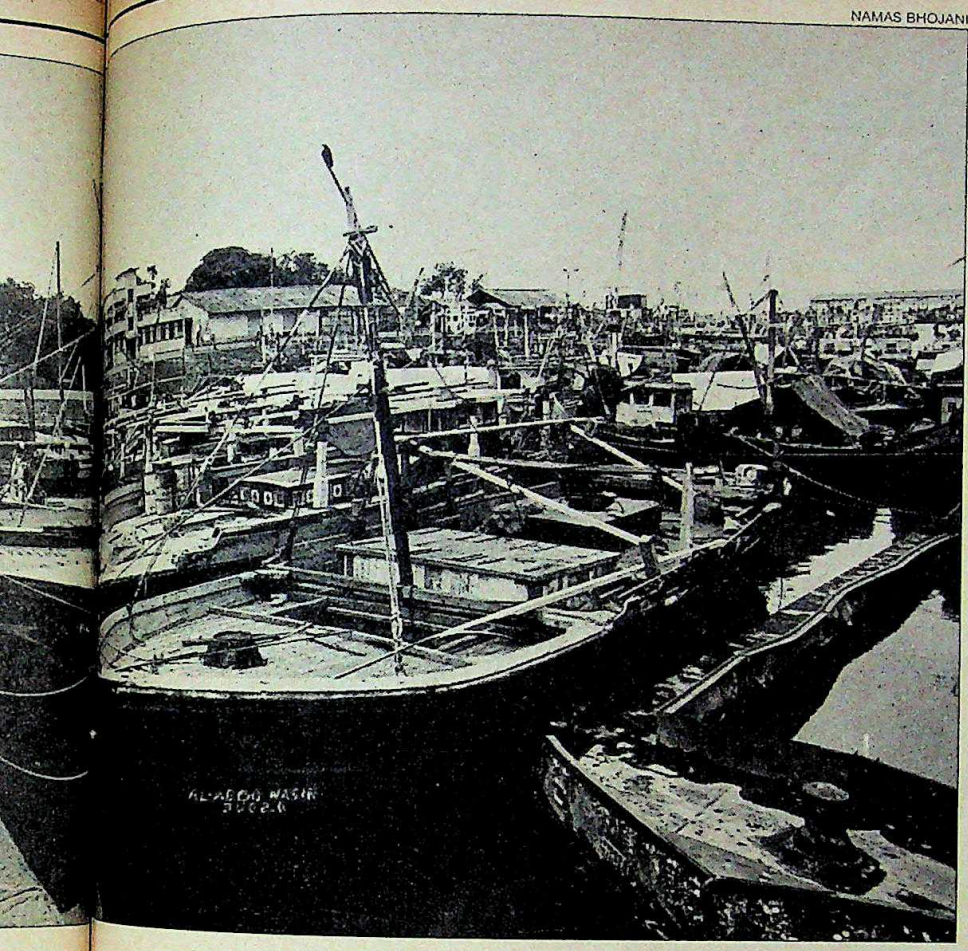
NAMAS BHOJANI



Impounded Pakistani trawlers: contentious issue

Pakistan scented much more, for instance, when the Oil and Natural Gas Commission stationed an off-shore drilling rig in the disputed area in the winter of 1983-84. Their air force planes often flew over the rig to check what the Indians were up to. "We don't know how much oil will be found there," says an Indian official, but the prospect of reserves under the sea bed has heightened the proprietary clamour of both sides. To make matters worse, a large trawler, *Zaigham 4*, owned by the Pir of Pagaro, was among the ships apprehended by the coast guard last year. A wealthy and influential Pakistani leader, Pagaro is the guru of Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo and founder of the Pakistan Muslim League.

Intense pressure was applied on the Indian Government to release his trawler. Pakistan's Minister of State for External Affairs Zain Noorani, spoke to S.K. Singh, Indian ambassador in Islamabad. In December 1986, the MEA suggested that *Zaigham 4*, nine other Pakistani boats and 138 crewmen be exchanged for Indian trawlers and crew. But the Defence Ministry called off the swap, probably due to the suspicion that some of the Pakistanis arrested are not fishermen at all. Said a coast guard official: "While a majority of the fishermen caught are thin and small-built, some, who are extremely well-built, and well-trained, stand out. They could be Pakistani navy men in civilian disguise." Curiously, many of the trawlers intercepted had 13 to 16 crewmen instead of the normal eight or nine. "We suspect the plan was to infiltrate these extra crewmen into India," said the official.

IF true, this probably explains why the captains of Pakistani trawlers twice tried to desperately evade capture and even rammed coast guard ships. One trawler sank and a crew member of the other was killed. On facing resistance, the coast guard had to fire warning shots from helicopters, leading to the charge in the Pakistani press that helicopter gunships were being used against fishermen.

If the territorial dispute is gradually being politicised, it is due to its human dimension. The suffering and uncertainty faced by the families of those arrested—in both countries—has led to angry accusations that poor fishermen have become pawns in an international power play. It was this pressure that forced Pakistan to seek a meeting with India to discuss the issue.

The two countries' delegates met this April in New Delhi. But, even minor disputes between suspicious neighbours take on an intractability that defies an easy solution. The meeting on the fishing war too achieved little, though each country did allow the other's consular officials to visit the imprisoned fishermen.

The Pakistani delegation leader, K.A. Sayed, joint secretary in Pakistan's Department of the Interior, said that the problem arose because fishermen, lacking adequate navigational aids, "strayed" into the other's territory. But the Indian team leader, Joint Secretary Arun Kumar of the Home Ministry, argued that while Indian boats impounded by the MSA had been within India's exclusive economic zone, some Pakistani trawlers had been captured near the Indian coastline, inside the 12-mile territorial limit. (While the exclusive economic zone, to tap resources, is claimed by India to be 380 km—or 200 nautical miles—wide, its right over its territorial waters is absolute).

Meanwhile, the confrontation on the high seas continues: surveillance aircraft of the coast guard and the MSA hover around the disputed area, directing their ships to swoop down on unsuspecting fishing craft. India has, in fact, delineated its sea borders with most of its neighbours except the two most sensitive—Pakistan and Bangladesh.

While some groups of Pakistani fishermen have returned home after serving prison terms imposed on them by the civil courts in Gujarat, more keep taking their place. To reap the rich prawn harvest, many appear willing to run the risks involved, which explains why they often end up filling jails in Gujarat port towns.

A coast guard official in Bombay gleefully calculates that trawlers—of all countries—apprehended last year are worth Rs 110 crore, equivalent to the coast guard's annual budget. It was under the leadership of Vice-Admiral I.J.S. Khurana that the coast guard was blooded, and achieved its most significant successes, especially against poachers, smugglers and other infiltrators.

Meanwhile, the decision to delineate the maritime boundary appeared to heed the call of reason voiced, among others, by *The Muslim* of Pakistan: "Unlike on land, there is no clear no-man's area.... The two countries are therefore well advised to enter into urgent negotiations.... to prevent this unnecessary fishing war from escalating explosively."

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Bombay

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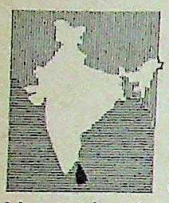
SRI LANKA

A Battle of Wits

Jayewardene buys time but accord is still vulnerable



NEW Delhi's entanglement in the Sri Lankan situation is starting to drag it ever deeper into the shifting sea of quicksand that the island's ethnic crisis now resembles. By last fortnight, with the violent opposition to the accord in Sri Lanka acquiring frightening dimensions, South Block was finding itself uncomfortably wedged between a rock and a very hard place. In the inflamed northern part of the country, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was making major advances but the Tigers are far from cornered—the daily body count is a sobering reminder that the battle will continue to be a bloody one.

In the south, the situation is even more explosive. The bomb blast that ripped through a crowded market in a Colombo suburb on the day the Sri Lankan Parliament met to debate the accord bill, took innocent lives and injured many more. But the real victim could be the accord itself, now under siege from all sides. The resignation of Gamini Jayasuriya, a senior cabinet minister, in the midst of the parliamentary debate was not all that surprising—he was a "conscientious critic" of the accord. But the timing is crucial.

The bomb outrage which killed 31 persons—Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, women and schoolchildren—and injured 130 more, was symbolic of the threat. Two days before the bombing, the full bench of the Supreme Court had ruled five to four that the provincial councils bill and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution did not violate the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka, except for two sections. The sections deal with the repeal of the Provincial Councils Act. One of the judges, Parinda Ranasingha, held that if this section was not withdrawn or suitably amended, the proposed amendment would have to be put to a national referendum.

Significantly, four judges ruled that the whole enactment was inconsistent with the Constitution and required a referendum. Their ruling cheered the opponents of the draft laws—led by former prime minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, two smaller opposition parties and a great many Buddhist organisations which filed petitions in court arguing that the devolution of powers proposed in the provincial councils bill violated the fundamental principles of a unitary constitution.

Since these were the first legislative steps taken by Jayewardene to fulfil his political obligations under the accord, a single decision the other way would have placed the President in a quandary and jeopardised the accord itself, with incalculable consequences.

Jayewardene, who has been staking his life and the survival of his regime on the accord, had one more crucial hurdle to cross. The ruling United National Party (UNP) could count on 140 votes in the House when only 113 were required to pass the bill. But the question of whether the UNP MPs would vote for the bill in the required numbers was in doubt.

The previous week, almost all UNP MPs received a "final warning" from the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV). If they did not absent themselves, abstain or vote against measures that were "a treacherous sell-out to Tamil separatists and Indian expansionists," they would forfeit their lives and those of their family members.

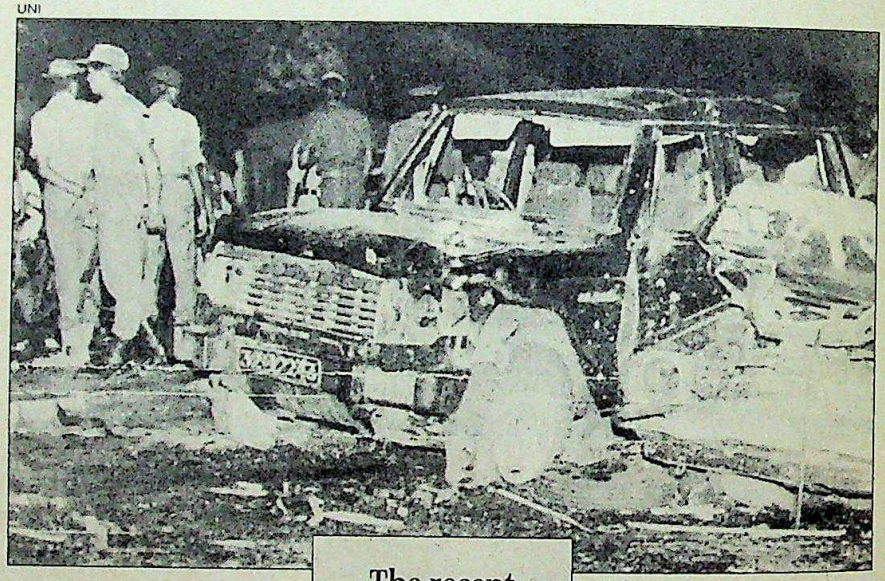
Sri Lankan Police say the DJV is a front of the banned Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP). Since the accord, 51 UNP activists have been killed. The Government's response was to create a party militia. Apart from being provided with armed guards, MPs from out-of-town constituencies were billeted at the Lanka Oberoi and driven to Parliament House in an armed convoy. But despite the threat, they demonstrated their loyalty to the President by backing the bill with an overwhelming majority. "We have sailed with him for 10 years, and we could not desert him now," said one.

But still, the backdrop to the parliamentary drama was bloody. Apart from the bomb outrage, JVP sympathisers staged strikes on campuses, burnt state buses, tried to derail trains and threw three southern towns into darkness by sabotaging power lines. Jayewardene, with his divisions inside the House (140 out of 168 seats) and his armoured columns outside, may have won the Parliament battle. But nobody is under any illusion that his battle to push through the accord will not be a protracted and painful one.

There was some consolation that, in the Jaffna Peninsula, the fortunes of war appear to have finally swung the IPKF way. Having learnt some hard lessons in the initial stages of their war against the

The scene of the Colombo blast

UNI



The recent bomb outrage in Colombo is symbolic of the threat that the accord is facing.

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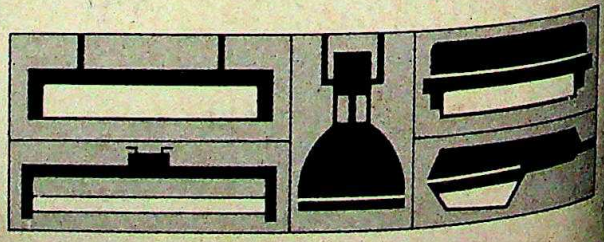

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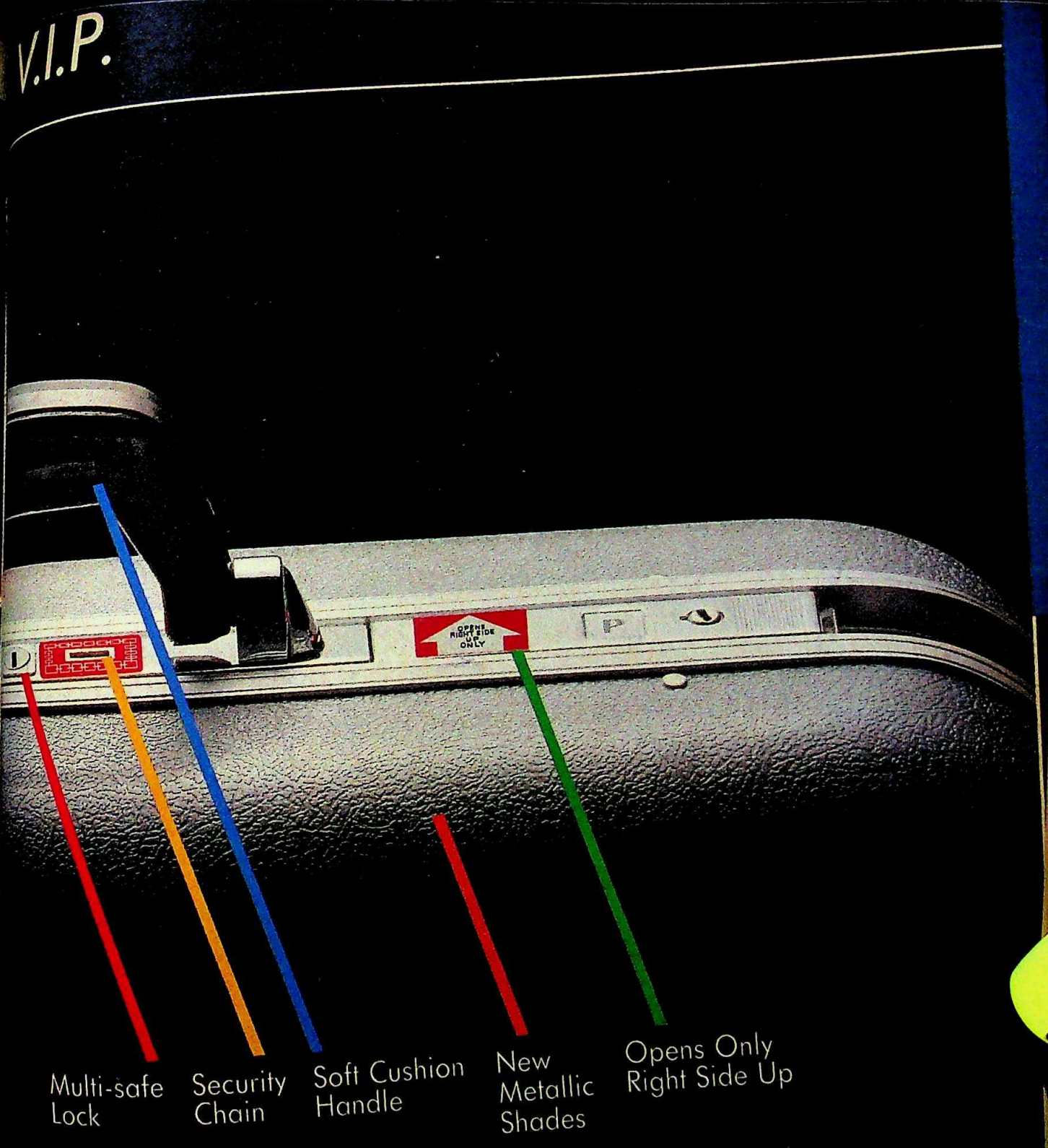

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Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE), the IPKF seems to have mastered its new and unfamiliar operational role. After taking Jaffna, the main Tiger stronghold, the Indian Army's strategy was clear—to push the Tigers out of the congested urban areas into the countryside, where the advantages will be more even. The Tigers know the terrain, but the Indian Army has experience of guerrilla warfare in thinly-populated areas, as in their operations against the rebels in North-East India.

That strategy also had another objective—to put the greatest pressure, militarily and psychologically—on the hardcore leadership, mainly Vellupillai Pirabhakaran, the Tiger leader. Pirabhakaran is rumoured to have been badly wounded in the leg during the IPKF attack on Chavakacheri, and his men have been slowly retreating in the face of the IPKF advance. The Tigers are now breaking up into smaller groups and have re-adopted the hit-and-run tactics they used against the Sri Lankan Army. "Without a regular chain of command, we are confident that they will get more disorganised and scattered. Once the cadre is isolated from the leadership, our main military objective will be accomplished," says an IPKF source.

But so far, the IPKF's main success has been psychological. After securing Jaffna, the IPKF quickly fanned out into the Vadamarachi area, another LTTE stronghold and more important, Pirabhakharan's home ground. By wresting control last fortnight of Velvettithurai, the Tiger leader's hometown, the IPKF has struck a major blow. The operational thrust resembles the classic tiger hunt, an ever-narrowing circle of beaters attempting to drive the prey into the waiting nets.

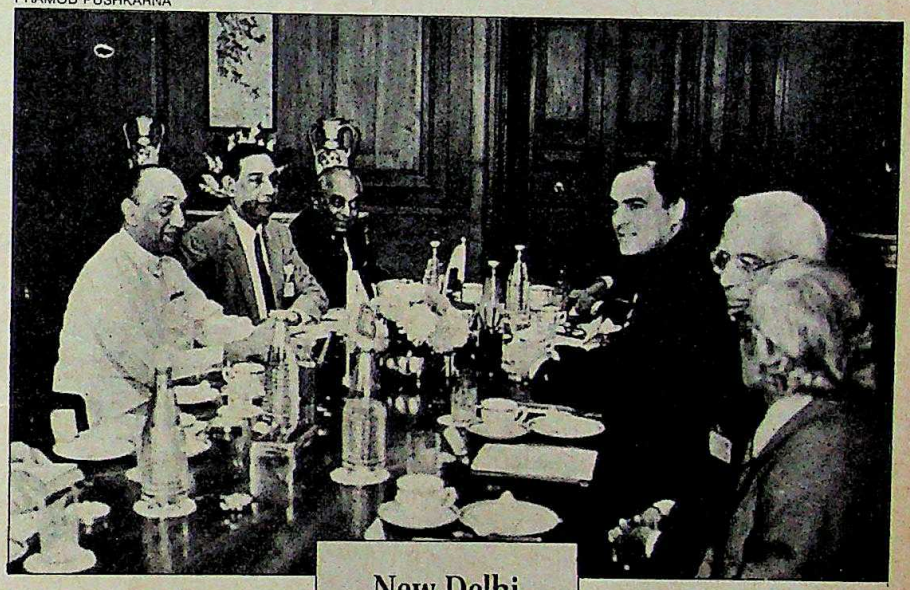
To ensure that Pirabhakaran and his key lieutenants do not slip out of the noose, the IPKF has attempted to block the known bolt-holes. Tiger hide-outs in Point Pedro, Mannar, Kaytes Island and Maniparai have been secured in the past week. That, coupled with the fact that the IPKF has raided a number of LTTE arms dumps and arms manufacturing units in the western wedge of the peninsula, is also an indication that their intelligence has markedly improved. In most cases, the information has come from rival militant groups but now, increasingly, from local Tamils.

Indian Government sources claim that the mood of the populace has undergone a dramatic change. But having lost ground in the north, the Tigers are still capable of causing havoc in the vulnerable eastern province, as last fortnight's slaying of 20-odd Sinhalese fishermen showed. The IPKF has reportedly flown in 2,000 additional troops into Batticaloa to insure against any such large-scale massacres. The Indian Government has so far ignored appeals for a cease-fire. "We will accept a cease-fire only if the request comes from Pirabhakaran directly, ensuring an unconditional surrender of all arms and an immediate acceptance of the accord," says an Indian official.

For that unlikely eventuality, New Delhi is banking heavily on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran. Rajiv Gandhi quickly rushed his Minister of State for External Affairs, K. Natwar Singh, to Madras to soothe the feathers ruffled by Jayewardene's injudicious remarks in New Delhi critical of Tamil Nadu's role in the island's ethnic crisis.

Indo-Sri Lankan talks in Delhi

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



New Delhi believes that MGR is the only one who can convince Pirabhakaran to lay down arms.

New Delhi's desperation is based on its belief that MGR is the only one who can convince Pirabhakaran to lay down arms and end the current impasse in northern Sri Lanka. Delhi was overly keen to enlist MGR into mediating between the Indian Government and the LTTE. MGR is believed to have already sent a message through Kittu, the LTTE's Jaffna commander now recovering from a leg amputation in Madras, to Pirabhakaran asking him to issue a statement on arms surrender and in support of the accord. MGR has also reportedly suggested that Pirabhakaran can fly to India for an audience with Rajiv Gandhi if he has any misgivings.

But Tamil fears over the Sri Lankan Government reneging on future promises still exist, especially after Jayewardene refused to budge on the devolution package to the north during his visit to New Delhi. Said Tamil United Liberation Front(TULF) Secretary-General Appapillai Amrithalingam: "We have been assured by the Government of India that Jayewardene would liberalise the provincial council bills at a slightly later stage and give more autonomy to the Tamil province. Jayewardene had said that the presidential proclamation on the merger would come only after the Tamil militants have been fully disarmed. Since the IPKF has nearly completed that job, the President should announce the merger without any further loss of time. That would allay Tamil fears to a certain extent."

But the key to the success or failure of the battle lies currently with Colombo. By ensuring that the crucial bill gets the approval of the Parliament, Jayewardene has bought himself enough breathing space to fight the war on the political front while the IPKF tackles the Tigers. But the options are now increasingly limited—one false step and the weakened edifice of the accord could come crashing down.

—DILIP BOBB with MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo and S.H. VENKATRAMANI in Madras

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FIJI

Marooned at Home

A demoralised Indian community

THE May 14 coup in Fiji, followed by a second in September, pitchforked the 3.5 lakh Fijian-Indian community onto the horns of an unforeseen dilemma. Fiji's new military ruler, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, under the new proposed constitution, is determined to ensure Fijian supremacy on the island, thus reducing the Indians, who outnumber the Fijians, to second-class citizens and leaving them suspended in a permanent state of insecurity. What will they do? More important, what can they do? To find out and to gauge the prevailing mood, SAEED NAQVI *visited Fiji last fortnight. His report:*

THE startling fact about Fiji today is the total absence of any agitational politics on the part of the majority Indian community in response to threats of total ethnic Fijian domination. Instead, in the troubled archipelago of 300 islands, home to 3.5 lakh Indians, many are fleeing in the face of what they perceive to be an irreversible decline in fortunes.

Ironically, in the wake of two military coups in Fiji, there has emerged a peculiar syndrome of rising expectations among the Indians to migrate to more prosperous lands like Australia and New Zealand. "Much of the Indian leadership is middle class and keener to preserve its interest than fight for its rights and the country," explains Mumtaz Ali, former adviser to the governor-general.

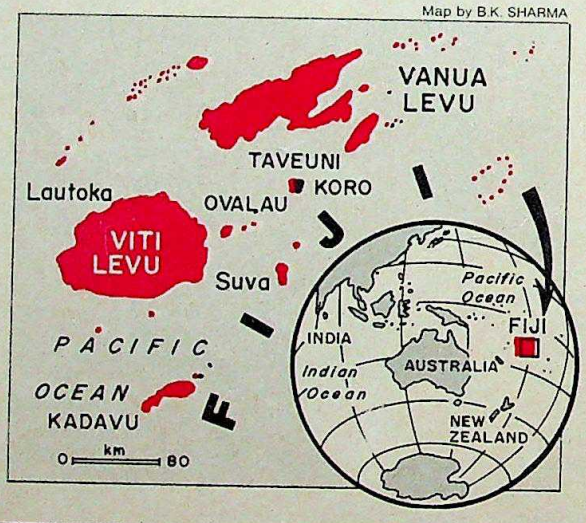
During the recent Commonwealth summit in Vancouver, deposed Fijian leaders had given some Indian delegates the impression of a stranded, demoralised Indian community looking to their "motherland" for help and sustenance. The Indian High Commission in Suva then made contingency plans to process what was expected to be a flood of visa applications. To date, however, it has received precisely 35 applications.

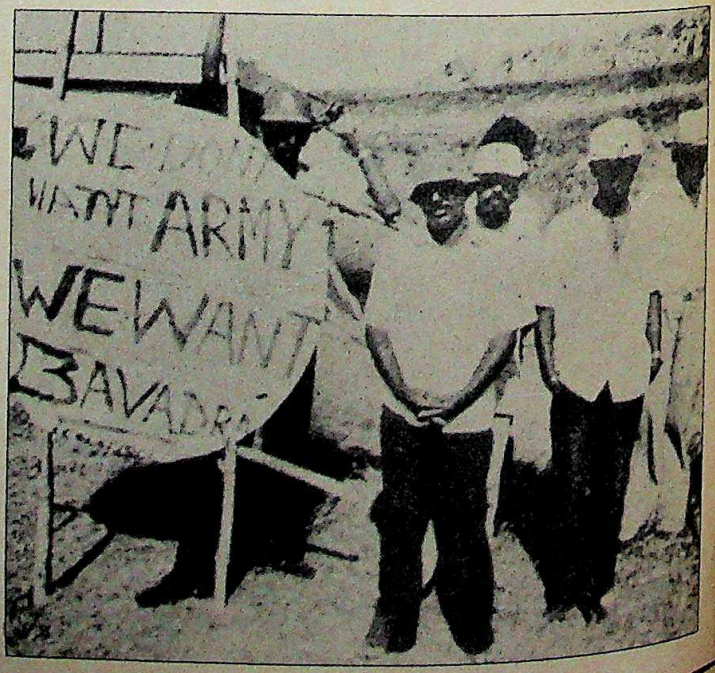
"India is the last place the Fiji Indians would like to return to. For them, upward mobility means certain fixed destinations for emigration: Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US, in that order," says Mohini Kumar, a Hindi announcer on Radio Fiji. She has sold her property cheap, after real estate plummeted following the coups, and plans to settle in the US. Others, including former MPs like M.C. Vinod, have already left.

"The Fiji Indian derives his pride, his separate cultural identity from the India connection," says Dr Satendra Nandan, health minister in the Bavadra cabinet. "But he sees better economic prospects in the West." Adds Mumtaz Ali: "The stereotype of an 'impoverished India' is etched deep in the Fiji Indian psyche." This psyche of the Fiji Indians is really conditioned by the manner and purpose of their arrival here in the late 19th century. Originally working as indentured labour in the sugar plantations, they sought a better existence in these distant Pacific islands, inhabited by the exotic Melanesian tribes.

Now, as the later generations have acquired middle class aspirations, the tendency has been to move towards greener pastures in the West. As Irene Jai Narayan, minister for Indian affairs in the military government of Colonel

Map by B.K. SHARMA





Fijians supporting the coup (left); and Indians protesting against it

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Rabuka at a parade: pro-Fijian stance

Rabuka, says: "With the spectre of Fijian supremacy looming large, more and more Indians are hoping to get away even faster."

This is where the gravest danger lurks. About 1,300 Fijian citizens, mostly Indians, migrated to Australia during 1985-86. The figure is likely to go up to 1,700 for 1986-87. But the flood of visa applications at present is totally out of proportion with the relatively small number who will get in. Only skilled professionals and those sponsored by close relatives qualify to immigrate. The situation vis-a-vis New Zealand, Canada and the US is very much the same.

A potentially explosive situation could arise when the Indians find the door to the chosen lands locked. Dr Nandan predicts that violence will occur when the majority realise that they will have to build their future in Fiji. He visualises the present Indian leadership losing out to younger, more radical elements, "unless both sides show statesmanship and repair the rupture between the Fijians and Indians".

It is difficult to dismiss the rupture as a casual estrangement between two communities. The Fijians demonstrated their deep hostility, in the most macabre symbolism, when the Indian-backed coalition won the April elections. They dug a huge pit or 'lovo' in front of the grey government house, at the base of the statue of Ratu Sukuna, one of Fiji's most revered chiefs. A century ago, cannibals buried and cooked humans in such pits.

Although a horde of Indians are trying to emigrate to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US, only a handful will be accepted. And few want to return to "impoverished India".

The Indian response has been a numbed horror, with only stray cases of arson and bomb explosions. But it is difficult to lay the blame for this state of affairs on any one side. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who has headed the ruling Fijian-backed Alliance Party and been prime minister since Fiji's Independence from Britain in 1970, could be blamed for having created the illusion that Fiji was a thriving democracy on the Westminster model. Indian leaders of the coalition like Jai Ram Reddy, mistook the illusion for reality. When the truth dawned, they mounted a virulent election campaign, charging the ruling Fijian-backed Alliance Party with corruption in office.

Traditional Fijian society, with its revered system of chiefs, was shaken to its very foundations. The coalition "Indians" were seen as ridiculing "our chiefs", as Colonel Rabuka says *(see interview)*. "Indians already controlled the economy, they have now threatened to dominate the political structure as well," says Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, former governor-general and one of the most important high chiefs of Colonel Rabuka's clan.

Constitutional pundits have been monitoring events in Fiji since the Bavadra government was ousted by the May 14 coup and the proclamation of the Fijian Republic after the second coup on September 25. The reality, most have found, is that when the chips are down, Ratu Penaia, Ratu Mara and Colonel Rabuka are all Fijians first. Their Saville Row suits and western liberal masks have long been discarded. Aiding the inevitable shift towards Fijian supremacy, is the divided Indian community.

Tragically, it is increasingly being split along communal lines. The 50,000-strong Muslim community is backing Siddiq 'Sid' Koya, a leading lawyer. Koya is bitter against the coalition leader Jai Ram Reddy—who is widely regarded as the real leader of the coalition rather than Bavadra. "In 1977, the Indian-backed National Federation Party (NFP) won the election under my leadership," Koya says, "but Jai Ram Reddy and his supporters, all NFP members, withheld support because they did not want a Muslim prime minister."

Another division exists between the strong business and commercial interests controlled mostly by Gujaratis and some Punjabis, and the original indentured labourers, largely from impoverished Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. These men lived a hard life on the plantations, and many acquired leases on the lands traditionally owned by Fijians.

But both groups are now under pressure from the Fijian land-owners. "We own 84 per cent of the land and we intend to keep it that way," says Apisai Tora, firebrand Fijian minister for communication in the Rabuka Government. He is also a leader of the extremist Taukei (land-owners) movement, strongly committed to "Fiji and Fijians". "Indians cannot be given equal rights," he says, openly admitting: "The Westminster style of democracy has gone down the river as far as we are concerned."

There are thus conflicting pressures facing Colonel Rabuka. On the one hand are the Taukei extremists demanding a totally pro-Fijian Constitution. On the other are his own revered chiefs Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara. Sentimental about the British connection, the chiefs seek a constitution which ensures Fijian supremacy in general but with the trimmings of tolerance that will enable them

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COLONEL SITIVENI RABUKA

"We want the Indians to stay"

COLONEL Sitiveni Rabuka, 37, made history twice in Fiji in less than five months. In May, he ousted prime minister Timoci Bavadra's Indian-dominated coalition government at gunpoint, and then followed this up with a putsch on September 25. Rabuka recently spoke to well-known freelancer SAEED NAQVI, *the first Indian journalist to be granted an interview, on his hopes and aspirations for the island nation. Excerpts:*

Q. Now that the first coup of May 14 is part of history, it would be interesting to know how you brought it about. Whom did you discuss the idea with?

A. Before the election, I had started training a group of officers. I knew there were going to be riots. I had anticipated riots during the campaign season. You see, we Fijians are not broadminded enough—some of us cannot accept the idea of our chiefs being ridiculed publicly.

Q. Which chiefs were ridiculed?

A. Oh, allegations of corruption against prime minister Ratu Mara and some of his ministers. In fact, I am still trying to find out if the allegations were true. Then the alliance lost. The Taukei movement emerged—with all its plans for violence, demonstrations and arson. It was at that point that I went to the governor-general, Ratu Penaia, and asked him if there was something we could do.

This was particularly after the Taukei had submitted their petition to him expressing displeasure at an Indian-dominated government and urging him to intervene and seek an immediate review of the Constitution. I told him that if he did not stage a political coup, I would stage a military coup. I then left. I thought about the whole thing. The next day I played golf with Ratu Mara and this received world attention because everybody thought Ratu Mara and I had plotted the coup. Believe me, Ratu Mara did not know. In fact, he got a shock when he heard about the coup.

Q. Before the second coup you had told the governor-general that you accepted the Deuba accord between the Coalition and the Alliance Party. Then why did you have to stage the second coup?

A. I had at no stage accepted the Deuba accord. All I had told the governor-general was that I would watch the progress of their discussions. I had thought that they would come back to me. It may have been presumptuous of me to expect that from the governor-general. But then I was protecting the interests of the Great Council of Chiefs.

Q. What was it exactly that was totally unacceptable to you?

A. The governor-general had mapped out certain steps. There has to be a constitutional review committee. There has to be a council of national reconciliation. There has to be a parliament of some sort and then elections. But the Deuba accord came up with a caretaker government. In other words, the caretaker government would not please the Fijian community. A government of national unity would not be accepted by the Fijian community because the idea came from the coalition. We thought that if the caretaker government would carry on long enough, they would forget the real issue which was to change the Constitution, ensuring the paramountcy of the Fijian. Once the caretaker government came into being, they would have imposed watch-dogs on the military, watered down the military and restricted its capacity to stage another coup. Now what I have done is to set up a machinery that will watch the military and whoever takes power now will not have to face another military coup, whether I am commanding the army or not. Before there is another coup, they would come to know about it.

Q. You are talking so much about coups. Is there a danger of another coup?

A. Now there is no danger of another coup because we have taken care of the constitutional changes. A new Constitution is almost ready. We have seen to it that Fijian interests are protected, that their participation in commerce is promoted.

Q. This country has had very special links with Britain. Doesn't it pain you that your link with Britain has been severed and you are now out of the Commonwealth?

A. It pains me a lot. I have a lot of respect for Her Majesty and it grieves me that we are now out of the Commonwealth. But I sincerely hope that it is only a temporary suspension rather than a termination.

Q. What compromises are you willing to make for re-entry into the Commonwealth?

A. I believe I do not have to make any compromise. I believe that if I incorporate into the Constitution the things I have in my mind, everybody will be happy. I will never do anything that will unnecessarily hurt any group of people in Fiji.

Q. Why don't you retain the old Constitution and introduce further safeguards regarding Fijian rights?

A. Well, that is all we are changing in the new Constitution.

Q. But you are giving 36 seats to Fijians and 22 to Indians. That is a big difference.

A. Yes, that is a big difference.

Q. And since you are going to have only communal rolls, you will end up having two parties in this country, one a Fijian party and the other an Indian

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party, perpetually in opposition.

A. No, I still expect the elections to be fought on (non-racial) party lines.

Q. But the Indians will rally around the Indians and the Fijians around the Fijians.

A. What is the point of Indians having only 22 seats? If elections are fought on party lines, they have a chance of making some inroads on this side as well. Just having a government of Fijians will not be a good thing. I would like to see a government in which Indians have a say as well.

Q. In Lebanon, the President is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Muslim, the speaker a Shiite and the defence minister a Druze. Similarly, you could have a Fijian prime minister, defence minister. And possibly an Indian foreign minister, home minister?

A. We have not considered that. It is a good idea well worth considering, but I believe that there should not be a Fijian party and an Indian party.

> "We have seen to it that Fijian interests are protected. Though I am in a position to repatriate all Indians, I do not want to do it."

Q. But that is the way it is likely to evolve. In the aftermath of the two coups, a somewhat threatened Indian community will tend to huddle together unless you give it other suitable openings.

A. There is nothing to stop another strong Indian-backed party from coming to power with Fijian support. All I am saying is that whatever changes are made in the Constitution, particularly with relation to land, should be made by Fijians. So if we have Fijians who do not care about land, they can go and vote that way and that is it. If they want to commit suicide, let them.

Q. From your words, what I divine is this: this is going to be a purely Fijian state and Fijian paramountcy will be sacrosanct. In other words, what you are saying is that the Indians are aliens to whom the Fijians have accorded hospitality.

A. It may not sound very good, but that is probably what it is.

Q. But isn't it unfortunate? After all, these people have been here for 120 years. They have invested in this country, contributed to its economy, treated this as their home.

A. It is a little unfortunate, but there is another side to it. I am now in a perfect position to repatriate all Indians because we have just become a republic and we are not bound by Commonwealth pressures. But I do not want to do it. When we were in the Commonwealth, we were obliged to protect what Britain had given to the Indians and the Fijians.

Q. But if you repatriated every Indian, your economy would collapse.

A. Correct. We are prepared to face that if we have to. We don't want that to happen. We want the Indians to stay....

Q. ...but not as equal citizens?

A. (Long pause). Well, in the sense that they cannot run the Government.

Q. What would be your foreign policy?

A. I prefer to stay within the western bloc.

Q. This is an area of great strategic importance to the United States. Would you be willing to offer base facilities to the US Navy?

A. I don't think we can offer base facility to them. The port facilities are available if they come patrolling our area.

Q. When you say that you are a part of the western bloc, what do you mean?

A. We shall not readily accept any help from the eastern bloc or any communist country.

Q. What role do you visualise for India and the Indian High Commission in Suva in the present circumstances?

A. I don't know. There is no aid from India. There is no need for them to be here. In any case, there is no more interaction between India and Fiji and we do not need an Indian high commission here. All Indian people in Fiji are Fijian citizens and we will look after them under the Constitution.

Q. Are you saying that there should be no diplomatic relations between India and Fiji?

A. Are there diplomatic relations between Fiji and India now?

Q. Aren't there?

A. Not formally.

to keep a liberal front.

The Indians, under the umbrella of the coalition, have two clear options. The first is to accept Colonel Rabuka's minimum demands: to give Fijians 36 seats in a house of 67 (with 22 seats for Indians, and 8 to Europeans and others); to have a Fijian prime minister, foreign minister and home affairs minister; to have elections based strictly on communal roles and a mandatory review of the constitution every 10 years. Indian leaders like Koya believe that at this stage, "there is enough in the so-called minimum demands from which constitutional lawyers can coax sufficient good for the Indian community."

The other option is for Indians to reject the minimum demands. Leaders like Reddy feel these will only give a mask of respectability to the Fijian chiefs. While their leaders debate on their future course of action, the Indian community remains caught in an inextricable bind. Dalpat Rathod, an Indian hotelier, echoes the stand of Gujarati businessmen: "We came here to do business, not to fight politics. We want normalcy to return so that business can be normal."

The Fijian dollar has been devalued officially by 30 per cent but has actually crashed by 50 per cent. As one Indian businessman confided: "We want normalcy so that property values go up just enough for us to sell and run." He maintains there will be no fresh Indian investment in Fiji. And the third generation Indians—the well-off middle class professionals—are the keenest to leave the island. "We would have left in any case, but now we shall leave sooner," says a teacher.

Those truly stranded are the overwhelming majority of Indians in the sugar plantations and the squatter colonies. Under the "Fiji for Fijians" slogan, land leases are being renewed at four times the price. All the leases run out by 1996 when, they feel, "catastrophe awaits us". According to Mahendra Chaudhry, who is a trade union leader: "This is the lot that will stay on and fight as political processes develop."

But there are also those who blame themselves for their failure to integrate with the Fijians. Vijaya Parmanandam, sworn-in as a judge in the Rabuka Government, is bitter about the Indian community's "failure to integrate with the Fijians". Says he: "We do not mix or eat food with Fijians." But a more sensible observation comes from Satendra Nandan: "Oil and water do not mix, but you need both to run the car."

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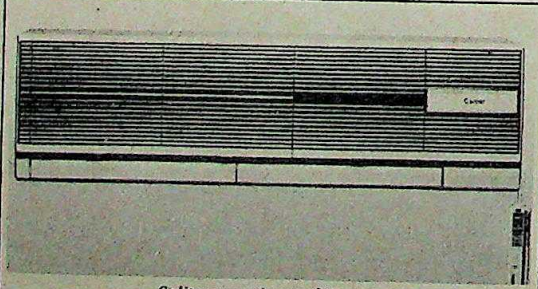

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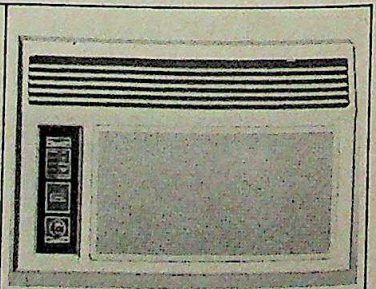

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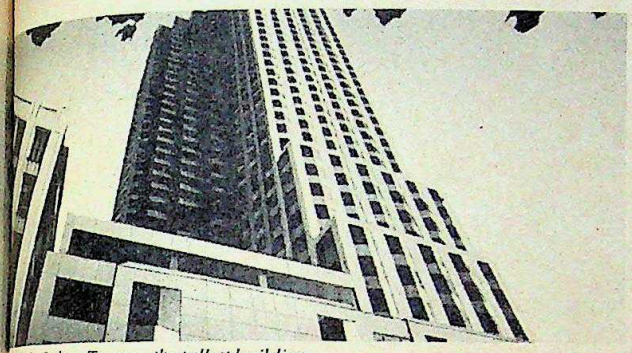

...ocks the Sydney Tower – the tallest building
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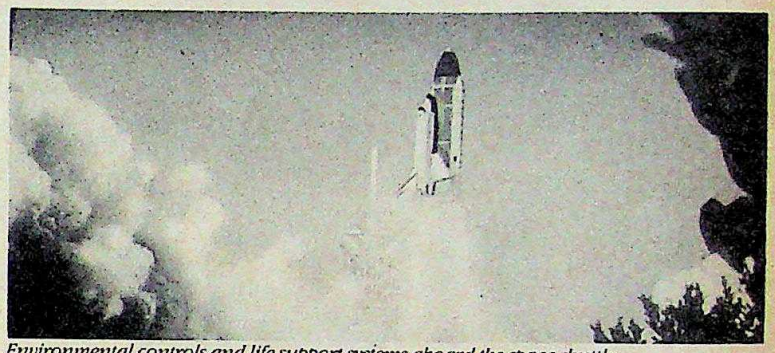
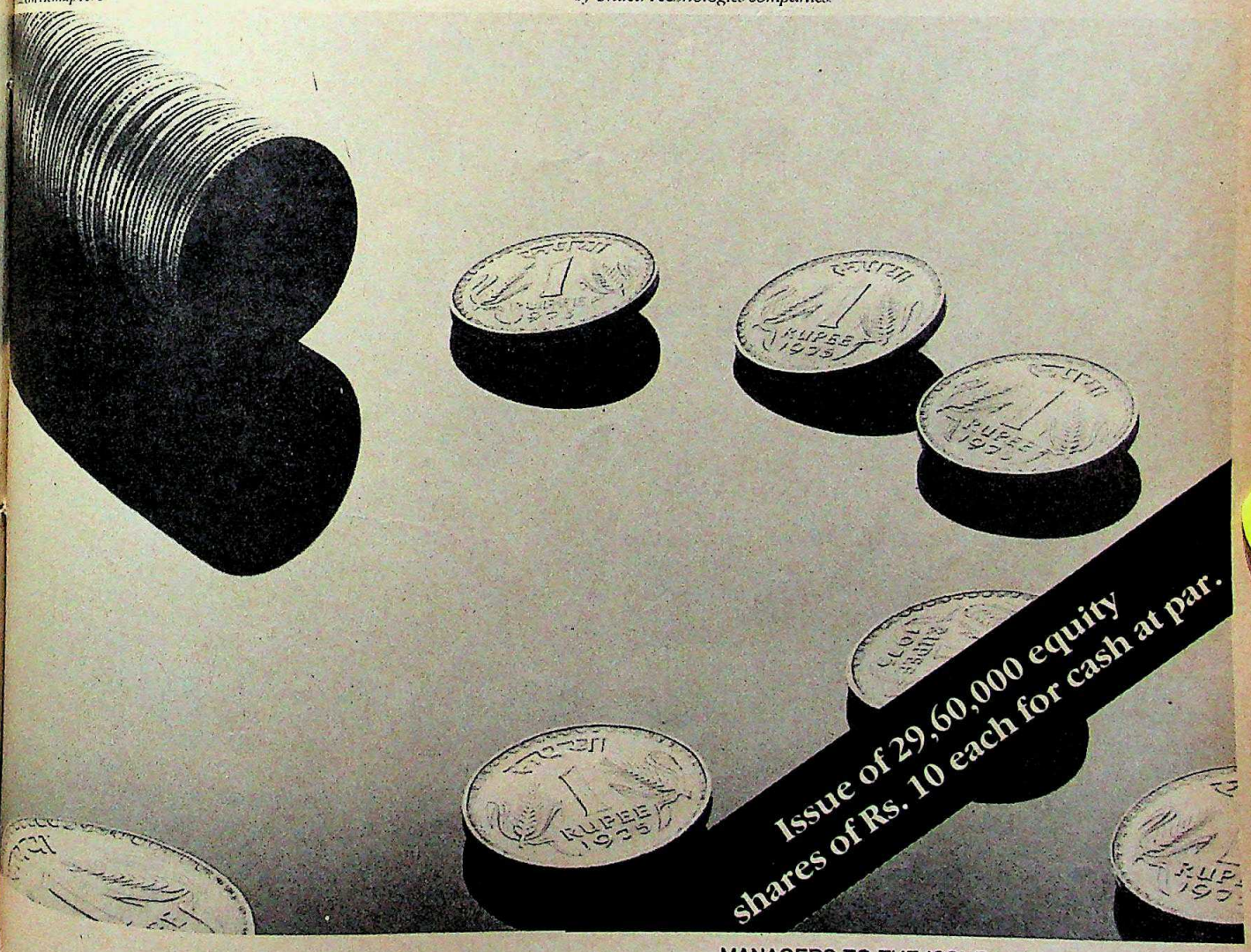


Environmental controls and life support systems aboard the space shuttle by United Technologies companies.



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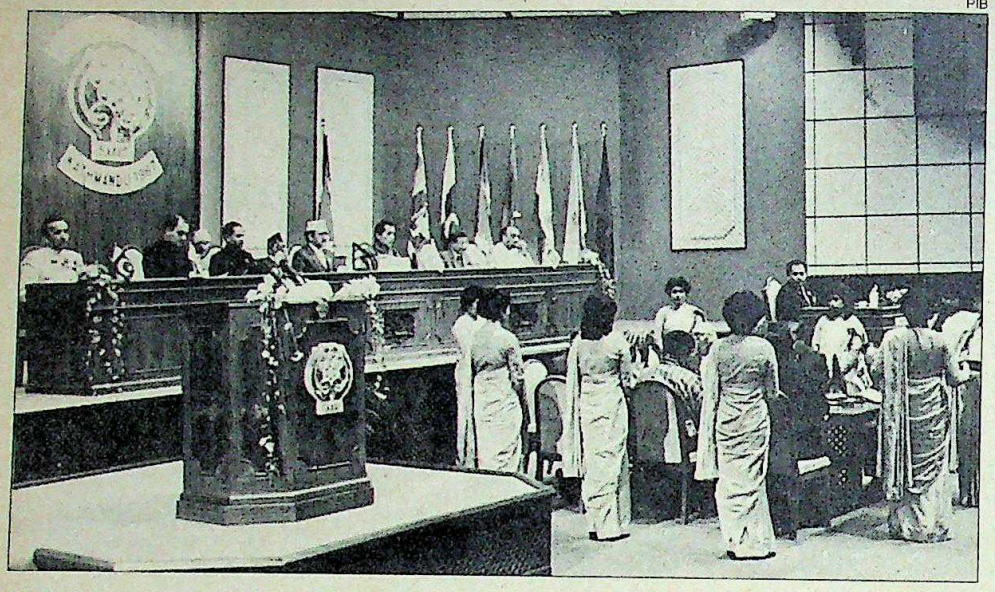

The summit: letting off steam

SAARC

Gang up on Big Brother

But India did not suffer too much

MULTINATIONAL summits are often pervaded by an air of club-house bonhomie. Summiteers, after all, belong to the world's most exclusive club. SAARC—the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation—brought together in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, the region's royalty of two kings, three presidents and two prime ministers. But at the end of three days of deliberations, the leaders had little to show for their efforts.

For the record, they had forged a regional convention on suppression of terrorism, agreed to set up a regional food security reserve and decided to commission a study on the causes and consequences of natural disasters and the preservation of the environment. But, judging from the power plays enacted behind the scenes and the hair-trigger vetoes, their main achievement was to politicise and side-track a forum that had been created to promote collective economic self-reliance.

One-upmanship was the name of the game for the traditional rivals, India and Pakistan. At one point, Pakistan's Minister of State for External Affairs Zain Noorani rushed to the press lounge to announce with unconcealed glee that his delegation had "shot down" India's move to admit Afghanistan as a member of the SAARC. "I thought this display was quite undiplomatic," said a western diplomat present in Kathmandu. India responded by spiking Pakistan's proposal to grant observer status to the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The summit also demonstrated that the Big Brother syndrome—was alive and kicking in the region. But though Pakistan fired the expected broadsides and there was occasional sniping from other directions, the gathering proved less than hostile to India, which had found a new ally in Sri Lanka.

It was not so much one large summit, but 21 simultaneous mini-summits as the leaders of each of the seven South Asian nations met separately with their counterparts. There were one-on-one talks between Rajiv Gandhi, his Pakistani counterpart Mohammed Khan Junejo and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene. Given the prickly state of India-Pakistan relations after the brigade-size clash in the Siachen snows, it is doubtful whether Rajiv would have travelled to Pakistan or Junejo to India to tackle pending issues. But meeting on Kathmandu's neutral ground, the two leaders resumed the disrupted dialogue.

As an immediate follow-up, the home secretaries and the secretaries for defence and foreign affairs of the two countries will meet shortly to take up the thread of the interrupted discussions. And, equally importantly, the two prime ministers agreed to demarcate the maritime boundary in the Kachchh region, a live dispute which has touched off a "fishing war" between the two coast guards. Meanwhile, the discussions that Rajiv and Jayewardene had started in Kathmandu continued in Delhi during the Sri Lankan President's stop-over on his way home.

Whatever their declared agenda, leaders use such summits to send pointed messages, register protests, let off steam and generally clear the air. But the uninhibited venting of steam transformed SAARC into the political forum it was never intended to be.

In fact, Jayewardene's reference to the Indo-Sri Lanka accord opened the door for blatantly political and bilateral issues, with many of the smaller nations doing a balancing act to appear neutral between the two "powers"—India and Pakistan. Bhutan joined the Maldives in welcoming the accord, but then supported Pakistan's plea for a nuclear-free south Asia. It also joined hands with Bangladesh and Nepal to press for a joint development of the Himalayan waters. The king of Nepal chipped in with a loaded reference to Balkanisation and the presence of foreign troops on the soil of any SAARC country. The object of the SAARCasm: India.

In such a gathering, the politics of consensus inevitably imposes its heaviest burden on the dominant participant. Eager to avoid being seen as either the odd-man-out or the bully, India bowed to pressure from other leaders and signed the regional convention on terrorism. "One can take regionalism too seriously, thinking it's going to supercede existing bilateral ties. That is not so," commented an official of the Ministry of External Affairs.

For Nepal, it was an opportunity to shine in the glare of international media attention. In any case, Kathmandu was spruced up like never before and stiff fines announced for littering. And the subcontinent's only casino was closed for the duration of the summit, as if to emphasise that the games the delegates played at the negotiating tables and in the drafting committees had infinitely higher stakes than at the gambling tables.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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"To reach true love, you have t
of thorns" he replied, his eye

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ve that climb a ladder
eyes glowing like embers.

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RELIANCE CUP

Tears and Triumph

The favourites fail but cricket is the winner

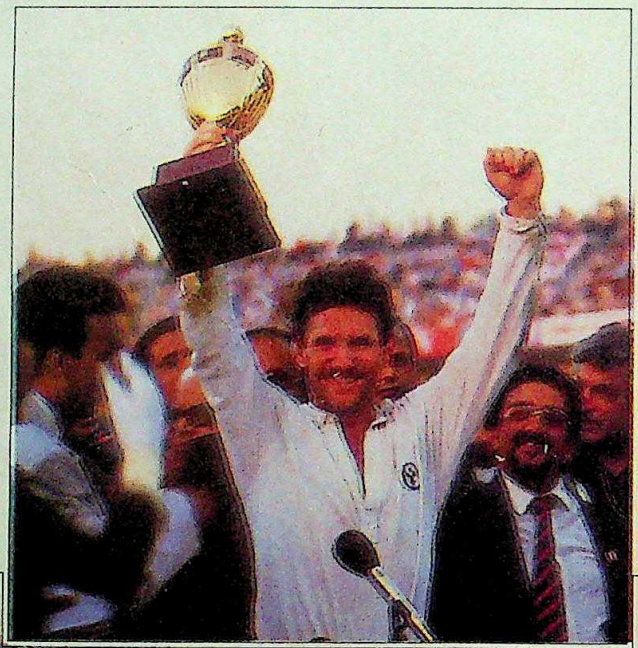
IT was a near-perfect script—until somebody changed the ending. That somebody turned out to be the monolithic Mike Gatting and his co-author, the aggressive Aussie, Allan Border. Thanks to them, what the just-concluded Reliance World Cup finally ended up putting on display was the most audacious cricketing coup of the decade.

By earning ownership of the glittering, diamond-encrusted trophy—one-day cricket's Holy Grail—in an anticlimactic, snatch-and-grab final at Calcutta's Eden Gardens last fortnight, Border and his unfancied Australian cobbers fashioned a more momentous upset than India, the title holders, had accomplished four years ago at Lords.

In the end, it was no sneak punch that floored the tournament favourites and co-hosts, Pakistan and India, but a tough and timely lesson in the requirements and restrictions of the one-day game. Both the finalists, England and Australia, rank outsiders when the tournament got underway, booked their passage to Calcutta by cutting out the frills and sticking strictly to percentage cricket. En route, they showed the over-confident Indian and Pakistan sides exactly what professionalism is all about.

In retrospect, it was not the better sides that showed up at Eden Gardens, but the ones that adapted to their limitations, worked harder at the game and handled the pressure with a greater degree of confidence. Even the sudden sag in sub-continental spectator interest when both India and Pakistan crashed out of the tournament failed to rob the finals of its pulsations and prestige. Eden Gardens, and Calcutta, may have got itself all prettied up for an Indo-Pakistan party, but their replacements were clearly the more deserving candidates.

For the inscrutable Allan Border (Reliance folklore has it that the only time anyone saw him smile was after the last ball had been bowled at Eden Gardens), winning the World Cup is a tremendous tribute to his tenacity and his positive, never-say-die attitude. Albeit in a limited sense, he has single-handedly pulled Australian



Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

■ Border (left) with the trophy; and (below) the Australians on their victory lap at Eden Gardens

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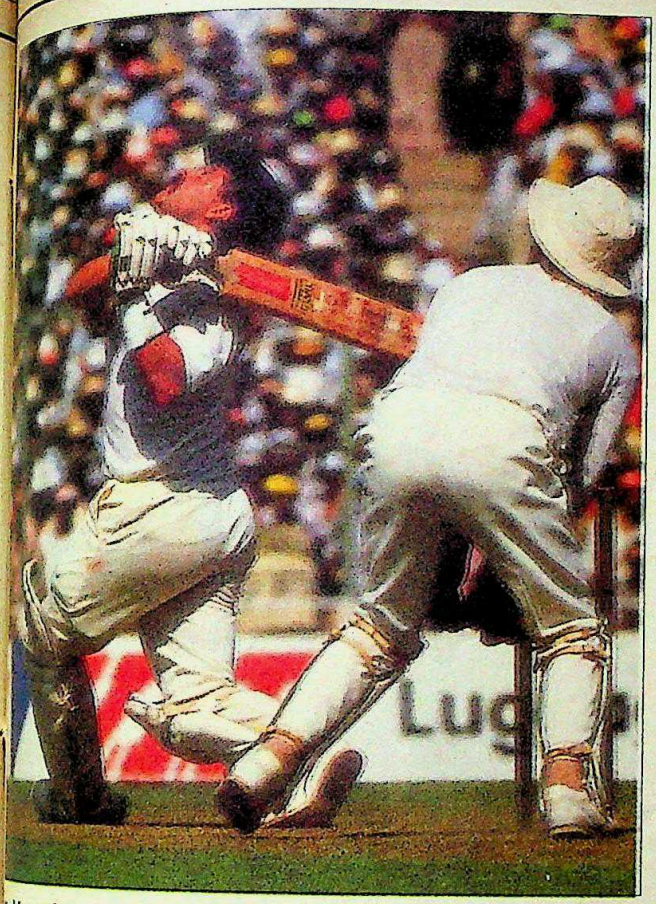
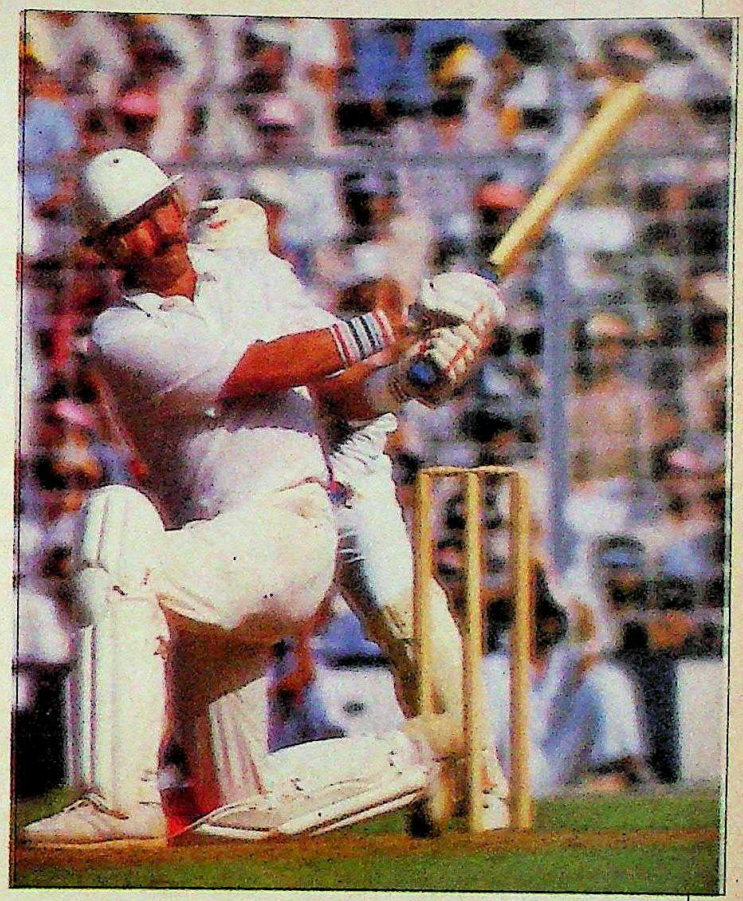
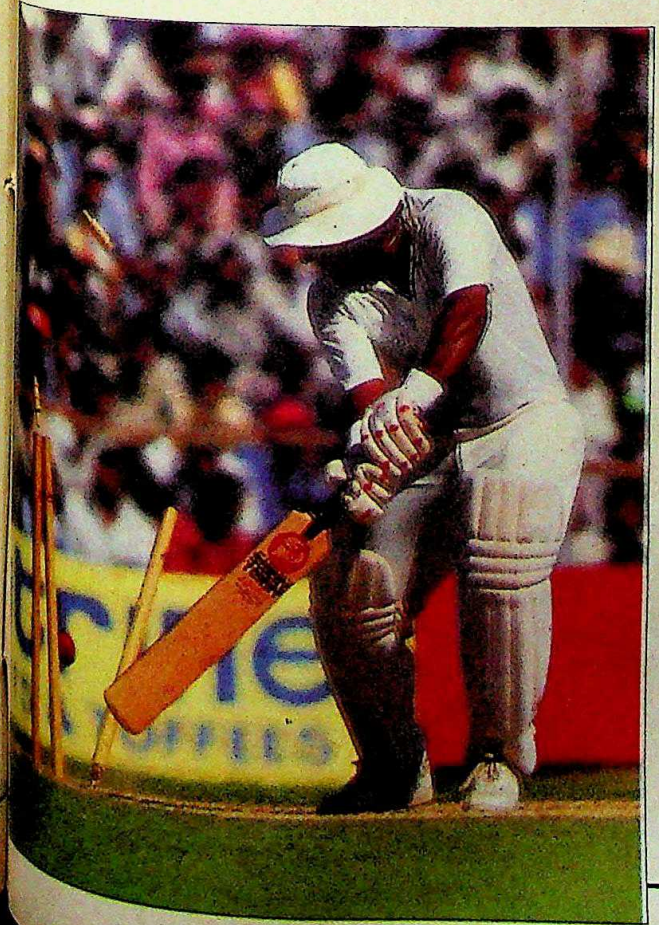


Man of the finals, David Boon, hits heavenwards



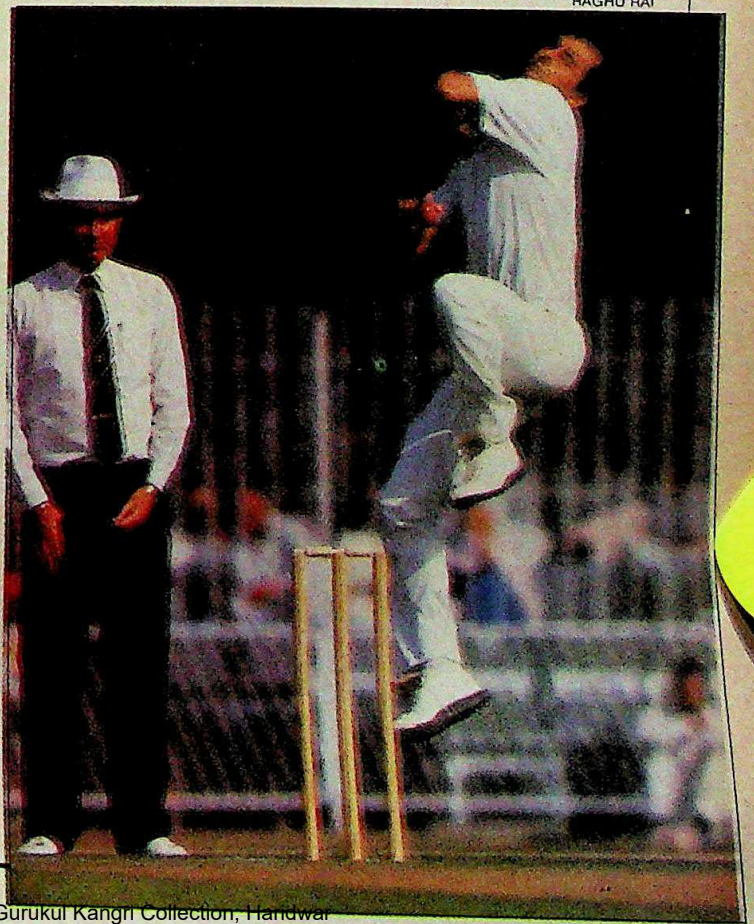
Graham Gooch employing his sweep shot at Bombay

Sunil Gavaskar's final innings ends in disaster



Imran Khan also ends his career in ignominy

RAGHU RAI



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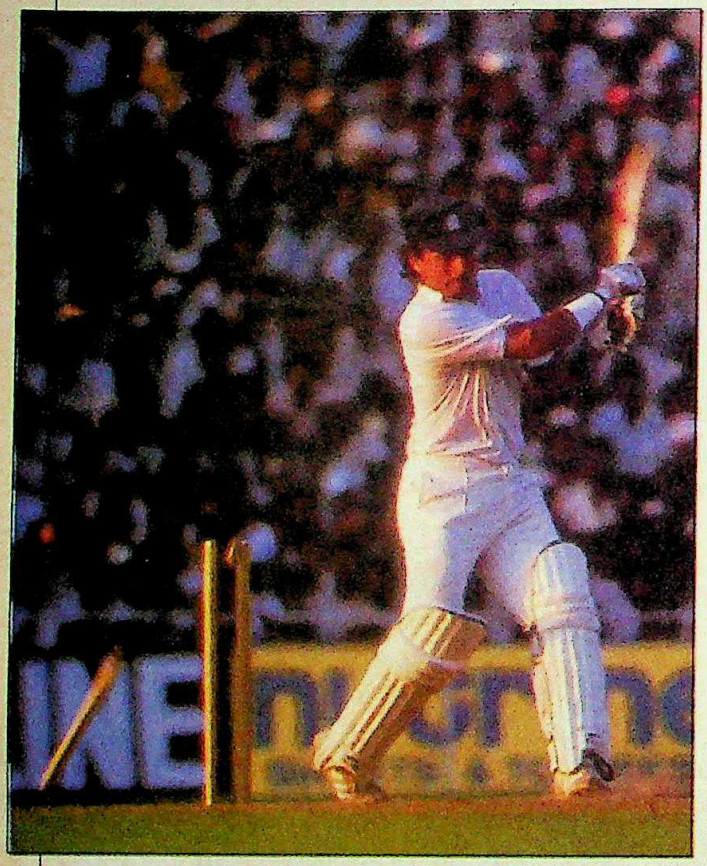
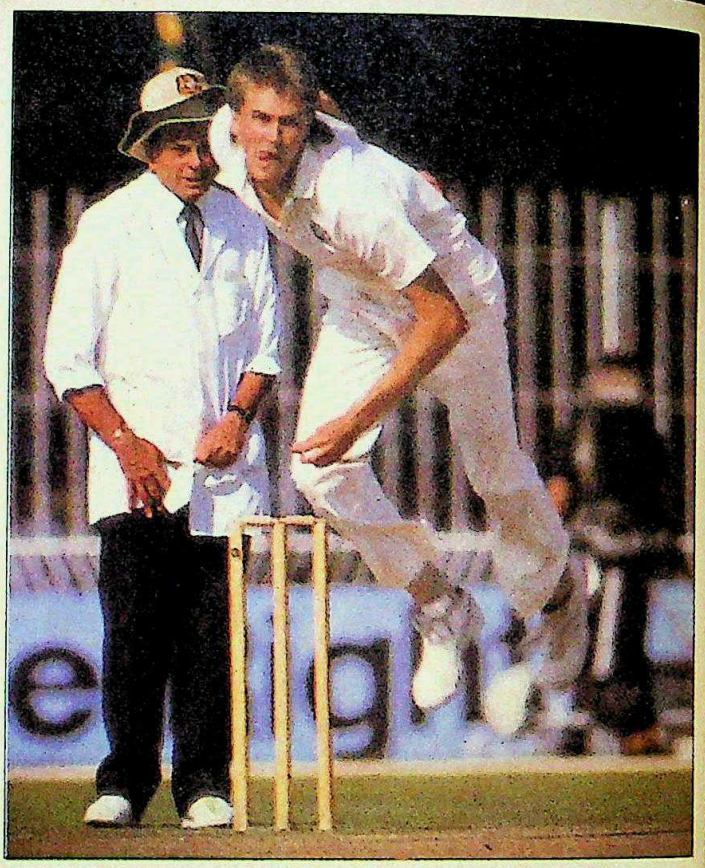
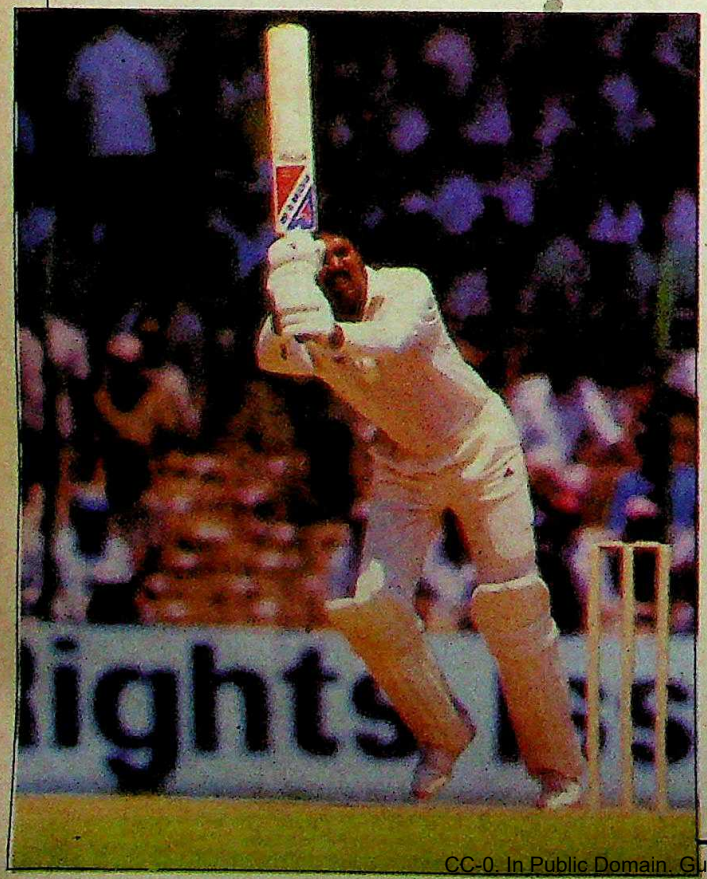


■ England's Allan Lamb exits in Calcutta



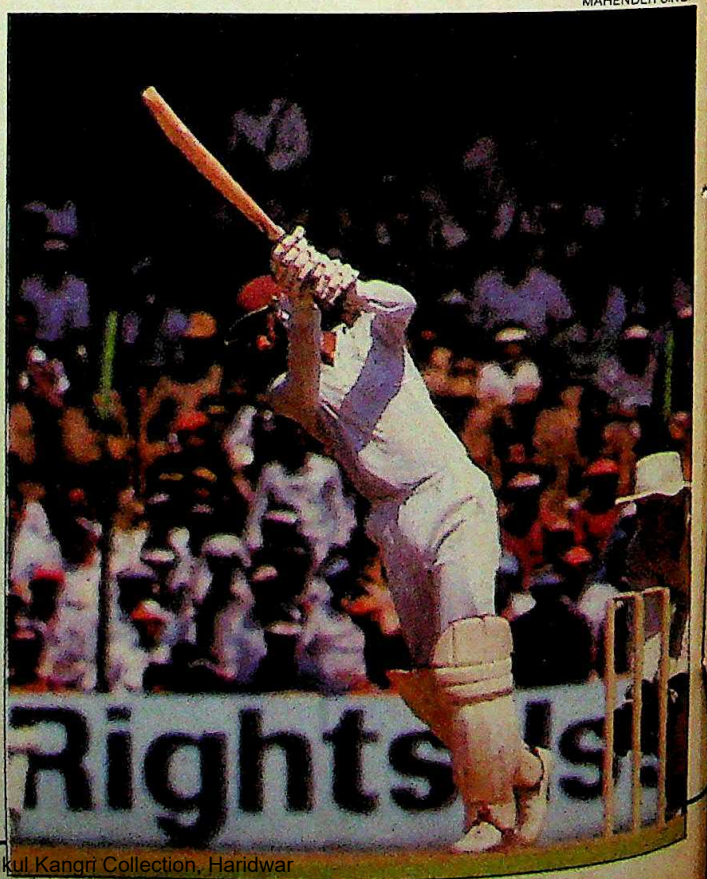
■ Australia's Bruce Reid throws everything into his bowling

■ Kapil's stroke that may have cost India the match



■ Sidhu in full flow, the only find of the tournament

MAHENDER SINGH



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cricket out of the kind of depths it has never plumbed before, and in the face of seemingly unsurmountable odds. Saddled with a side sorely lacking in experience and confidence, last fortnight's triumph is just the kind of morale-boosting tonic that Australian cricket required. "It's been worth the struggle. All that hard work has finally paid off. When we arrived, we gave ourselves an outside chance of reaching the semis. But after the win at Lahore (against Pakistan), I really started believing we could be world champions," he said, adding with justifiable pride: "A new era has begun in Australian cricket."

Though Australia owed much of its success to its opening bats, the bull-like David Boon and the more elegant Geoff Marsh, eventually it was a team effort with almost everybody making valuable contributions when it mattered. Craig McDermott (with 18 wickets, the highest wicket-taker in the Reliance Cup), Dean Jones, Mike Veletta, Bruce Reid, Simon O'Donnell and Stephen Waugh all pitched in at crucial stages of the tournament. Says former Pakistan captain Asif Iqbal: "It was sheer hard work and perseverence that made the Aussies worthy champions." By losing just one match (against India) out of the eight they featured in, Border's underdogs proved convincingly that individual talent matters less than collective responsibility in a competition of this nature.

Which is precisely why England, easily the most professional side in the Reliance Cup, made it to Eden Gardens as well. Graham Gooch—as millions of hang-dog Indian fans will testify—was the outstanding player of the tournament, with the highest individual cumulative score (471 runs in eight innings) and three man-of-the-match awards. But it was their cool-headedness under pressure and the collective effort they threw into every game that ensured England's entry into the finals. In fact, despite losing two matches out of seven in their run-up to the finals, Mike Gatting's team had come through a much tougher group and were heavily tipped to win at Calcutta. Eventually, just seven runs marked the difference between the new World Champions and the runners-up. "Full marks to Australia," acknowledged Gatting, "they were the better side on the day it counted."

FOR pre-tournament favourites, India and Pakistan, the fact that the only representatives from the subcontinent on the Eden Gardens pitch were the two officiating umpires, was the ultimate irony. The ironies did not end there. India lost its first match and then reeled off five successive wins to storm into the semis. Pakistan hit the Reliance ground running with five successive victories before losing their final group encounter. Both wound up playing the semi-finals in ideal conditions—on home grounds backed by their highly-vociferous supporters. Both teams wound up batting second, got within grabbing distance of the target and then cracked under pressure. Experts on both sides blame crucial captaincy lapses—Imran for allowing the less-accomplished Salim Jaffer to bowl the last, decisively expensive over, and Kapil for playing the horrendously irresponsible shot that cost his wicket and eventually the match. As former Indian captain Ajit Wadekar commented after India's semi-final defeat in Bombay: "I really thought I was watching a replay of the semi-final at the Gaddafi stadium in Lahore."

For Imran Khan, playing in his final international series for Pakistan in his hometown of Lahore, the defeat marked an inglorious end to a glorious career as one of the world's outstanding all-rounders—and captains. As in India's case, it was the fatal mixture of over-confidence and excessive expectations from hysterical fans that plotted Pakistan's downfall. At Lahore's jam-packed Gaddafi stadium, the cries of *Allah-ho-Akbar* from the crowds were as much a plea for divine intervention as a requiem for the country's cricketing eclipse. Now, especially with Imran out

■ **Javed Miandad in trouble in the Lahore semi-final**

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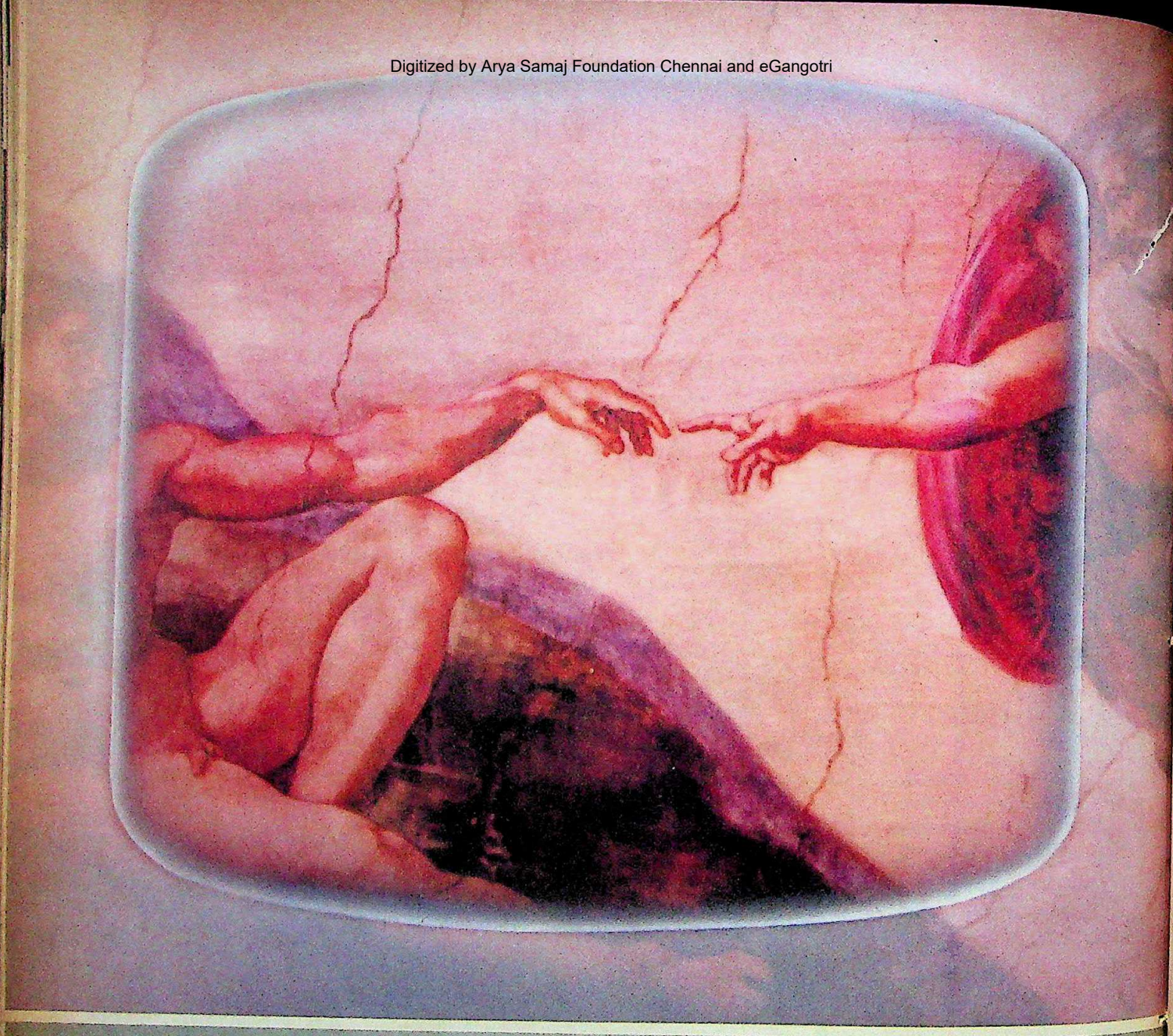

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of the scene, Pakistani cricket will take a long time to recover from the double-demoralisation. The huge banners in the hyperactive ladies' stand at Gaddafi stadium that read: "Imran, we'll miss you," carried more meaning than intended.

The extent of the subcontinental similarity is bizarre. For India, the Reliance Cup was also Sunil Gavaskar's swan song. Like Imran, Gavaskar has been the most outstanding player in the side and his abject failure at Bombay, his home-town, was as unfortunate an end to a brilliant career as Imran's. Gavaskar did succeed in achieving one goal that has eluded him so far—a century in one-day cricket—but it was ultimately a case of flattering only to deceive, symbolic of the entire Indian team's inexplicable performance in the do-or-die match at Bombay's Wankhede stadium.

On the morning of the match, former West Indian skipper Clive Lloyd, one of the shrewdest and most successful captains in one-day cricket, predicted: "It's a wide open game. One mistake and either of the combatants can go down. This is where professionalism comes in. Ultimately, it will boil down to which side makes the least number of mistakes."

For the 60,000 over-eager spectators who thronged the stadium, and the millions gummed to their television sets, it was obvious that all the mistakes were trademarked 'made in India'. First, Kapil won the toss and, deceived by the overcast skies, put England in to bat when the Reliance Cup averages had shown that the side batting first invariably held the high cards. Then, Gooch literally swept the Indians off their feet with a superb man-of-the-match century. Though most of Gooch's runs came from the sweep shot, Kapil inexplicably only had one man posted at long leg for the major part of his innings. Gooch eventually racked up just under half the total English score.

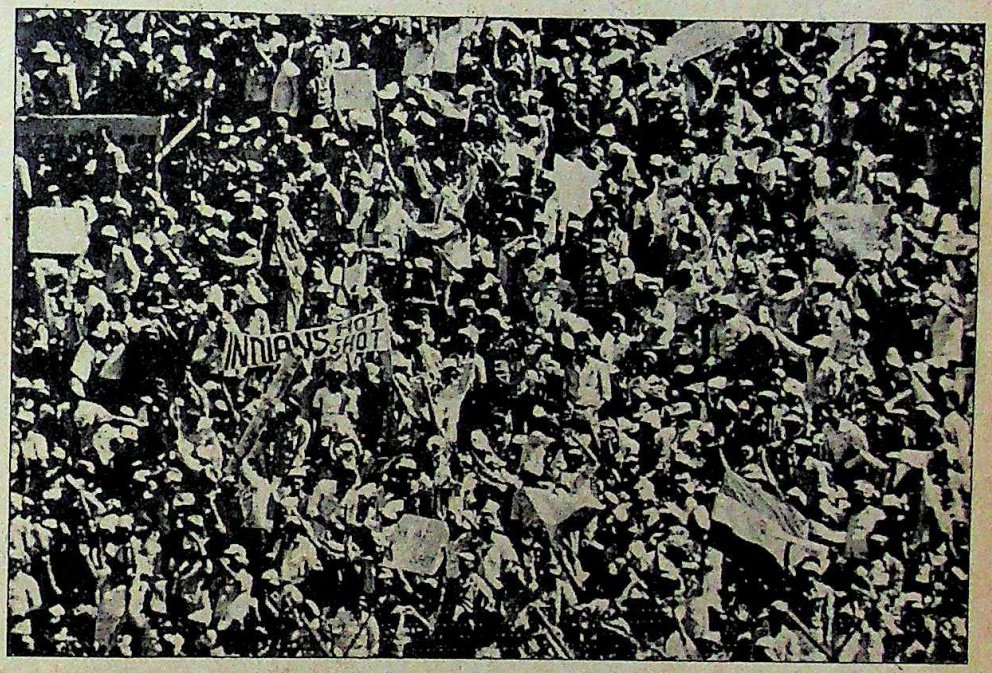
The manner of India's subsequent, and surprisingly tame, surrender has triggered off what promises to be the longest and most hotly-disputed post-mortem in Indian cricketing history. Without diluting the effort of England's bowlers, the undisputable fact is that what was on display was a fatally familiar sight—the vulnerability of India's batting line-up, considered the most formidable in the tournament, to high-grade pressure. It was precisely because of that pressure that the Indian spinners, Maninder Singh and Ravi Shastri, were unable to counter the tactics employed by Gooch. In sharp contrast, it was their English counterparts, Hemmings and Emburey, who turned the tide in Gatting's way. The immortal advertising slogan, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," could have been coined for the occasion.

The absence of vice-captain Dilip Vengsarkar, one of the coolest heads in the Indian side, had already cast an ominous shadow over India's fortunes, though the target was well within the available talent. Panic, however, was a factor nobody had taken into consideration. Gatting himself singled out Kapil's dismissal as the turning point in the match. "It was a fairly silly shot to hit" he said in a typically British understatement. Though the others, Srikkanth, Shastri, Sidhu, Pandit, Sharma and More, can apportion the blame among themselves for not keeping their heads, as the situation clearly dictated, the award for the most irresponsible shot of the tournament had only one contender—Indian Captain Kapil Dev.

As West Indian Captain Vivian Richards observed: "That was the main difference, the way the English players kept their cool and the kind of shot Kapil played. This kind of cricket is also a mind game." Kapil defended himself by claiming that he wanted to bring the target run rate down for the later batsmen. "It was just one of those things," he shrugged. It was. One of those things that spelled the difference between winning and losing.

Already, if somewhat inevitably, the country's vast cricketing public is ascribing dubious reasons for India's shallow surrender. Gavaskar's much-publicised pledge to never play in Calcutta again is the least of the evils circulating on the cocktail circuit. The one that has literally gained the most currency is that the Indian team was paid off by a betting syndicate. Though ridiculous to an extreme, Kapil's Devils (now being pronounced without the 'D') can draw scant consolation from the fact that much the same charge is being levelled against Imran and his side in Pakistan. A defeat in unadulterated view of home crowds is a pill that Indian cricket crowds find impossible to ingest.

Yet, it is probably those very same crowds who are ultimately to blame for India's under-par performance. The subcontinental cricket craze has developed one fatal flaw—it separates cricketers from their mortal moorings, pumps them with pomp and property and then turns around and demands a price they are often unable to pay. One electronics firm, overcome by the excitement, pledged enormous sums of money to the Indian team for scoring sixes and boundaries—another reason being advanced for India's eventual failure.



■ A section of the crowd at Bangalore

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■ The teams line up at the start of the series

But as the Indian side learnt to their cost, there are no free lunches in cricket. The contrast in consistency was obvious. Three Australians, Marsh (428), Boon (447) and Dean Jones (349) crossed the 300-run mark. Of the eight bowlers who got more than 10 wickets, four featured in the finals. In seven Reliance Cup innings, only one Indian batsman, Gavaskar, reached 300 runs. By the same token, only one Indian bowler, Maninder Singh, got more than 10 wickets.

Now, with Gavaskar's exit into the wings, the long hard road to rehabilitation will once again have to be negotiated. Kapil, despite his indiscretions, is not in any great danger of losing his captaincy for the immediate series against the West Indies, but the pressure on him now will be remorseless. The only find of the tournament is Navjot Singh Sidhu—if no miracles are expected from him each time he ambles to the crease. The biggest disappointment in the Indian side has been Ravi Shastri. Despite his recent stint in English county cricket, Shastri showed that he still lacks the necessary maturity. Chetan Sharma is useful when the pressure is off and a liability when it is on. Prabhakar's performance gave no great cause for rejoicing either, which still leaves a large question mark over the Indian bowling attack.

There are also dangerous signs of a revival of the age-old malady of Indian cricket—dissension in the ranks. It is no secret that relations between Kapil and vice-captain Dilip Vengsarkar are running rather ragged and the resultant loss of team cohesion is obvious. Perhaps a little more stick and a few less carrots is the diet that could help trim the team.

BUT eventually, the real winners of the Reliance Cup was cricket—and the magnificent crowds at Eden Gardens. As former England captain Tony Lewis said: "The people of Calcutta have won and both India and Pakistan have succeeded. But above all, cricket has come out on top. India and Pakistan can relax—the 1987 World Cup was a raging success." Despite the earlier misgivings, the organisational and cricketing success of the Reliance Cup was a major coup for the subcontinent. Says New Zealand skipper Jeff Crowe: "It has been a fantastic experience. Those responsible for conducting this tournament have done a great job." Adds Richards: "The Reliance Cup has been a wonderful event for the subcontinent. The organisation has been good and it doesn't seem like a bad idea at all to have moved the tournament out of England."

In the end, the Reliance Cup really belonged to the organisers and the sponsors who made it possible. "Like all Indians, I was disappointed that we didn't make it to the finals, but it has been worth every penny," says Anil Ambani, executive director of Reliance Industries, the company that sponsored the event. Adds I.S. Bindra, convenor of the Reliance Cup Organising Committee: "The tournament exceeded even our own expectations. Despite the fact that neither India nor Pakistan figured in the finals, the atmosphere at Calcutta was fantastic and the setting absolutely superb. The Reliance Cup can justifiably be called a historic success."

The fireworks that exploded over Calcutta's skies last fortnight may not have been matched by those on field but what was on display was the ultimate test of cricketing abilities. It was, somehow, a fitting finale that the two countries that taught cricket to the rest of the world should have starred in the final credits. The best team may not have won but cricket did, and that is compensation enough.

—DILIP BOBB

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The Price of Overconfidence

IN instant cricket the difference between winning and losing is that of a hairline. There is little scope for mistakes and even less for correcting them. Even a side like England which came in for all-round praise for its professionalism and workman-like approach, perished due to its own mistakes in the finals against Australia.

How topsy-turvy things can go in one-day cricket is clear from the fact that the respective toppers of Pool A and Pool B—India and Pakistan—did not make it to the finals. And eventually the cup went to the side whose skipper had very modestly said on reaching New Delhi that he would be very happy if his team could make it to the last-four stage.

India and Pakistan, who were the likely candidates for the finals after their successes in pool games, fell in the penultimate round due to overconfidence. Pakistan suffered from this feeling more than us because the media had built them up as some kind of a super team. Besides, their run-up to the World Cup had been very good.

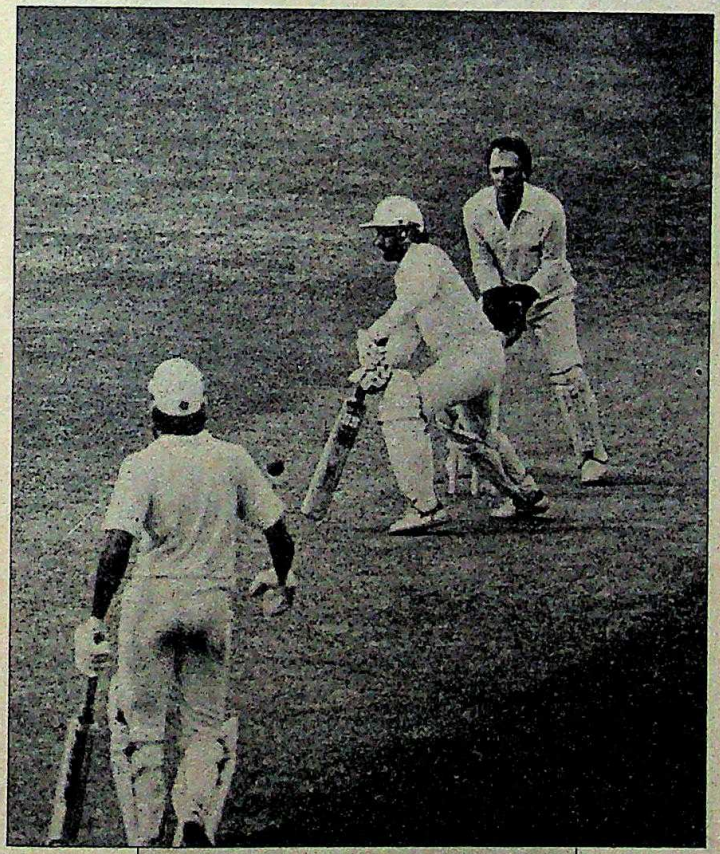
From the public's point of view, the fact that neither India nor Pakistan made it to the November 8 game at the refurbished Eden Gardens, which looks lovelier than ever before, was a great disappointment. I had gone to Calcutta to witness the final and was invariably mobbed by people in the hotel wanting to know, "What went wrong?"

I can only say that we were let down by overconfidence. We were feeling good when we took the field in the Bombay semi-finals. Being confident is a positive sign, but the moment you start taking things for granted, you have had it for sure.

In Bombay this hampered our chances considerably. Even after England had posted a 250 plus total, we weren't too bothered. Though I must admit that Graham Gooch created a lot of problems for us by sweeping out our spinners, Maninder Singh and Ravi Shastri. He is a very professional and seasoned cricketer. In order to tackle our spinners, he practised his sweep shots on the days leading up to the game.

Although I had said in my last column that the presence of only leg-spinners in my team would not make any difference, now I am inclined to think differently. In the semi-finals we could have done with an off-spinner. Some of the initial runs which we conceded to Gooch and Gatting by way of sweeps, could have been prevented if we had had an off-spinner in the side. It is easy to pack the leg side for an off-spinner.

Another factor which went against us was the poor running between the wickets. Somehow, none of the boys was willing to go for the singles and twos. Everybody wanted to go just for the big hits. This created problems for us in the opening game at Madras. We didn't have reason to complain about it in the other games as we won them quite convincingly.



Somehow, none of the boys was willing to go for the singles and the twos. Everybody wanted to go just for the big hits. This created problems for us.

Problems arose in the semi-final. The England side, to begin with, fielded very well. A batsman easily gets frustrated when some of his best hits are cut off by the fielders. He tries harder and normally ends up getting out. In such situations, good running between the wickets can ease the pressure on the batsmen considerably. In fact, some sharp singles and twos can also force the fielding side to commit errors.

The theory that one-day cricket is all about big hitting is a lot of nonsense. You can score as quickly by running some good runs. In this respect, the Australian openers David Boon and Geoff Marsh showed themselves to be good examples. They have a tremendous understanding and always tested the fielding side with their quick running between the wickets. You can easily average four runs per over in the first 40 overs and then really open the floodgates in the last 10.

Against England we must have lost at least 30 runs because of the reluctance of our batsmen to go quickly for the first and then try for the second. Had we taken these runs, the winning target would have been much closer.

I have been criticised by many people, including the England skipper Mike Gatting, for holing out to him at mid-wicket off Hemmings. The only reason I went for that stroke was that we were

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fairly comfortably placed at that stage. The asking rate had come down to nearly five runs per over. At this stage I went and spoke to Azharuddin. I told him that I wanted to go for the big hits in the next two overs in an attempt to score 20 to 30 runs.

That shot off Hemmings did not carry beyond the ropes, but had I succeeded in doing what I had planned, the asking rate would have come down to below four per over in just 15 balls. In any case, there was no need for us to worry as we needed approximately 85 runs in 17 overs. With six wickets in hand that is no target. I went for a six and the ball fell short of the ropes by a couple of yards.

The media has held this one stroke responsible for the Indian debacle at Bombay. I couldn't disagree with them more. When I left, India needed exactly 87 runs for a win and the asking rate was just a little above five runs per over. Had the later batsmen merely kept their wickets intact the runs would have come our way automatically.

I would like to know what a lot of other batsmen would have done at this stage had they been in my shoes. During a chat Viv Richards told me that he would have done much the same thing. And I am sure that Gatting, who was very critical of my 'irresponsible' shot, would have done the same thing that I had tried. At least I didn't play a reverse sweep like him in the finals which cost his side the Cup.

It is easy to look back on events and try to ascertain what went wrong. In the middle you are alone. You barely get a second to make up your mind. It is like trying to defuse an explosive device. One mistake and you can blow up your chances.

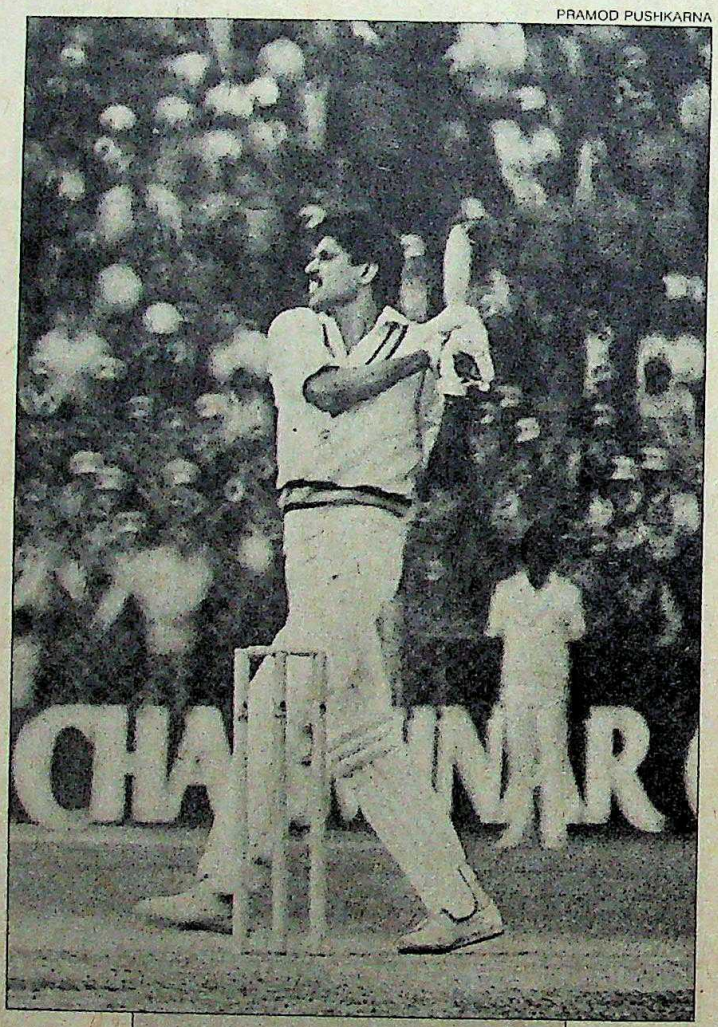
But you have to take the step as it will in any case blow up, once the time runs out. It would have been hailed as a master stroke had the ball sailed over Gatting's head. The very people who are now calling me foolhardy for playing that stroke would have said in awe, "What guts!" What people think doesn't really bother me. The important thing is that there was a way out of the tense situation and I tried to do it.

Certainly it is a great disappointment to lose in the Reliance Cup. Especially after the team got into its stride. But there was some good news also. The best was the arrival of Navjot Sidhu. We have a tradition of producing a wonder-boy after every two to three years. Sidhu in my opinion is going to carry that label in the coming years.

Any team which aspires to win matches must have an attacking number three. Sidhu played that role magnificently. Ironically, the very strokes which proved his undoing three years ago when he made his debut against the West Indies, have made him a superstar now. Those days he was not hitting the ball hard enough. As a result, he got caught in the deep very often. I presume he must have done a lot of strengthening work in the last couple of years. His big hits seem to suggest that.

Sidhu has shown his ability in one-day cricket and I hope he carries on the good work in the Tests. In the coming years he and Azharuddin have a very vital role to play for India. Now that Sunil Gavaskar is out, according to newspaper reports, the Indian batting will have to lean heavily on the shoulders of Dilip Vengsarkar, Sidhu and Azhar.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sidhu played many innings in the World Cup when the batting maestro Gavaskar was at the other end. Gavaskar is an institution when it comes to batting and everybody can learn something from him. I am sure Sidhu must have noticed how Gavaskar rotates the strike, concentrates and then takes a breather. Sidhu will need all these qualities to become a great batsman. Right now his problem is that he doesn't know when to take a break. Frequently in this championship he has got out after settling down as his hits fell far short of the fence.

The reason why I have so much faith in him today is that few people can match his dedication and single-mindedness. For him life is cricket, cricket and cricket. Usually he locks himself up in a room and on many occasions I had to literally push him out of the room. Now that he has had an exceptional run in the World Cup, people's expectations are going to be very high. He should be prepared for criticism if at all he hits a lean patch.

Gatting criticised my 'irresponsible' shot in Bombay off Hemmings. At least I didn't play a reverse sweep like him in the finals which cost them the cup.

If Sidhu's emergence swells my breast with pride, then there is another happening which makes me sad. Though Gavaskar has not yet intimated the Board of Cricket Control, I understand from press reports and from other cricketers that he has retired from first class cricket.

It feels funny to think that Gavaskar will not be in the middle when we play the next game. He has been around for more years than any of us. At least I have got

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used to seeing him whenever I go out to play for India.

His contribution to Indian cricket has been immense and the team will certainly miss him, especially since he was playing so well now. The 103 at Nagpur is a winner. I am very glad that he got his century as this was one landmark which had eluded him so far. He has scored well over 3,000 runs in one-day cricket and it was only right that he got a hundred. And the manner in which he got it benefited the occasion. We needed to step up the run rate to top the pool and he ensured it with his blitzkrieg. He is a master batsman and when he wants to, he can score as he wishes. A lot depends on his mood.

The Indian batting depends a lot on him. Take the case of the Bombay semi-final. I don't think we should have faced the problems which we eventually did had Gavaskar stayed at the crease for some time. Every side needs some solid batsmen like him and Dilip to keep one end intact in times of crises. Our misfortune was that Dilip was unwell that day.

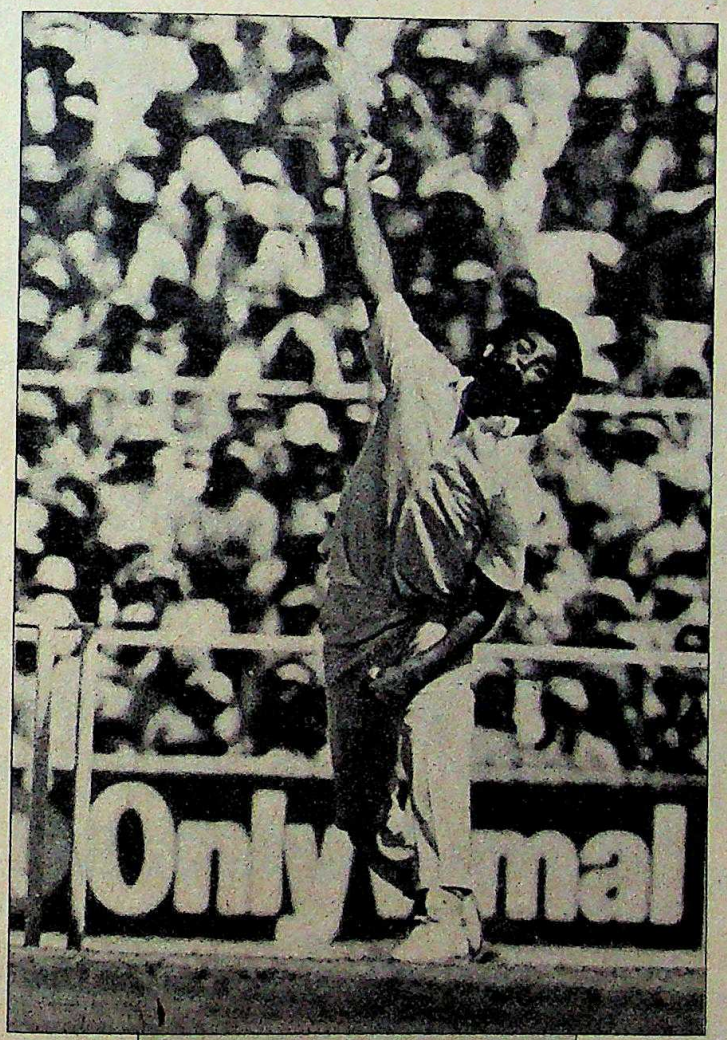
In the coming seasons the complaint that Indian bowling lacks bite should also be taken care of. Maninder came into his own in this competition. He has matured a lot in the last season. He bowled the former delivery also quite effectively. And the fact that he got as many as 14 wickets is a sure sign of his emergence as a strike bowler. Even Shastri, though he was not as successful, bowled very intelligently.

Our hat trick boy Chetan Sharma also put to rest all the criticism that has been levelled against him. I am not going to talk about his hat trick. Everybody has already written volumes about it. What I want to emphasise is his ability to do more than he is capable of doing. He is a pocket-sized human dynamo.

Chetan has had some tough moments in the last one season. First was the six by Miandad at Sharjah and then the injury against Pakistan in the last series. He was out for a while. Luck smiled on him when he returned to the Indian side for the World Cup but only momentarily. He suffered a hairline fracture on his left thumb in the benefit match against Pakistan at New Delhi.

Our team doctor, Ali Irani, said Chetan would be out for about two weeks. I have been accused of favouring Chetan by not asking for someone to take his place. This is all rubbish. It's just that Chetan was looking and bowling so well. He has shed about 10 kg in the last season and was really very fit. Even though we knew that he would be out for the first two matches I was willing to keep him as I have faith in him.

The Board officials obviously didn't share my confidence and during the opening game against Australia decided to replace him. I felt it was unfair. To begin with, the Board should have at least consulted the captain or the manager. Anyway, after I came to know of the Board's decision I personally went to Chetan's room and asked him to honestly tell me how he felt. He assured me that he was feeling all right. I had no reason to disbelieve him and decided to keep him in the side till the Board provided us with a replacement. I was not in favour of a replacement at this stage as the new person would have taken some time to settle down. Besides, I was confident that Chetan would be able to play at Bombay. The only reason why we eventually didn't play him was that I wanted him to recover totally before the crucial return game against Australia at New Delhi.



Our hat trick boy Chetan Sharma also put to rest all the criticism that has been levelled against him. He is a pocket-sized human dynamo.

I must compliment our team doctor, Ali Irani, for a magnificent job. His enthusiasm and the frequent sessions of physiotherapy he put us through kept all the players on their toes. I am sure that he will be engaged for all series in the future also.

Before I congratulate the Australians, a word of praise is also due to the organisers of the Reliance Cup and the well behaved crowds at most centres. The entire tournament went off very smoothly. None of the players had any complaints whatsoever.

The crowd at most of the centres was well behaved. Did you notice that not once did anybody invade the ground? This is something unheard of in India. But what really touched my heart was the ovation we received at the Taj Hotel in Bombay after losing the semi-final to England. People started clapping the moment we entered the lobby. This response made the pain of defeat significantly less for us.

All said and done, the Aussies were magnificent—for the simple reason that they were the winning side on the day it mattered most. Allan Border deserves all the credit for transforming the side into a world beating one. I am sure Australian cricket, which has been in the doldrums for some years, will now be on the rise. Well done Allan.

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THE RED RUSH

THE State Trading Corporation of India (STC) is poised to join a roster of 30 Indian companies that have submitted proposals to the Union Government to set up enterprises in the USSR. The Oberois, for example, propose to build a hotel at Tashkent for the Russians, while Parle is keen on launching a bottling plant. Joining their ranks is the STC with a joint venture newsprint project. Moscow had informally sounded the public sector company on the project some months ago, and STC has held talks with a Soviet delegation on it. The plan is still tentative, but it is likely that India will buy some of the newsprint, the rest being used in the USSR or sold to third countries. The Red Rush is explained by the so-called Perestroika or Soviet reconstruction programme, which offers business opportunities to Indian companies.

REVVING UP

AFTER bouncing back into the black, tractor and light commercial vehicle (LCV) manufacturer Eicher is revving up for the fast lane. In the works are sophisticated security systems, industrial electronics, tractor-drawn agricultural machines and harvestor combines, a wider range of tractors and even forays into lighter and heavy duty trucks. Eicher will branch out into the full range of trucks only after its LCV venture turns profitable next year. The investment: anywhere from Rs 25 crore to Rs 100 crore, depending on the kind of trucks that will be first produced. Clearly, the project will pit Eicher against commercial vehicle heavyweights Ashok Leyland and TELCO. The group is also negotiating with European firms on a tie-up to make unpickable, mechanical locks with keys that provide different levels of access, and electronic and magnetic security systems. The diversifications are meant to offset the ups and downs in its agriculture-based businesses and the aim is to push group sales from roughly Rs 150 crore this year to Rs 400 crore in three years.

FUTURE UNDER QUESTION

THE future of Chamundi Mopeds, the Rs 22-crore venture promoted by the Bangalore-based Mehtas, continues to be uncertain. The Mehtas are still talking to Chamundi's technical collaborator Peugeot on the French company buying into the losing mopeds company. The Mehtas had at one time decided to hawk Chamundi on the recommendation of the financial institutions, but changed their mind after the Karnataka Government granted Chamundi major sales tax concessions. A clearer picture of the firm's future will emerge over the next fortnight, after the Mehtas hear from the institutions on a package to revive the company.

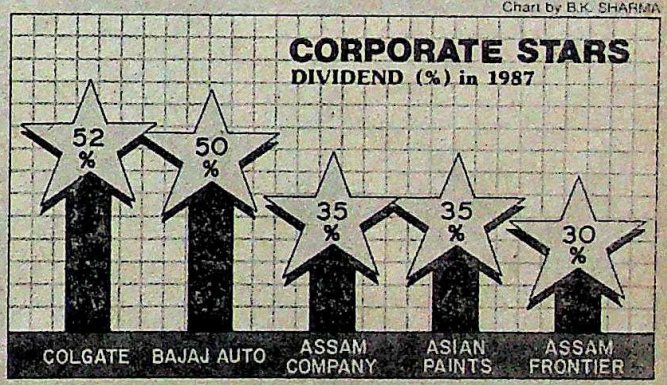
A DELAYED DEAL

THE Hindujas' take-over of Ashok Leyland may take slightly longer than had initially been planned by the Rover Group in London. One of the conditions of the sale had been that payment for the 39 per cent overseas shareholding in Ashok Leyland should be made by November 20. But the final announcement by the Rover Group says the Hindujas and Fiat Iveco of Italy (who bid jointly) will pay up some time in 1988. The reason for the postponement of the payment and the clinching of the deal is still undisclosed. But the new shareholders are expected to have their nominees on the Ashok Leyland board by the end of the year.

DISTURBING SIGNALS

PRIVATE corporations continue to reward shareholders with fat dividends. A financial daily's study of dividends declared up to September 1987 shows that the average rate of dividend has inched up from 16.04 per cent in 1986 to 16.14 per cent in 1987. The uptrend is in line with the gradual upswing in dividend rates over the past few years, underscored by a Reserve Bank of India study in late 1986. This year too, the star performers are perennial favourites such as Assam Company, Assam Frontier, Asian Paints, Bajaj Auto, Colgate, along with smaller concerns like Malankara Rubber.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



all of which paid over 30 per cent dividend (*see chart*). Nevertheless, there are clear signals that the good times are coming to an end. Fewer companies have maintained their dividend rate this year than last year, fewer of those who had skipped dividends are back on the dividend list compared with 1986, and even fewer companies have declared dividends of over 25 per cent than last year.

PLAYING A NEW ROLE

A rash of company take-overs may soon be in the offing. The reason: foreign banks in India are aggressively leaping into the act. Some of these banks in fact have drawn up their own hit lists of foreign-controlled companies ripe for take-over either by other multinationals eager to enter the country or by local businessmen. The banks believe that many parent companies overseas can be induced to willingly part with their controlling interest in subsidiaries in India because it would fetch them a fat price and because their dividend earnings are, in any case, fairly small. To drive the point home, bankers are busy presenting their case to foreign parent corporations and to potential buyers, hoping to get a percentage of the final selling price as their commission.

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KANDLA

Free-for-all Zone

The Government cracks down on erring units

THE dull brown earth stretches to the horizon, as parched as the export processing zone that is its centrepiece. For months now, this little industrial outpost in Gujarat has kicked up dust. Nearly half the units at the Kandla Free Trade Zone (KFTZ) have been lying closed for lack of orders. One of the companies in the zone is fighting a landmark case with the Government, and allegations of hanky-panky are flying thick and fast.

Last fortnight, the storm broke when the Government issued show cause notices to a host of companies at Kandla, charging them with violating the conditions listed in their licences. The rumpus cast a harsh glare on Indo-Soviet trade—a sensitive topic in official circles. It also raised a prickly question: are Indian exporters subsidising the Soviet Union's hard currency requirements?

Armed with a licence from the Government, exporters can set up shop in the country's six export production enclaves, or even launch 100 per cent export-oriented units (EOUs) outside them. Here they can bring in raw materials or semi-knocked-down goods free of duty without paying taxes for five years. But the Government tags on a major stipulation to their licences: they have to process goods, adding a minimum value of 30 per cent or more.

Many exporters have seen in this a passport to easy money. Instead of processing wares and adding value, they've been buying virtually finished products from the West for hard currencies, nominally adding a few gizzmos and reshipping the stuff to the Soviet Union.

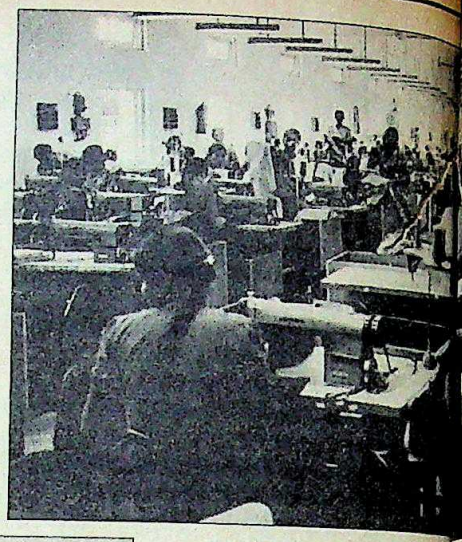
"You just bring it in, change the label and export it," confides a senior representative of the India-USSR Chamber of Commerce airily. Adds an entrepreneur at Bombay's Santa Cruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ): "I don't think anyone just changes names—that's a metaphorical statement. But strange things are known to happen at Kandla."

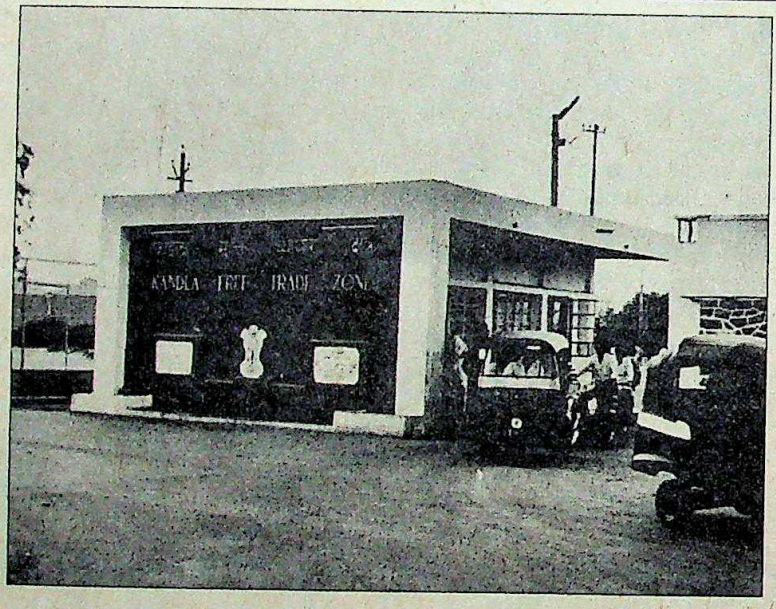
The label-changing game is peculiar to Indo-Soviet commercial relations because trade between the two nations is conducted in rupees. So what Indian exporters are doing is to pay out in dollars or yen to bring in the rupees: a case of exports costing the country foreign exchange. The USSR could thus get a brand new Japanese or American product for rupees, instead of forking out hard currency. "The Russians don't want to spend their hard currency. They'd rather pay 30 or 35 per cent extra in rupees. Ultimately, we just become representatives of Japanese or American companies," explains the Chamber of Commerce official.

There is, of course, another side to the Soviet buying from India. As industrialist B.K. Modi, whose Modi Xerox and Indian Xerographic Systems export copiers to the USSR, points out: "There is no problem of political decisions blocking supplies, as might be the case with American or European countries." Even so, the Soviets wind up with not getting spares: Indian exporters can't supply these as easily as they can semi-finished wares.

From the country's perspective, such deals fail to promote local manufacture. Kandla is particularly vulnerable to the problem as it sells most of its wares to the USSR. A hefty 82 per cent of its Rs 237-crore exports went to the Soviet Union last year. Indeed, more than 100 of the 125 units at Kandla sprang up six years ago after the Government handed out tax benefits to export zones, most of them to service Soviet orders which had begun pouring in. In contrast, fewer than 10 units at SEEPZ sell only to the USSR.

Inevitably, stories abound of companies at Kandla barely assembling and packaging copiers and cat-scanners, of importing finished ski boots and tagging on laces to meet the value-added condition. One Kandla major imports all the chemicals, mixes them, and exports





KFTZ (left): inside a factory (above) and the Simac building: value-added rumpus

Indian exporters are paying dollars for substantial quantities of imported components and selling products to the USSR for rupees—a case of exports costing the country foreign exchange.

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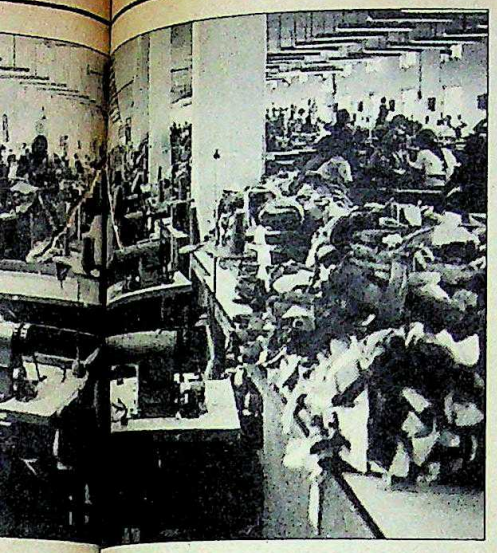

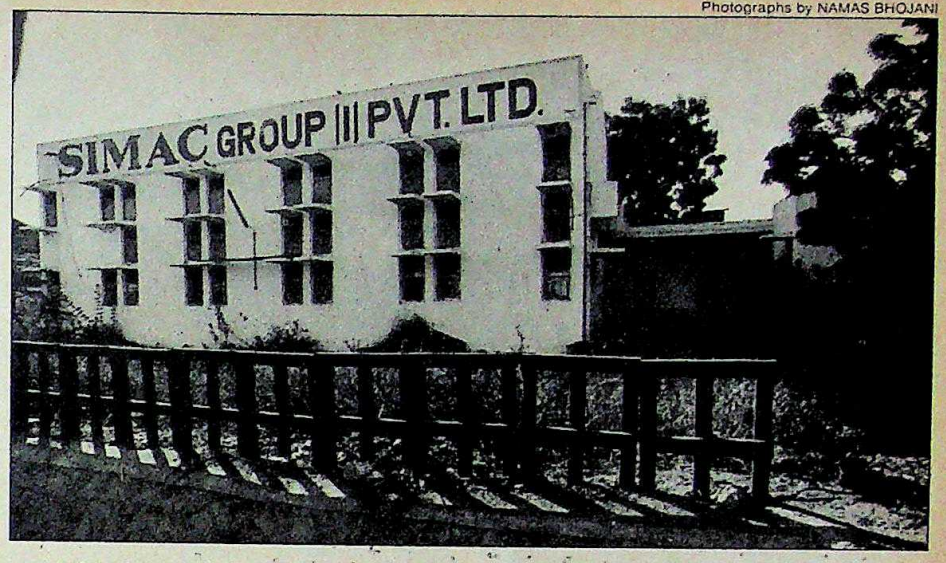

shampoo packaged in imported bottles topped with imported bottle caps.

"Other than garment, pharmaceutical and stainless steel utensil units, nearly all the units at Kandla import things in a semi-knocked-down condition," alleges Meghjibhai Meheshwari, president of the KFTZ General Workers' Union. "One company used to just import brushes and handles separately, put the two together and export them." And D.A. Shetty, consultant to garments manufacturer Milton's (Pvt) Ltd, which diversified into fire hoses at Kandla, tells of rivals having imported rubber hoses, cutting them to length and then exporting them till Milton's blew the whistle on the racket.

On the firing line too have been such firms as the Rs 11-crore Indsu, the engineering products company linked with Amitabh Bachchan. Indsu has been accused of shipping in almost finished equipment and exporting it, a charge the company contests. Says a company official: "The allegations are a political stunt. People outside don't understand these things." He claims that medical equipment was assembled and tested before it was exported, and that assembly is inevitable because the company is in the first phase of production.

Assembling equipment for export is not illegal, however undesirable it may be. The Government allows firms to do this initially, imposing on them a phased local manufacturing programme. Nor is the practice confined to Kandla. Indian Xerographics quite legitimately began assembling copiers three years ago in Uttar Pradesh with hardly any manufacturing facilities. The actual test comes in what the licences allow them to do—and companies that don't add the licence-specified value plainly violate the law.

The dividing line between the two is at times thin, but a number of enterprises fall flat on the second count. Logically, this should not happen at all. The Government polices export zones and asks exporters to submit dozens of import and export documents. Then, the customs checks 10 per cent of all imports into export zones to make sure that finished goods are not brought in. Still, some palm greasing can go a long way.

THE question, however, is: how widespread are these practices? Few really know. The India-USSR Chamber of Commerce functionary estimates that nearly 70 per cent of the electronic goods shipped to the USSR last year (estimated value: over Rs 100 crore) were just assembled in India. The local contribution to other manufactured products is probably far higher. Even a conservative reckoning—that just 10 per cent of the Rs 1,890 crore worth of manufactured products exported to the USSR comprise goods that are barely assembled here—would give a figure of some Rs 190 crore.

Predictably, exporters contest such assessments. A senior executive of Hindustan Lever, which has a cosmetics and garments unit at Kandla, maintains that less than 10 per cent of the entrepreneurs there are involved in shenanigans. And in public at least, the Government joins those who play down the problem. Says Union Minister of State for Commerce P.R. Das Munshi: "A campaign is on in the press. There's a big gap between press reports and the reality on the ground. Everyone says it's done. I visited Kandla six months ago, but no one could prove the charges."

Proof is indeed difficult to come by, but the Government is evidently soft-pedalling the issue. The Soviet Union accounts for around 18 per cent of India's exports, and officialdom clearly does not wish to ruffle its feathers. Equally clearly, there is a gap between official statements and actions. Why else would it have started to get tough now?

Last fortnight, the office of KFTZ Development Commissioner, T.C.A. Rangadurai, served notice on exporters in the zone, charging them with not delivering on their promised value addition. Rangadurai declined to talk to the press, but executives of firms in the zone said at least 10 companies had been clobbered, including the MJ group of companies, the Bombay-based export house (total sales to the USSR: Rs 80 crore).

An MJ executive explained that his company had signed a Soviet contract some years ago and that the company project report had promised to add around 33 per cent value to a product. He then added that the Government had jacked this up to 60 per cent and that the company had told the Government in writing that it would be unable to meet this target and went ahead with the project.

In fact, the crackdown began last year after residents at Gandhidam, a small town close to Kandla, wrote to authorities in New Delhi listing a series of corporate sins. Newspaper reports too have indicted most companies at Kandla with merely assembling equipment. So the Government began asking new entrants to Kandla to export at least half their output to non-rupee-paying nations or general currency areas (GCAs). This year, it went one better: at least one new Bombay-based garment manufacturer was asked in July to export his entire output to GCA countries.

The tougher official attitudes have led to legal fireworks. Last year, the Government shut the Kandla factories of the Simac companies, claiming among

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other things, that it had failed to export half its output of knitting machines to GCA countries, as stipulated in its licence. The company went to the Gujarat high court and won its case, and the Government appealed to the Supreme Court which in turn referred it back to the high court.

The case is still on, but feelings are running high at Kandla about the Government's new attitude and about one-sided media reports, so much so that exporters even considered a national advertising campaign to convey their viewpoint. Says Ajay Kothary, a former president of the KFTZ Industries Association: "Wasn't knocked-down condition imports mentioned in the government approvals? The Government is trying to cover up wrong policy decisions." Ashok Kaul, chief executive of AMD Corporation, the Rs 20-crore socks company, argues that the newspapers have been patently unfair. "They cannot malign us like this."

The exporters' case is that a few of them initially imported almost finished stuff, that this was inevitable because manufacturers couldn't invest in equipment till they were sure of repeat orders, and that they are being made scapegoats for a practice that is widespread even outside export zones. Argues the Hindustan Lever executive: "One of the bedrocks of our policy is to make available imported raw materials for export production through export zones, advance licensing, and 100 per cent EOUs. In none of the others do you look at it in terms of label-changing. Why this hoo-ha about export processing zones?"

Clearly too, the depreciation of the rupee against hard currencies has aided the drop in value addition. "The prices offered by the Russians have risen, but not proportionately. If you import $10 worth of goods and have to export $14 worth to get 40 per cent value addition but get only $11, your value addition will go down," argues Association President R.D. Shah.

Exporters offer several other defences, but what is plain is that the Government, in its eagerness to woo entrepreneurs to export zones, has allowed them to get away with questionable deals for far too long. The only silver lining is that it has flipped a new leaf. Says a Commerce Ministry bureaucrat: "Now that trade with the USSR is going to expand, we're going to be careful about what processes manufacturers adopt." If nothing else, that marks a new realism on an old problem.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

BIHAR

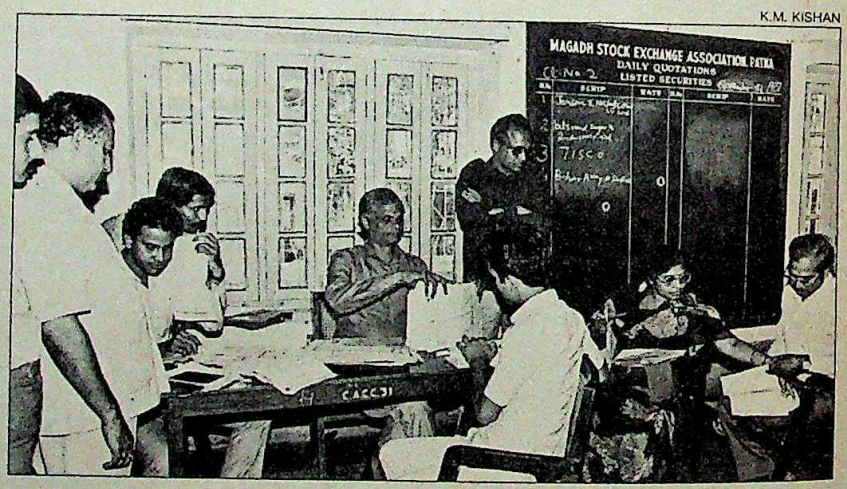
Low Stock

BIHAR'S depressing industrial scene brightened briefly on Diwali-eve, with the opening of the Magadh Stock Exchange (MSE) in Patna—the fifteenth in India but the first in the state. But the smiles were quickly replaced by disappointment.

Only three companies, including TISCO and Jenson and Nicholson, had been listed on the stock exchange till last fortnight. And the MSE's plans to get 300 members went awry when only 15 paid up their fees. Many would-be-members were also suspicious of the designs behind setting up the MSE in the first place. "The stock exchange is in the hands of a few individuals," says a senior official of the Bihar Chamber of Commerce (BCC).

The stock exchange was conceived by the BCC and the Bihar Industries Association three years ago. BCC Secretary-General and MSE Director S.N. Patwari says that the main reason for the poor response is that big industrial groups in Bihar have their headquarters outside the state. Trade sources, however, say that there is a lack of confidence in the stock exchange, and point out that even MSE President A.S. Verma has not had his company, Kalyanpur Lime and Cement, listed. But Verma says it is in the process of being listed. "Whenever a new stock exchange is set up, doubts and confusion persist", he says.

K.M. KISHAN



Magadh Stock Exchange: poor start

Critics see politics in the selection of members too. The MSE initially wanted to enrol 100 members, but when the number of applications touched 800, decided to choose 300. Finding the deposits—Rs 50,000 each as security and Rs 10,000 as infrastructure development charges—too high, many of those selected backed out. The MSE then introduced a scheme to pay the amount in instalments, but only 150 aspirants paid the first instalment (in addition to another 15 who paid the whole sum).

Some of the members allege that the fees were deliberately kept high to scare away local brokers and bring in 'outsiders'. An MSE spokesman however, denies the allegation and says that the Union Government's rules regarding members' fees are strict and cannot be tampered with.

But many members demur, saying that the MSE has already collected more funds than it now needs. A more serious complaint refers to the selection of brokers, done by a committee which included government representatives. Trade sources allege that instead of taking in reputed brokers, the directors brought in their own family members and friends.

Brushing aside the charges, BCC Vice-President G.N. Mishra says: "Since Bihar is industrially backward, the MSE will naturally take some time to take final shape." Meanwhile, the stock exchange will have to concentrate on sorting out a messy beginning.

—FARZAND AHMED

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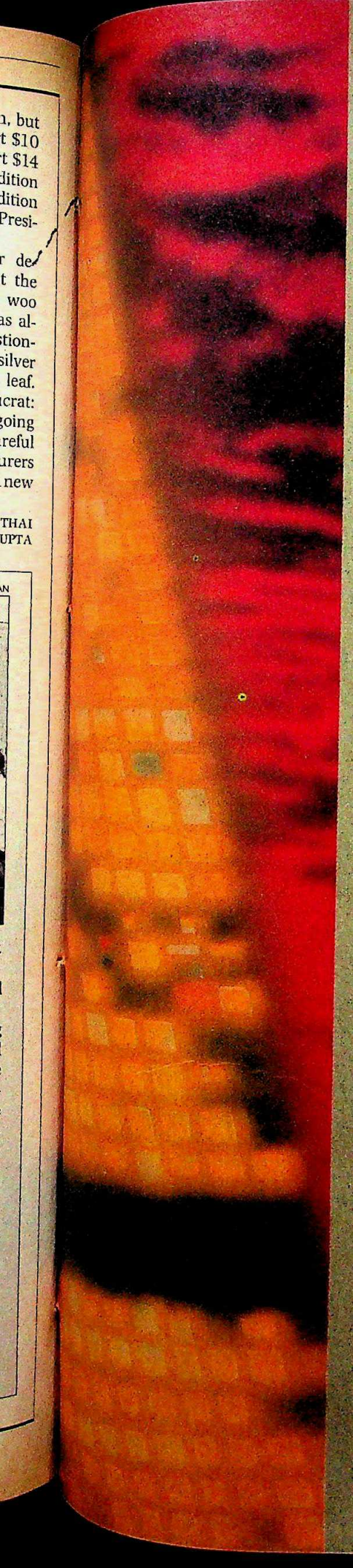

When the world's great cities could no longer grow outwards, they started growing upwards. And skyscrapers became mini-cities in themselves: with their own special breed of transport systems. New York's tallest building, the 107-floor World Trade Centre, is one such. Every day, about 1.3 lakh people travel up and down its fleet of 198 elevators—all built and kept flying-fit by Otis.

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Otis is the world's unchallenged number one in vertical transportation; twice as large as the largest competitor, and a major force in over 130 countries. In India, Otis uses the very latest international knowhow... perfected for Indian conditions through indigenous research.

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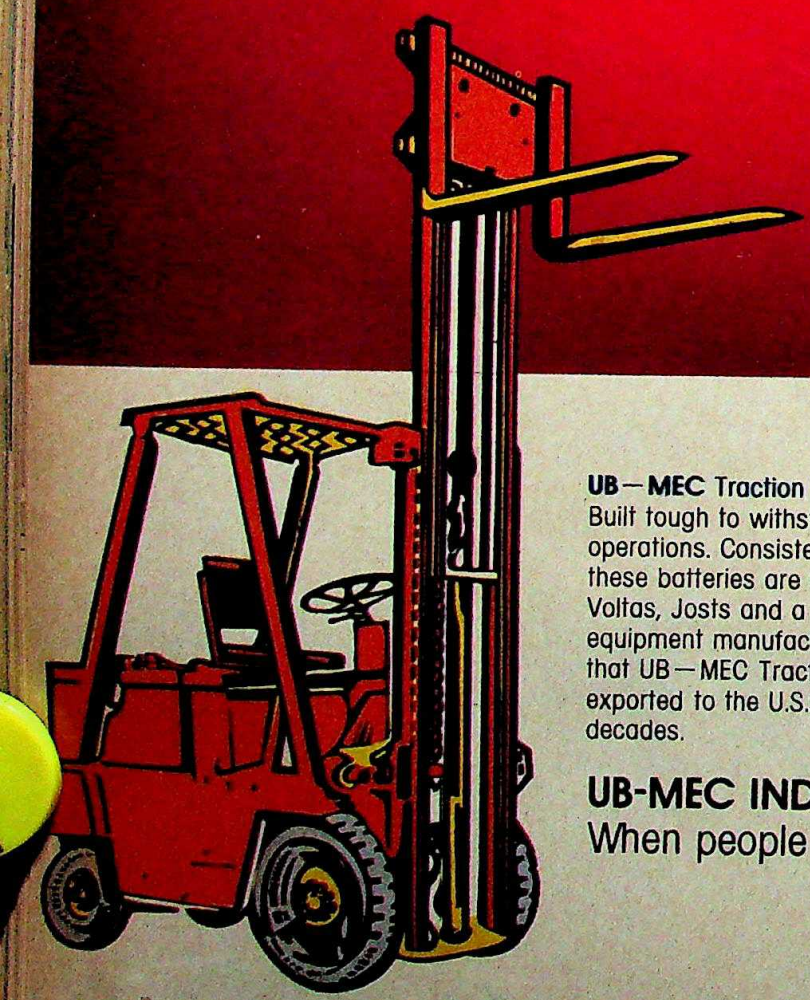

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THE US

Audacious Exchange

Profitably converting dollars into rupees

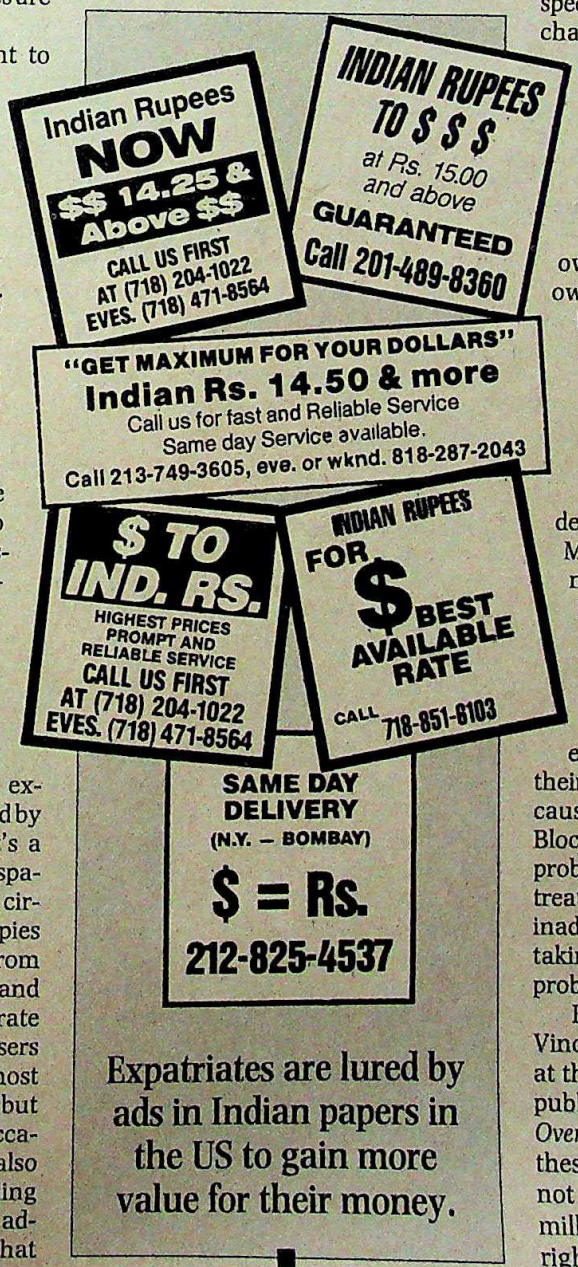
SANDWICHED between an all-American Mcdonald's and an Italian pizza joint, the modest Indian grocery shop appears to be no more than another of the thousands of little ethnic businesses spread over the New York city borough of Queens. But the shop is no hole-in-the-wall operation. All day long, as the salesman rattles the cash register with small sales of garam masala and dosa-mix, basmati rice from Amritsar and curry-patta imported from Florida, two others behind the scenes are busily counting the real bucks.

"How much do you want sent to India? If it is more than $5,000, the rate is Rs 15 per dollar. Less than that, it is Rs 14.75," says one. And if the customer seems hesitant, there quickly follows a word of reassurance. "It is all safe and legal here. You pay us only after your people in India have got the rupees. You may even pay us by cheque."

In Washington D.C. someone has already moved on after making his quick buck. "The car is still for sale, but the Remfrews left without leaving a forwarding address and I can no longer do anything about the advertisement for Indian rupees to dollars," says a pre-recorded message on the telephone number advertised in an ethnic Indian newspaper.

The ethnic Indian newspaper is where it all begins, an audacious—if immoral—racket to transfer money between the US and India at open-market premium exchange rates rather than at rates fixed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It's a kind of American havala. The newspapers, which together command a circulation of more than 60,000 copies every week, carry advertisements from dealers offering between Rs 14.25 and Rs 15 per dollar, while the official rate hovers around Rs 13. The advertisers provide telephone numbers which, most often, belong to well-established but low-profile Indian businessmen. Occasionally, however, the number may also belong to a phone call forwarding agency as was the case with the advertisement in Washington D.C. that brought a recorded reply after the dealers had chosen another front.

The mechanics of the racket, which many Indians have now begun to accept as another profitable aspect of their expatriate existence, are simple. The sender provides only the address where the money is to be delivered in India, and then calls the receiver to check that the correct amount has indeed been given. Only after he receives confirmation does he pay the equivalent in dollars to the agent in the US.



Expatriates are lured by ads in Indian papers in the US to gain more value for their money.

The other half of the racket begins when the agent's Indian partners look for Indian travellers or businessmen who need more dollars for trips abroad than what the RBI is willing to permit. "Normally," says a New York dealer, "the deal is struck at around a rupee or so per dollar more than what we pay here and that is our profit, all of which stays in India." Besides the premium, the racketeers offer income and wealth tax breaks in India whether one is buying dollars in the black market or receiving an illegal remittance. The whole business goes unrecorded as most people use their black money when buying in India and they receive the equivalent in dollars in cash under the table in the US.

The dealers repeatedly make the specious point that neither foreign exchange nor rupees leave India's shores. "It is just a business of playing around with the rupees that are already there and, in the bargain, we only help our relatives or partners make a living," said a Queens-based exchange dealer.

Similar logic is put forward by the owners and editors of the expatriate-owned Indian newspapers that regularly run the advertisements. Ramesh Murarka, publisher of *India West*, a San Francisco-based weekly, says that he once even got a call from the Indian consul-general who complained that his newspaper was carrying advertisements detrimental to Indian interests. Says Murarka: "My way of looking at it is: no money of any kind is leaving India. So, what is the harm? Excess dollars are exchanged for excess rupees and vice versa without crossing the shores."

Most publishers also defend the exchange deals on the ground that their magnitude is not large enough to cause any serious concern in North Block. "These take care of some peculiar problems such as the need for medical treatment for which the RBI sanctions inadequate money and that too after taking ages. This is a humanitarian problem," Murarka adds.

But some others disagree. Says Vinod Goel, who once taught marketing at the University of Maryland and now publishes the Washington DC-based *Overseas Tribune*: "I always turn down these ads. For a few dollars, we should not be helping people deprive India of millions of dollars which would right-fully go there." And *India Abroad*

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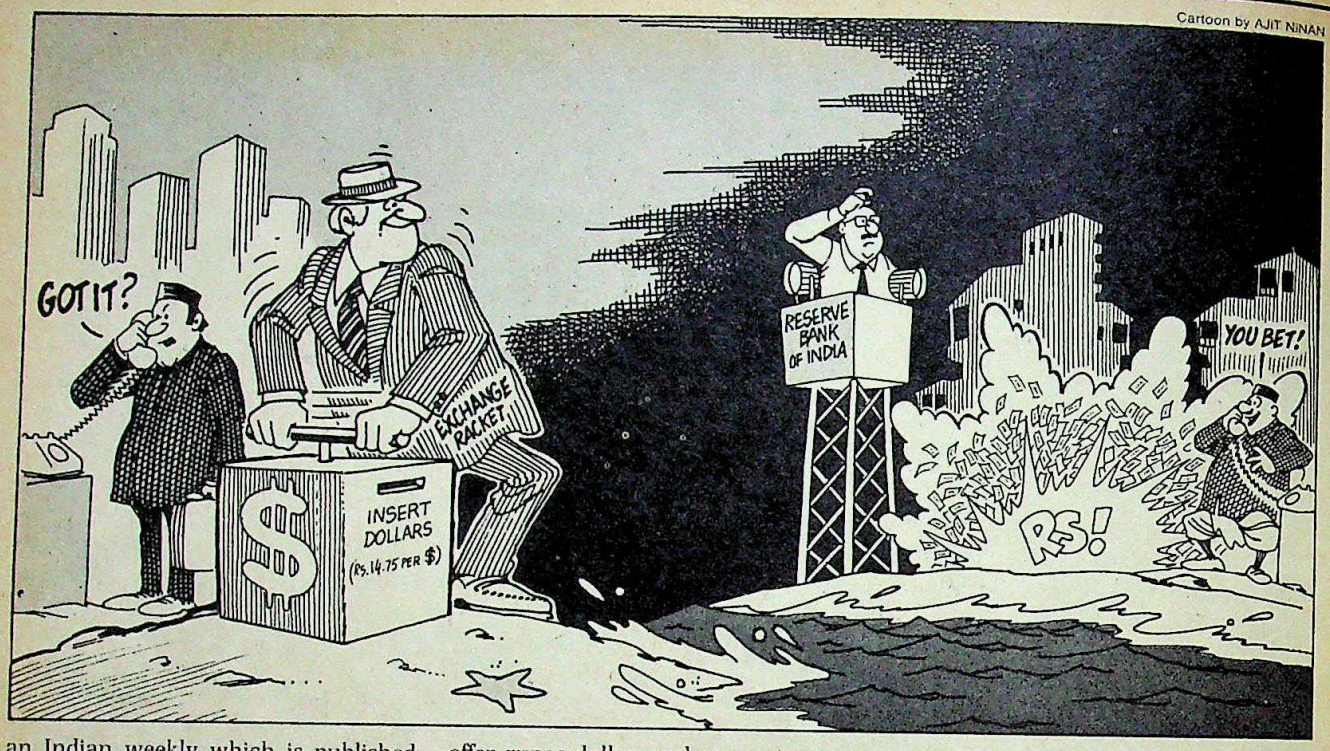

an Indian weekly which is published from new York, has also stopped accepting these advertisements on editorial grounds.

Representatives of Indian banks here estimate the extent of the trade at more than $100 million (Rs 130 crore) from the US alone. K. Ramakrishnan, the New York-based regional manager of the State Bank of India won't hazard a guess as to the approximate amount but calls it "very substantial, and by no means negligible".

Says another Indian banker, pleading anonymity: "If this is the state of affairs in the US, where expatriate Indians are well educated and where the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) efficiency makes it difficult for people to transfer too much money without accounting for it, can you imagine the situation in the Gulf, Europe and in places like Hong Kong?" According to him, such illegal transfers account for at least a part of the fall in the official remittances from the Gulf countries.

Indian bankers also point out that it is not just the shady business of unofficial exchange that robs India of foreign exchange. There are also other more overt channels. Given the free market conditions in the US, a number of prominent exchange dealers convert dollars and Indian rupees at a premium. One such firm is Deak Perera Finance which has branches in 35 countries besides practically every major American city. Company officials confirm that they offer rupee-dollar exchange at an approximately 10 per cent premium plus commission. They refuse, however, to even consider questions on the legality of the business. "I don't know what you are talking about. This is above board. Currencies get the rate they command in the global market and not what the Government offers them for," says a company representative.

A large number of professionals and small entrepreneurs, who regularly send money to their families in India, welcome the premium. So do several small-scale export-import businessmen, as for instance, those importing hand-woven rugs and handicrafts. For travelling Indian businessmen, and those wanting to avail of medical facilities in the US, the additional dollars are a way of overcoming RBI exchange limits. And finally, for a small but significant number of Indians, this is an avenue of transferring some of their inherited riches to the US.

Many Indian bankers, though, say that the premium is not the only reason why expatriate Indians go to shady dealers. This alternative also cuts the red tape involved in sending a remittance home. "Often they do it for the sake of convenience as till recently banks did not take personal cheques for money transfers to India," says Ramakrishnan. Moreover, the process of getting a draft or certified cheque, its postal transit and collection in an Indian bank, is time and money-consuming.

Several Indian settlers, including those in the legitimate business of brokering NRI investments in India, who have written to the RBI and other Indian officials about the racket, have been unable to draw any response. Says Ramakrishnan: "We too have brought the racket to the notice of the Indian Embassy. My impression is that they consulted lawyers and were told there was nothing they could do. The racket is illegal in India but here you have free market conditions and no FERA."

At the embassy, a senior diplomat disclosed that someone anonymously mailed to him the pamphlets distributed by exchange racketeers, which he sent on to New Delhi. No follow-up action has yet emerged.

While officials express their helplessness in the face of US exchange laws, an Indian settler suggested a simple method of trapping the racketeers in India. Undercover agents could use the services of the dealers in the US, and then trap the couriers in India when they deliver the rupees.

Even if the racketeers get away, the seizing of their rupee profits would end the business. And the few thousand dollars the operation would cost would be well invested, bringing an immediate gain of several million dollars. But till officials catch them at their own game, the exchange dealers will continue to rake in the big bucks.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in New York

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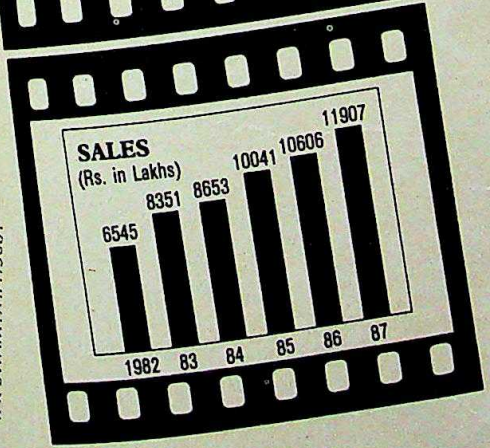

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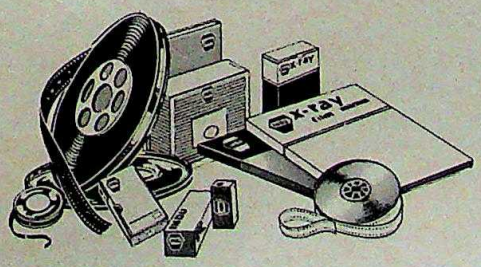

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FERTILISERS

Perilous Glut

Stocks pile up and sales drop

PRODUCE or perish is a well-known adage. But what happens when companies produce and are about to perish? They call a press conference.

Last month, the troubled fertiliser industry did just that. In the capital, Joseph Kurian, chairman of the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI), the industry's lobby group, did some plain talking: "Why are the profits of fertiliser companies bad? The reason is bad policy."

The candour is perhaps unusual—over 70 per cent of the fertiliser industry is owned by the state. But the public sector's stepping out of line is understandable. The industry has been heading for the pits for months and the situation has now got out of hand.

Faced with a glut, fertiliser firms have piled up stocks valued at Rs 1,100 crore. And many are closing shop or cutting production. Gujarat State Fertiliser Company closed one of its three plants, and a number of the 70-odd small superphosphate producers downed shutters. Sriram Fertilisers and Chemicals has trimmed output since last March by 10 to 20 per cent. "We operated at 100 per cent production capacity for the last two to three years. Now we operate at 70 per cent—which is low for the Industry," says its Executive Director D.C. Mittal.

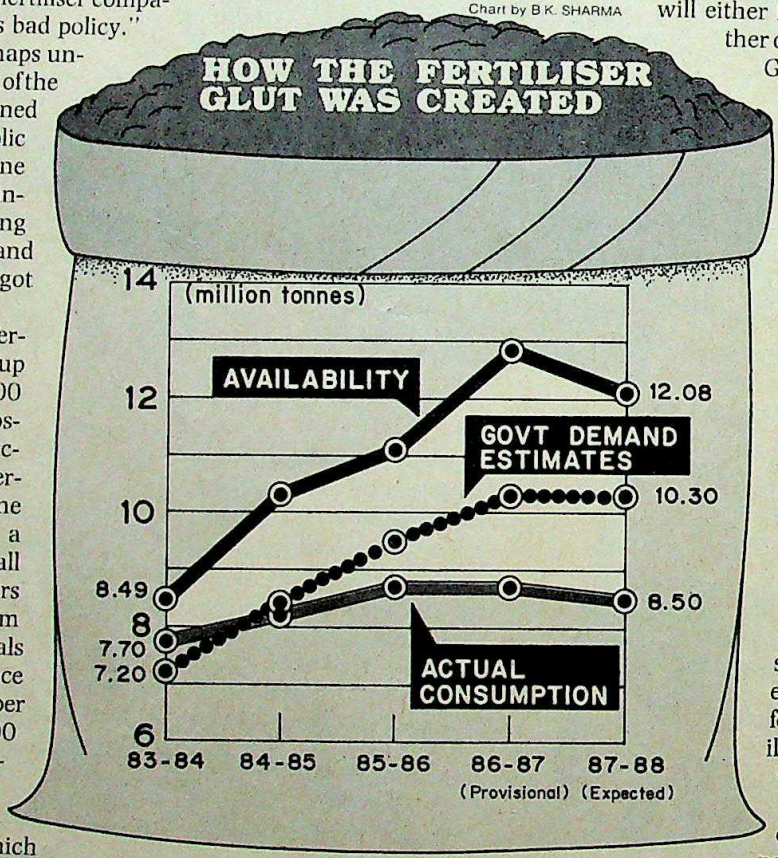
Adding fuel to the fire, the industry's bill for carrying inventories is soaring and could run to Rs 150 crore this year. In fact, interests payments for financing stock carrying costs have risen in the last few years, savaging corporate bottom lines. In Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation, interests payments have quadrupled in three years, from almost Rs 10 crore to Rs 41.44 crore.

So bleak is the financial outlook that fertiliser industry men predict meagre profits or even losses for most companies this year. Said Kurien, who also heads the state-owned Madras Fertiliser Ltd: "Most of us show signs of redness."

Clearly, the flashpoint is near—and the Government and the drought are the culprits. For one, officialdom overestimated the demand for fertiliser (*see chart*), and imported about 9 million tonnes of fertiliser over a three-year period. In the ensuing price war, companies handed out over Rs 400 crore in discounts to farmers, till the Government banned further rebates last June.

Other concerns, mainly the issue of subsidies, have now overshadowed imports. At roughly Rs 3,400 a tonne, fertiliser production costs are high in India, partly as state-owned oil firms have hiked input prices. In any event, the production cost tops the farmgate price of Rs 2,350. The Government meets the difference.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Normally, subsidies are associated with inefficiency. Here, the case is the opposite: an average 80 per cent production capacities are used. The result: subsidies have climbed alarmingly. So the Government promised to peg subsidies at Rs 1,750 crore this year, Rs 50 crore more than last year's subsidy.

And here lies the rub. Industry representatives claim that the official gambit is to keep subsidies down, regardless of the consequences. Argues Pratap Narayan, executive director of FAI: "The Government has fixed subsidies at Rs 1,750 crore this year. But new plants are scheduled to produce an extra million tonnes. So the subsidy should go up by Rs 250 crore, apart from increased costs that are not in the industry's control. The Government can't pay this. So it's trying other things."

A series of recent official moves have attracted suspicion. For instance, companies require a government order permitting them to sell their wares, since fertilisers are covered by the Essential Commodities Act. But the Government has allowed them to sell just 58 to 66 per cent of stocks this season. So the industry will either have to cut production further or store more stock. Also, the Government had informally promised to reimburse companies on inventory carrying costs, but has so far held a sphinx-like silence on this, and other dues.

Fertiliser Secretary K.D. Vasudeva concedes that the industry faces problems in marketing fertiliser. He, however, points out that imports are based on demand and supply projections. "They're an approximation and will never be perfect. Any Government would like to be in a situation of oversupply." In any event, imports have now been virtually stopped. But a government economist admitted last fortnight that, "official fertiliser demand estimates were wildly optimistic". He maintained that the Government resorted to imports because it wanted to buy cheap when prices were low.

On the other issues, Vasudeva says that the Government has handed Rs 39 crore to fertiliser companies to cover the cost of holding imported stock, and a similar move for domestic stock is under consideration. And on the subsidy charge, he says: "To the best of my knowledge, no decision has been taken to the detriment of the industry."

Two possible hopes for fertiliser companies are price-cuts in government-controlled inputs and a fertiliser price hike. But both are unlikely in a drought year. The result: fertiliser companies face a disastrous financial harvest.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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CUMI's Winning Solutions – 3

When importing gear grinding wheels was becoming a headache, a CUMI solution brought relief

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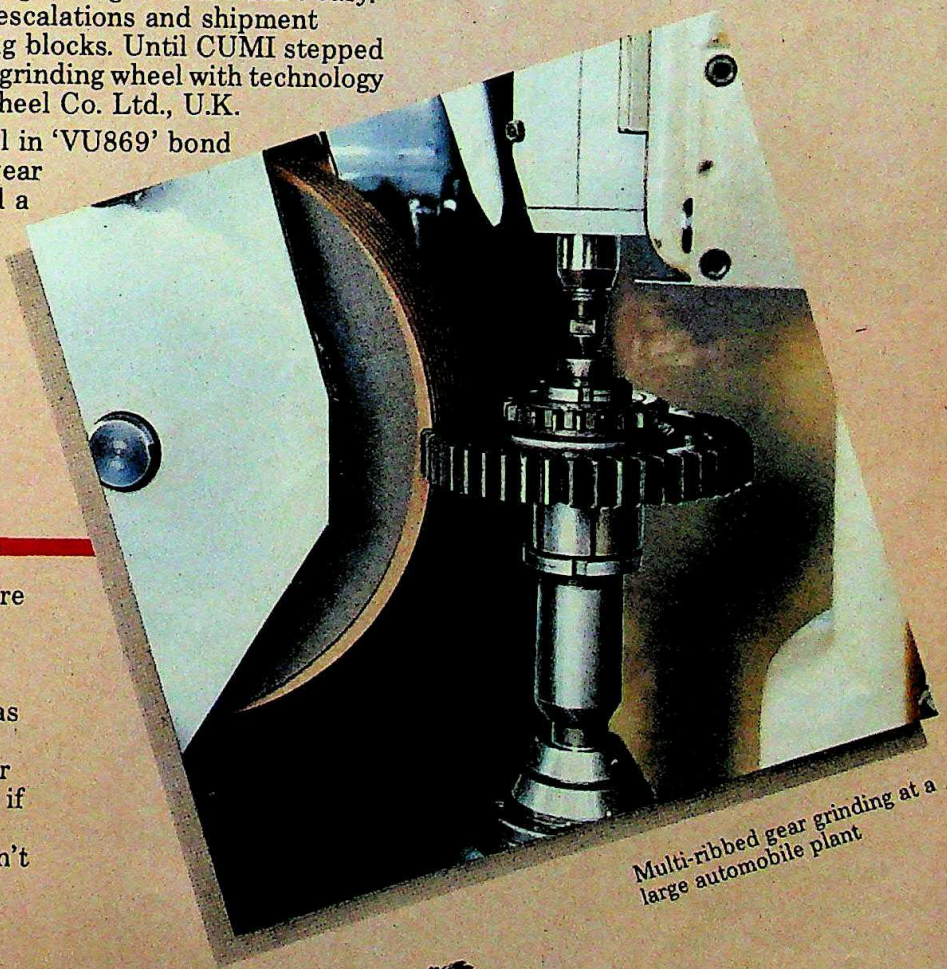

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The Threat of Famine

FAMINE is an insidious affliction that can suddenly erupt from drought when nature's fragile balance is disturbed. Past famines of Bengal, Bijapur and Bihar each affected less than 20 districts. The drought of 1979 affected 150 districts, but good winter rains saved the country. This year, rainfall deficiency affects 300 out of India's 412 districts and there is acute scarcity in 148. If there is failure of winter rains, insufficient water in canals or tubewells, or if there is panic hoarding or speculation in food and fodder, we could witness conditions of famine yet again. And it won't be confined to 20 districts.

The situation is precarious. Water levels in most reservoirs are less than 50 per cent of capacity, and less than 30 per cent in major ones like Pong, Krishnarajasagar, Mettur and Ramganga. Post-monsoon levels of sub-soil water in aquifers have never before been so low. This is especially disturbing as the South-west monsoon, which gives India nearly 80 per cent of its rainfall, has now retreated. Irrigation, which is nothing but the recycling of the natural rainfall will, therefore, be very uncertain in the year ahead.

After playing down the damage for a while, the Government is now grudgingly admitting that kharif losses may be in the region of 15 to 20 million tonnes. This means that, compared to an output of 83 million tonnes in 1983, production in 1987 may not be much more than the 63 million tonnes produced eight years ago, in 1979. Add to that the 19 million tonnes of food stocks and the total grain available till the next harvest in April is 84 million tonnes. As India's foodgrain consumption is around 11 million tonnes per month, this means we will have just enough food till April.

Now the Government is trying to reassure the public with projections about an excellent rabi crop, but this crop has yet to be planted. And in actuality, the rabi prospects are disturbing. The worst drought-hit regions are the wheat-growing areas of Punjab, Haryana, north Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh, all of which have recorded a 50 to 67 per cent rainfall deficit. As 40 per cent of this wheat crop is rain-fed, there is little likelihood of any sowing unless the region receives a good shower before November 15. Sowing thereafter will yield lower output, at a level of two quintals per hectare per week. Farmers are very concerned about the low levels of water feeding their tubewells, the slow recharge of these tubewells and the shortage of electricity to run them. Although canals have water now, farmers are anxious about its sufficiency to sustain the crop. A shortage of certified seeds and low fertiliser off-take do not augur well for the future.

> "The Government now grudgingly admits that the kharif losses may be up to 20 million tonnes. And the prospects of the rabi crop—yet to be sown due to poor rainfall—are also disturbing. If the winter rains now fail, we could witness famine yet again."

If the 1979 drought could cause the annual foodgrain output to crash from 131 million tonnes to 108 million tonnes, it is hard to believe that the country can meet the high targets projected by the Government, after an even worse monsoon failure. If the rabi crop proves disappointing, there will be little hope till the next kharif crop is harvested in October 1988. By then the entire economy would be grievously affected.

So what is to be done? The Government's drought relief packages are mainly concerned with relieving the drought impact in the worst-affected villages by providing work, food, fuel, water and fodder. These are good as far as they go, but they don't go far enough. The sheer size of any district, averaging 8,000 sq km with two lakh cultivators, is already showing the limitations of the government machinery. A few thousand agricultural experts, extension workers and district-level officers are hopelessly inadequate for the huge task ahead. The Government must, therefore, mobilise additional manpower from non-governmental organisations, notably voluntary bodies, industries, civic bodies, schools and colleges, which can work in defined areas to make the government plans more effective.

Apart from alleviating distress, the Government must provide financial incentives to motivate farmers to produce more. A financial guarantee to cover farmers' input costs if the crop fails would motivate those who would otherwise consider sowing too risky to undertake due to no rain. Similarly, there can be a penalty tax on under-utilised lands to spur larger cultivators (2.4 per cent of cultivators control 23 per cent of India's land in holdings over 10 hectares). Any farmer would rather pay for the costs of inputs with the prospects of its harvest, than pay an equivalent sum in tax.

The highest priority must, however, go to food security. The Government must book, but not actually bring in, five to 10 million tonnes of foodgrains abroad. These stocks plus the domestic buffer must be aggressively used for pre-emptive selling to hold down prices and to control the wholesale traders who still handle the bulk of India's foodgrain movement. These foodgrain traders have already cornered about 90 per cent of the kharif market arrivals and could pose a grave threat for the future. In the happy event that production and stocks prove adequate, the foreign stocks could be resold. The loss on such advance purchases would be a very small price to pay as insurance for food security.

This drought also clearly underlines the high price the country is paying for its continuing neglect of the land and, especially, the ravaging of its forests. This has been the main factor in reducing rainfall retention in the soil which, through transpiration, also contributes to improved rainfall. If India wants to free itself from its dependence on the rain gods, it will have to improve the forest cover, as also land and water management. Bold action is urgent today and critical to India's future.

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I.T.C. Limited

INCREASED TURNOVER, PROFITS AND DIVIDENDS

I.T.C. Limited

Excerpts from the speech of Shri J. N. Sapru, Chairman, I.T.C. Limited, at the 76th Annual General Meeting held on 16.10.1987

Shri J.N. Sapru

INTRODUCTION

The year 1986/87 has been a difficult and disappointing one for the country, both on the economic and political fronts. It is indeed ironical that, at a time when we need to bury our differences and put our shoulders together to tackle the serious economic situation on a war footing, we seem to be indulging in self-flagellation and mutual denigration and, in the process, doing more harm than good to the image of the nation. In these circumstances we need to ask ourselves what good, if any, is being achieved by tarnishing the image of the industry and further, whether the nation's economic problems are being solved or worsened by denying the most productive and contributing sector of the industry its growth and development through blacklisting on allegations still to be proved and, more often than not, caused by ambiguous and misconstrued fiscal legislation.

It is my fervent appeal that, instead of an antagonistic and adversative approach between Government and industry, a much greater collaborative and mutually appreciative approach needs to be adopted to solve the many-faceted problems of the Indian economy. Here the lead can only and must come from the Government.

EXCISE

I am sure you are all concerned about our differences with the Excise Authorities, so let me deal with it first. As you are perhaps aware, Revenue Authorities have alleged evasion of Excise Duty of a staggering Rs 803.78 crores for the period 1st March, 1983, to 28th February, 1987

As I have repeatedly stated, your Company has not, ever, evaded Excise Duties, nor knowingly transgressed the law. The allegations rest on a grave misconception of facts and law.

In brief, the Excise case rests on the unwarranted and unjustified allegation that Excise Duty must be paid on the street level prices charged by the million-odd retailers in the country, and ITC colluded with them to sell cigarettes at prices higher than those printed on the cigarette packets, and thus evaded duty. It is also being insidiously suggested that retail overcharging is unique to your Company's products, not acknowledging the cross-industry character of this phenomenon. Further, Excise Authorities in fact do not and cannot allege that any part of the extra profits made by the retailers through overcharging accrued to your Company.

The Show Cause Notice thus runs totally counter to the evidence presented to the Public Accounts Committee in 1986 by the same Authorities on identical issues. In written evidence before this Committee, the Ministry of Finance stated, "Only if there is evidence to show that the difference between the declared price and the higher price charged by the retailer or any wholesaler flows back to the manufacturer ... the question of application of the Central Excise Law would arise." This report was placed before both Houses of Parliament on 30th April, 1986, but the authorities are now adopting an attitude diametrically opposite.

What is of great concern is that the Excise Authorities have mounted an extremely well orchestrated publicity campaign with the intent to cause prejudice to your Company, its reputation and standing in the world of commerce. This publicity was resorted to within hours of the search and seizure operations, and still persists. This is notwithstanding the facts that such publicity is contrary to declared Government policy and the issues are sub-judice.

In my speech at the last Annual General Body Meeting, I had said in the context of your Company's Excise problems, and I quote, "I am happy to be able to report that due largely to a very pragmatic and positive approach by the Government, much progress has been made...in the resolution of disputed Excise matters spanning a decade...the spectrum of issues has been narrowed substantially, but I am hopeful that an amicable solution of the residual issues is within reach." However, the Excise Authorities are now seeking to resile unilaterally from commitments made which resulted in your Company making payments of some Rs 113 crores. It is indeed a matter of great regret that an alleged demand of Rs 27 crores has been raised by the Collector of Central Excise, Bangalore, to recover a purported claim that has already been settled and paid by your Company over a year back.

In the unpredictable climate, your Company had no option but to approach the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court and the Hon'ble Madras High Court respectively against the Show Cause Notice and the impugned demand from Bangalore. In both instances, appropriate interim stay orders have been passed by the Hon'ble High Courts.

Even though the cigarette industry is one of the most efficient and productive generators of revenue for the nation, the relationship between Excise and the Industry has been a saga of misinterpretations and litigation. Despite numerous memoranda and letters from the Industry, and your Company in particular, Excise legislation has been extremely ambiguous and capable of almost capricious interpretation. As an attempt at eliminating these, the Hon'ble Finance Minister stated in Parliament on 28th February, 1983, "With a view to ending the room for uncertainty once and for all, I propose to fix specific rates of duty in respect of cigarettes." Despite this unequivocal statement, ambiguity and uncertainty continued to be created, and it required the Prime Minister to finally remove them by introducing a totally new Duty structure in the last Budget.

It is a very sad commentary that issues of such magnitude are so easily capable of a multiplicity of interpretations, almost on the basis of opinion and influence rather than on the basis of understanding and mutuality. I must, however, reassure you and, through you, all investors, that your Company shall take all steps to protect the interests of all stakeholders. The fact that your Company continues to operate effectively and efficiently is ample proof of its determination to stand and fight without sacrificing good business practices, its pursuit of prosperity and growth and its abiding quest for excellence.

The final result, in our opinion, is not in doubt and we are confident that our stand will be vindicated, because we are convinced that the Rule of Law will continue to prevail.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

In spite of a difficult and trying year, your Company's performance has been good. Your Company's turnover crossed the Rs 1,000 crore mark for the first time and, at Rs 1052 crores, registered a 12.6% increase over the previous year. Net sales realisations, after payment of excise and other

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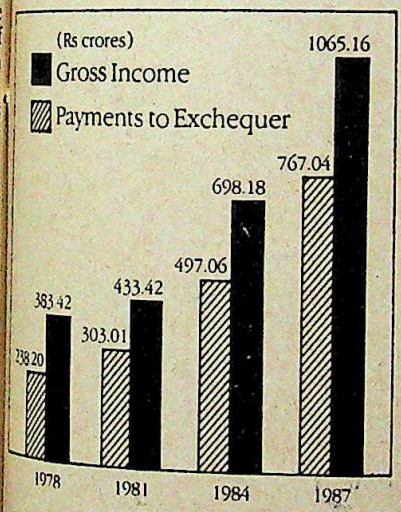
...ucts, at Rs 310 crores, recorded a 19% growth, and profit before taxation and extraordinary excise items at Rs 42.36 crores showed a significant improvement over last year. Trading results at the end of the first quarter of the current year also reflect a very healthy improvement, and this steady improvement in corporate results over the past few years has enabled your Company to keep well ahead of the rate of inflation. Consequently, your Directors have been pleased to recommend a dividend of 30%, subject to tax, which is the highest ever in your Company's history.

In the past ten years your Company has directly earned over Rs 437 crores of foreign exchange for the country through both exports of traditional and non-traditional items, and through its owned and leased hotels. In 1986/87 alone, it earned Rs 55.03 crores and, even after deducting outgoings under various heads, the net accretion to the nation amounts to over Rs 46 crores, which represents over 15% of your Company's turnover net of Excise.



In terms of Duties and Taxes to the national exchequer, your Company has contributed over Rs 1,600 crores in the past ten years of which in 1986/87 alone its contribution was over Rs 767 crores. Your Company is the largest single corporate contributor to the national exchequer in the private sector.

The continued thrust of modernisation in the tobacco businesses will enhance your Company's productivity through the induction of latest technology. The introduction by Government, from 1st March, 1987, of an Excise Duty structure related to the length of the cigarette has enabled industry to effect marked product improvements. Nevertheless, with the floor price of cigarettes having been raised substantially, as a consequence of the Duty increase, the industry volume is 20% lower today than the peak volume achieved in 1984. The cumulative effect of years of increasingly heavier taxation of the domestic cigarette industry has resulted in a glut of low quality tobacco to the detriment of tobacco farmers and the country's tobacco exports. The main beneficiary of the decline in cigarette volume has been *bidis*, which today outsell cigarettes 10 to 1. It is, however, of considerable satisfaction that the preference for your Company's brands continues to be favourable and we maintain our leadership in all segments of the cigarette market.

Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton in New Delhi, has firmly established itself as the market leader in the capital's highly visible and competitive market. Welcomgroup Windsor Manor at Bangalore had the distinction of being chosen to host the Heads of State and Governments during the second SAARC summit. Further, in pursuance of ITC's group philosophy to draw the best out of human resources through training and development, Welcomgroup has set up a Graduate School of Hotel Administration, signing up with the Dr T.M.A. Pai Foundation, in Manipal, affiliated to Mangalore University. This college will be the first of its kind in India.

OTHER BUSINESSES

Your Company has acquired 51% shareholding in ITC International; the remaining 49% shareholding has been acquired by Non-Resident Indians.

Meanwhile, the fashionable Bukhara restaurant owned by this Company continues to do well in the highly competitive New York market and I am pleased to advise that ITC International has reached agreement to operate and manage a restaurant in downtown Chicago.

I am also pleased to advise that Surya Tobacco Company Pvt. Ltd., Nepal, in which your Company has 49% shareholding, has got off to a good start. It has successfully launched and established three brands and steps are now being taken to augment its installed capacity.

Your Company's promoted enterprise, Bhadrachalam Paperboards Ltd., further consolidated its position. It stepped up the dividend to 20% from 12.5% in the previous year, and substantially reinforced its reserves. However, a totally unexpected power crisis in Andhra Pradesh for four months, from April, 1987, affected its operations, which have now been normalised, and the outlook for the rest of the year should be satisfactory.

LOOKING AHEAD : IN CONTINUED PURSUIT OF NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Now, as always, your Company has integrated its corporate objectives with national needs. Therefore, ITC elected to grow in two greenfield areas: Hotels and Pulp and Paper.

Your Company is embarking on its third major leg of diversification in a field... of national priority and of growing consumer needs.

The knowledge and expertise gained from ITC's strong rural presence and association with tobacco farmers is now being applied towards diversifying into edible and non-edible oils which offer both export and domestic potential of considerable proportions. In addition to creating jobs in rural and semi-urban areas, this activity will also result in bringing about a better quality of life for farmers.

When we consider the country's annual import bill on edible oil is approximately Rs 1,200 crores per annum, import substitution to the extent possible and export of by-products makes eminent sense for a company with ITC's philosophy and ITC's standing.

CONCLUSION

I am sure that I have been able to convince you that your Company has never and will never evade excise, and the allegations made are misconceived, and that our stand will be vindicated. The resolve with which employees at all levels have withstood this unnecessary and unwarranted diversion is a tribute to their dedication and commitment.

Your Company has embarked on a new venture of considerable national importance and I have every reason to believe that we are on the path to further achievements.

I would like to take the opportunity, in conclusion, of thanking you for your unwavering support and believe you should look forward to the future of your Company with confidence.

Thank you.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the 76th Annual General Meeting.

Professional Management of Planned Growth

INDIA TOBACCO DIVISION · INDIAN LEAF TOBACCO DEVELOPMENT DIVISION · PACKAGING AND PRINTING DIVISION
WELCOMGROUP HOTELS DIVISION · MARKETING AND EXPORTS DIVISION · BHADRACHALAM PAPERBOARDS LIMITED—AN ITC PROMOTED ENTERPRISE

Contract ITC 54 87

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THE MARKETS

Cross-Currents

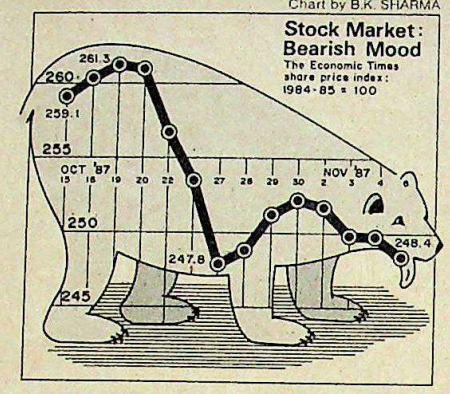
Investors remain cautious

THE corporate weather-vane seems as unpredictable as the original of the species. If the future of the north-east monsoons (crucial for the coming rabi crop) seemed uncertain, the corporate world saw the swirl of all manner of cross-currents last fortnight. And the ordinary investor might be forgiven for getting befuddled and deciding that safety lay in discretion. The predictable result: there was little trading activity, and share prices drifted lower.

The Economic Times index of share prices dropped steadily from 259.1 to 248.4 and, at the close of the fortnight, was heading further downwards. Inevitably, gold and silver prices soared as idle money flowed into bullion markets.

The surprise was that some companies seemed to be doing better than most observers have suspected. The transport sector is supposed to have been in the dumps, but TELCO made the unexpected announcement of improved half-yearly results. A year ago, it had declared half-yearly losses. As if not to be outdone by its Tata twin, TISCO also came out with improved half-yearly results—although there has been no price hike for steel, despite the intense lobbying that has been going on.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Other companies seem to be doing quite well too. Several tyre companies for instance—including JK Industries, Ceat and Vikrant—have reported impressive performances, while a host of companies have come out with bonus issues. Even Reliance might do better in the future, after the Government favours announced last month. The company's share price picked up Rs 8 over the fortnight. Oddly enough, both TELCO and TISCO continued to lose ground. If this suggested that a depressed market would not pay heed to good news, there was the contrary fact of small gains in the other sectors that showed buoyancy.

Tyre shares did well, and neither cement nor fertiliser shares did as poorly as might have been expected. Perhaps TISCO suffered yet again because of the fresh assertion that there would be no hike in the price of steel. And perhaps the market has already discounted for the sorry plight of the cement and fertiliser industries.

Nevertheless, there is no disputing that the market is now firmly into a bear phase, and the outlook cannot possibly be good when the economy is heading for a downturn. Several corporate reports confirmed this, as in the case of yet a third Tata company, Associated Cement, which announced poor results. And the troubled DCM—still a divided house, perhaps—skipped a dividend for the first time in living memory. A difficult period lies ahead, for DCM and investors.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 6.11.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	47.25	28.00	35.50	2.50 –
Associated Cement	241.50	132.00	142.00	6.00 –
Atlas Copco	152.00	52.00	54.00	2.00 –
Asian Paints	272.50	151.25	153.75	8.75 –
Bajaj Auto	5860.00	3950.00	5200.00	400.00 –*
Baroda Rayon	270.00	145.00	162.50	7.50 –
Bata India	160.00	61.50	63.00	5.50 –
Bayer	785.00	350.00	360.00	10.00 –
Bharat Forge	140.00	63.00	131.00	3.00 –
Birla Jute	58.00	39.50	40.25	1.75 –
Blow Plast	178.00	92.50	146.25	3.75 +
Bombay Dyeing	143.00	40.50	91.00	13.00 –
Britannia Ind.	190.00	95.00	96.00	3.00 –
Brooke Bond	109.00	77.00	84.50	5.50 –
Ceat Tyres	82.00	45.00	80.00	4.00 +
Century Enka	1175.00	815.00	960.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	80.00	nil
Citurgia	77.50	53.00	73.00	1.00 +
Colgate	415.00	205.00	213.25	1.75 –
DCM	47.00	21.00	22.50	2.00 –
Dunlop	101.50	71.25	78.00	3.50 –
Escorts	84.00	39.00	40.00	0.50 +
Finolex Cables	380.00	114.00	330.00	25.00 –
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	138.00	4.00 –
Garware Nylon	36.00	18.50	19.00	3.00 –
G.E. Shipping	35.50	16.00	24.25	2.25 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	183.50	74.00	82.00	4.00 +
Grasim Ind.	118.00	80.00	105.50	1.50 +
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	115.00	1.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	232.50	1.25 +
Hindustan Lever	212.00	72.00	72.50	3.50 –*
Hindustan Motors	35.35	16.70	22.40	3.60 –
Hind. Dorr	407.50	152.50	175.00	12.50 –
IEL	64.75	38.00	41.00	nil
Indian Hotels	130.00	62.50	110.00	12.50 –
Indian Organic	78.00	30.00	32.00	2.00 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	51.00	52.00	4.00 –
Indrol	510.00	160.00	205.00	5.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	360.00	265.00	327.50	12.50 –
ITC	78.00	40.00	47.00	2.00 –
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	53.50	nil
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	165.00	170.00	35.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	55.00	nil
KSB Pumps	480.00	220.00	440.00	5.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	107.00	67.00	73.50	6.50 –
Lipton	79.50	57.00	65.00	5.00 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	9.50	10.50	nil
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	52.00	1.50 –
McDowell	108.50	41.50	85.00	4.00 –
Motor Industries	695.00	317.50	535.00	32.50 –*
Mukand Iron	89.50	62.00	73.50	6.50 –
National Organic	577.50	382.50	450.00	20.00 –
Nirlon	26.00	6.00	7.00	1.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	25.00	27.50	1.00 +
Oswal Agro	127.00	79.00	120.00	4.00 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	34.00	35.00	1.75 –
Ponds	405.00	222.50	345.00	7.50 –
Premier Auto	33.00	17.00	25.50	3.50 –*
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	86.00	0.25 –
Raymond	109.00	48.00	95.00	2.00 +
Reckitt & Colman	225.50	143.00	193.00	1.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	92.00	129.00	8.00 +
Richardson Hind.	350.00	210.00	270.00	5.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	29.25	0.75 –
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	71.25	6.25 –
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	83.50	2.50 –
SPIC	53.50	27.00	30.00	0.50 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	550.00	555.00	17.50 –
Telco	665.00	345.00	360.00	15.00 –
Wimco	56.50	21.50	23.00	0.25 +

*Ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.8560	8.7800
Austria	Schilling	1	1.1006	1.0889
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.3680	34.2910
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.8100	42.7118
Canada	Dollar	1	9.8041	9.7041
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.0019	1.9815
Egypt	Pound	1	9.5000	9.4218
France	Franc	1	2.3255	2.2686
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6605	1.6497
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0799	0.0790
Iran	Rial	100	18.1631	18.1018
Italy	Lira	100	0.9900	0.9700
Japan	Yen	100	9.75	9.50
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7619	0.7500
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.9000	46.8132
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.2130	5.1695
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0000	0.9900
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6196	0.5800
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.8880	6.8168
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7339	0.7009
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.3390	6.2960
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0999	0.0991
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4295	0.4086
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.1452	2.1224
Switzerland	Franc	1	9.4146	9.3154
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.2100	0.2000
Thailand	Baht	100	51.3500	50.9200
UK	Pound	1	23.0750	22.9425
USA	Dollar	1	12.9875	12.8600
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3568	3.2981
USSR	Rouble	1	20.6100	20.5192
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.8678	7.6682

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 9.11.87.

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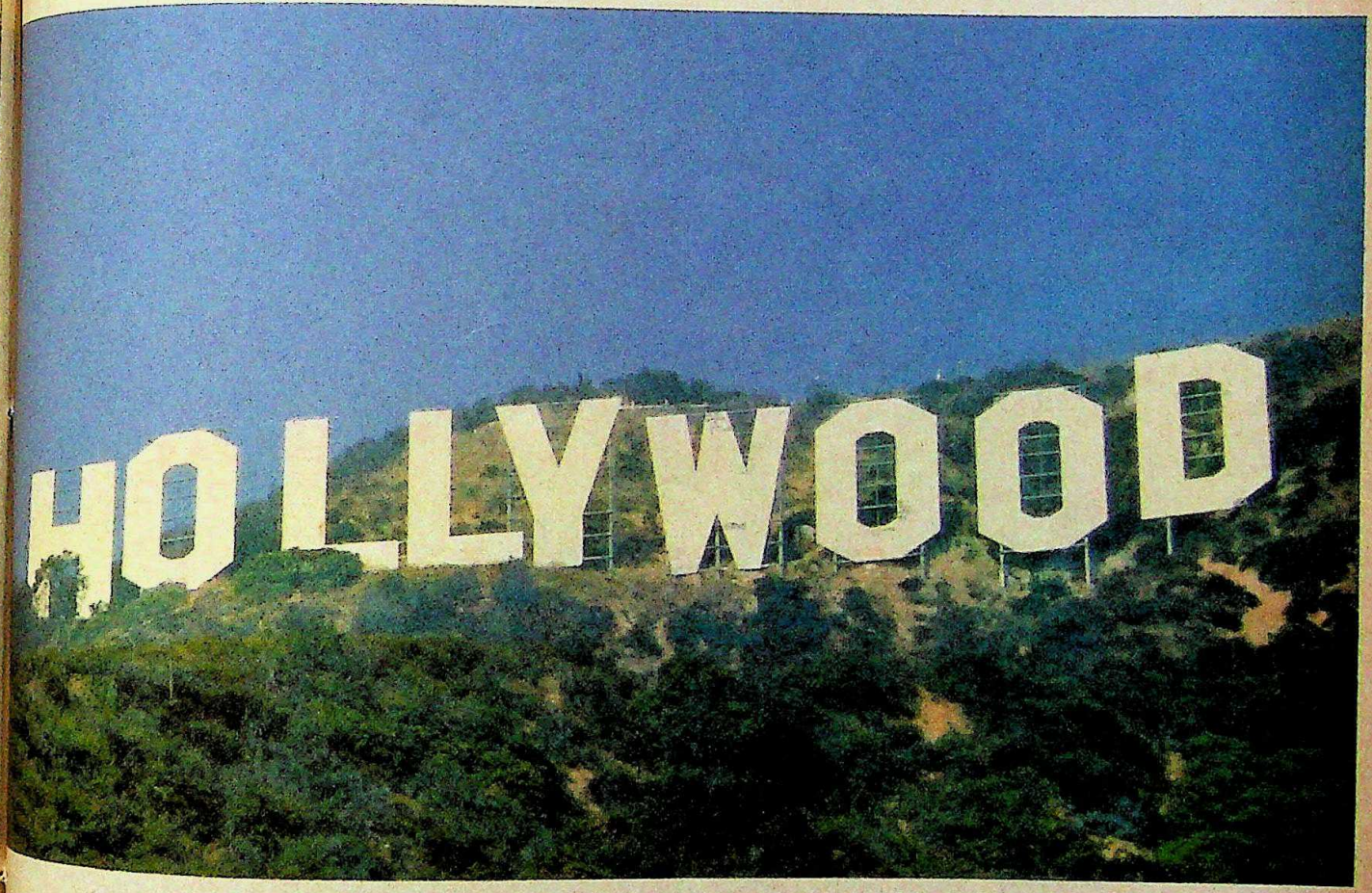

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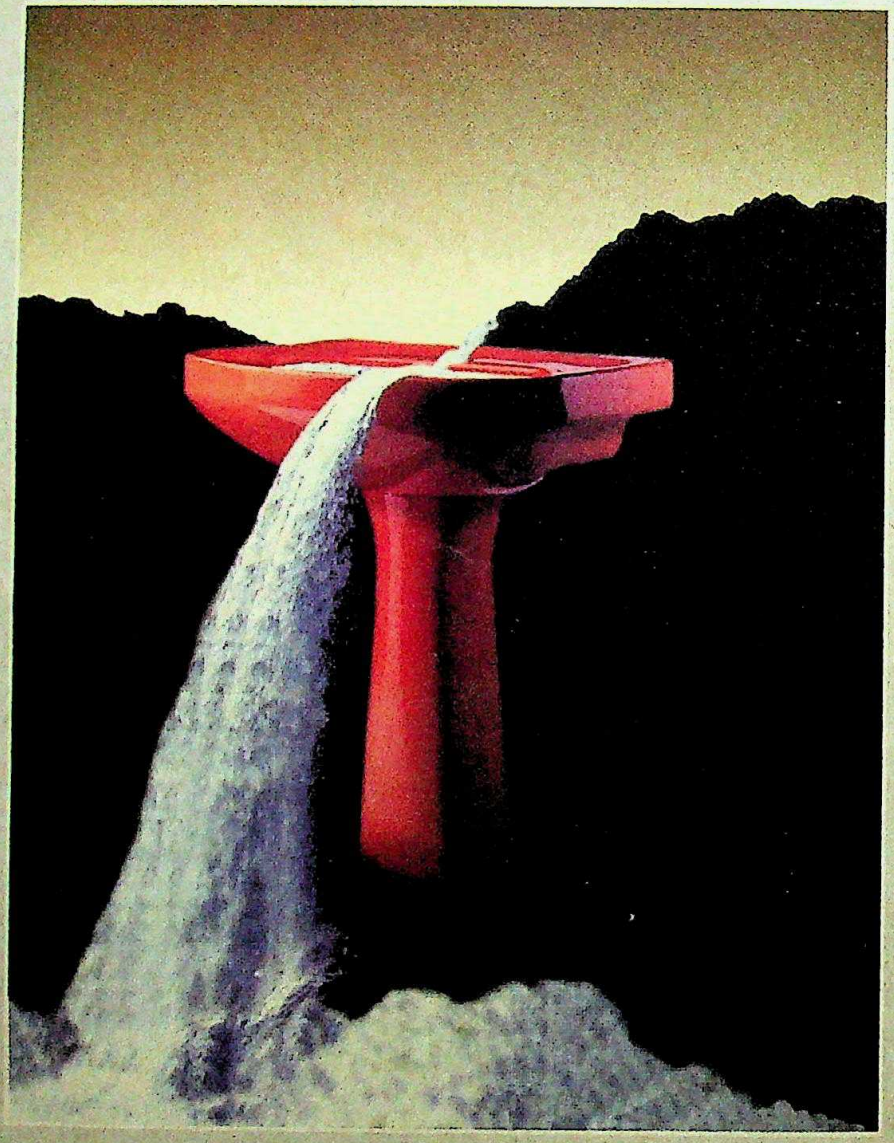

JOHNSON PEDDER SANITARYWARE (AND HOW 2+2=5)

IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR SANITARYWARE TO LOOK GOOD.

IT MUST ALSO BE PRECISELY THE SAME COLOUR AS YOUR BATHROOM TILES.

EVEN THE SLIGHTEST DIFFERENCE IN SHADES CREATES DISHARMONY.

ONLY ONE COMBINATION GIVES YOU THE EXTRA IMPACT OF PERFECT COLOUR-MATCHING.

JOHNSON PEDDER

JOHNSON PEDDER

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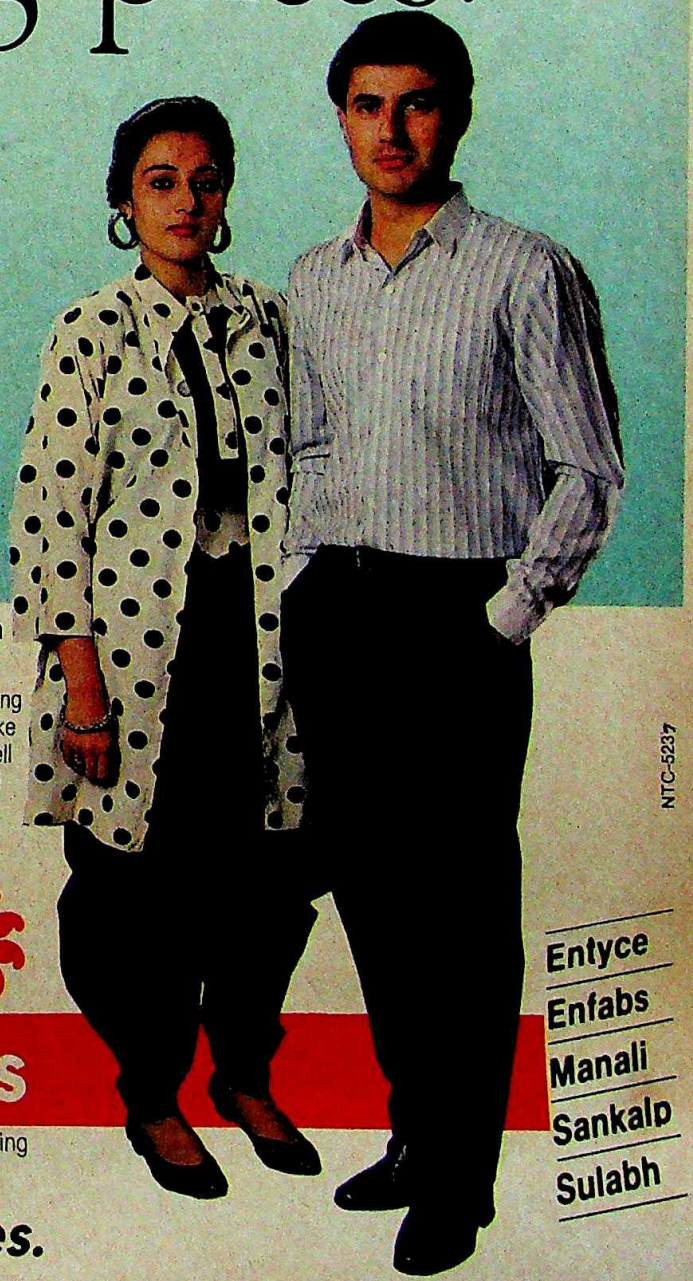

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Hero Honda CD100
Vs
Hero Honda CD100

Meet Sunny (on the left) and Bunty. They are old friends. And old foes. They have rarely agreed on anything in life.

If Sunny loves cricket, Bunty loves football. Sunny enjoys literature, Bunty loves to plunge into the world of facts and figures. Bunty is always formally dressed. Sunny would never be caught in a suit and tie. Sunny works in an advertising agency. Bunty works in a bank.

In their ten years of friendship they have agreed only once. And that was when they both bought their Hero Hondas.

But not really. Because ever since then a war has broken out between the two. Each claims his Hero Honda is better in every respect.

Like fuel economy. The last time they had an argument about whose motorcycle was more fuel efficient, they journeyed a full four hundred kilometres to test it out.

Like toughness. They have taken their bikes through the toughest of terrains just to prove a point to the other person.

Like looks. Sunny insists that his red bike is the finest looking bike in town. Bunty feels that his Hero Honda easily commands more attention (especially with the girls in his colony).

But we can't really blame the two. It's so easy to be fiercely proud of your Hero Honda that you'd never let another bike steal the show—even if the other bike is also a Hero Honda CD 100 —

What a bike !

HERO HONDA

Fill it. Shut it. Forget it.

ULKA-D-HH-532

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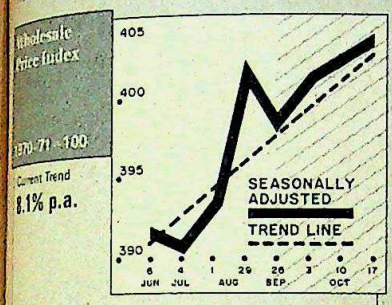
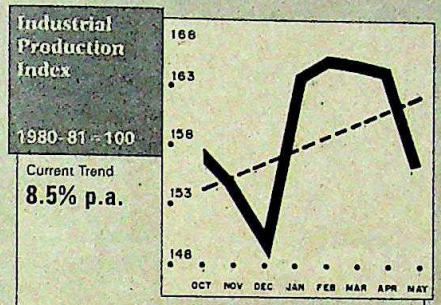
THERE is a real and daunting possibility that the country may well suffer zero economic growth this year. The present monetary and fiscal policy that is generally expansionary in nature can still be used to stimulate the industrial sector to even higher levels of output. And further, such a policy may also be used to keep stagflation at bay.

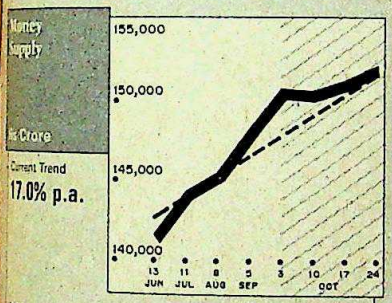
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.



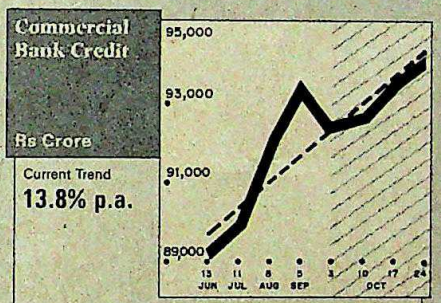
Prices continue to maintain their steady and inexorable rise, and there seems to be little relief in sight.



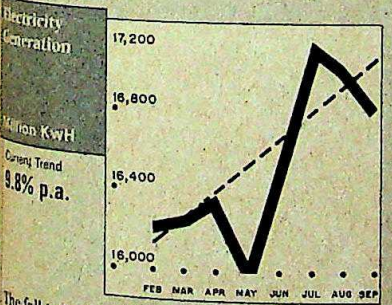
An industrial slide-back has begun and could accelerate once the effects of the drought are more fully felt.



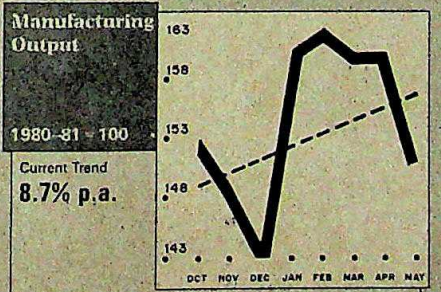
Money supply is increasing fairly rapidly, but some part of the money is being used for drought relief.



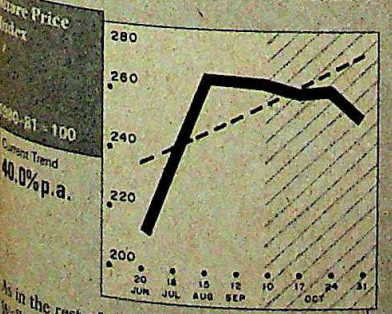
After shrinking in early October, commercial bank credit is expanding once again—and fairly rapidly at that.



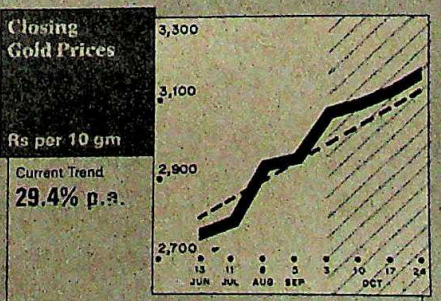
The fall in hydel generation has been too large not to adversely affect electricity generation as a whole.



Although the trend growth rate is still high, the manufacturing sector too shows signs of a recession.



As in the rest of the developing countries, the Wall Street crash has left India's share markets untouched.



With inflation and a continuing lull in share market trading, investors are still chasing the yellow metal.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the first fortnight of October 1987

	% Growth
Onions	30.84
Country Liquor	21.05
Chillies	19.75
Hides Raw	18.2
Coffee	16.32
Electrical Motors	8.71
Tapioca	7.58
Rape & Mustard Seed	6.00
Milk	4.52
Turmeric	4.02
Butter	3.76
Jute Textiles	3.46
Eggs	3.43
Gram	3.34
Zinc	3.30
Cashew-Nuts	3.23
Linseed	3.14
Mustard Oil	2.76
Linseed Oil	2.57
Mining Machinery	1.98
Sugar	1.67
Utensils	1.06
Ceramic Tiles	1.04
Bars & Rods	1.00
Maida	.98
Tyres	.96
Pig Iron	.95
Fish	.92
Rails	.87
Rice	.87
Semis Billets	.86
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	.86
Camel Back	.85
Aluminium	.84
Industrial Instruments	.83
Tractors	.82
Pesticides & Insecticides	.80
Boilers	.78
Steel Structurals	.78
Coal	.78
Machine Tools	.74
Sewing Machines	.73
Masoor	.65
Tubes	.64
Petrol	.63
Synthetic Fibres	.55

Of the 139 series considered, 77 of them with a total weight of 46.802 had a positive growth and 62 of them with a total weight of 39.824 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, September	12676	11999
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, September	684.9	708.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, September	3100	2894
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, September	513.5	596.6
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, September	53.5	51.5

Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP

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TANNERIES

Slow Poisoning

Effluents ruin North Arcot's land and people

HOW much better is late than never? The question is a debated one in Tamil Nadu's North Arcot district where, in the last two months, the state Environment Pollution Control Board has finally acted against 69 tanneries for discharging untreated effluent. The mayhem has however gone unchecked for so long, affecting the groundwater, that many feel the government action is already too late.

The offending units, accused of discharging 12 million litres of untreated effluent daily, have been charged in the court of North Arcot's first class magistrate. The waste was dumped into the Palar river, which originates in Karnataka, flows through Tamil Nadu and then empties into the Bay of Bengal. There are 302 registered tanneries in the Ambur, Vaniyambadi and Peranambut areas of the district.

Says Gangadhar Jas, chairman of the Pollution Control Board: "So far we have been a little lenient, having launched prosecution against only six tanneries. But now the time has come to strictly implement the law." The offence is punishable with six months' rigorous imprisonment and a Rs 10,000 fine.

All industrial units in the state had been warned to begin treating effluent by May 31, 1985. The deadline was extended by two months for the tanneries which, however, continue to flout regulations more than two years later.

The brunt of the damage has been borne by Vaniyambadi taluk (population: 3.3 lakh) which, apart from a high concentration of registered tanneries, also has 65 unregistered units. Two decades ago, the taluk was one of Tamil Nadu's richest agricultural areas. But pollution has converted it into a vast barren tract. This is reflected in the fall in the number of families dependent on agriculture by two thirds: from 24,000 two decades ago to 8,000 today. Cultivable land in the taluk has declined from 68,000 hectares to 22,000 hectares.

Besides, an estimated 2,000 drinking water wells in the taluk have turned repugnantly brackish (only 30 wells produce tolerably potable water). The poignance of the tragedy is all the greater because in drought-hit Tamil Nadu, Vaniyambadi was the rare taluk where clean drinking water was available at a depth of a mere 40 feet.

In Sammanthikuppam village, for instance, clear water was no cause for worry for its 1,500 residents. But now, says Revathi, 30: "The water in every well is brackish. We have to walk four furlongs to nearby Venkatapuram to get slightly more tolerable water." Even there, only one well has potable water.

The earlier practice of vegetable tanning—prevalent from the days of the East India Company—posed no hazards. But by the early '70s, it was replaced by modern chrome tanning which increased the number of chemicals used in the process from 42 to 276, including 13 heavy metals. Little wonder, that contamination of the area has accelerated alarmingly.

It is not just an environmental crisis that is Vaniyambadi's fate. The tanneries' negligence has led to respiratory diseases, gastro-enteritis and even menstrual problems for women. At the Ambur government hospital, just three years ago patients with lower respiratory tract infection numbered 50 daily. This figure has now doubled. In the same period, the daily inflow of patients with gastro-enteritis has trebled to about 10.

Statistics with the Employees' State Insurance Hospital in Ambur are even more revealing. The average number of patients has gone up from 300 daily a year ago to over 500 today. Interestingly, the hospital lists those suffering from undiagnosed infection, under the classification of patients infected by primary unknown organisms (PUO). The number of PUO cases, again, is up from only 127 in September 1986 to a high 389 in September 1987. Moreover, the people also have to put up with new

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

Residents at the rare clean well; and effluents outside a tannery

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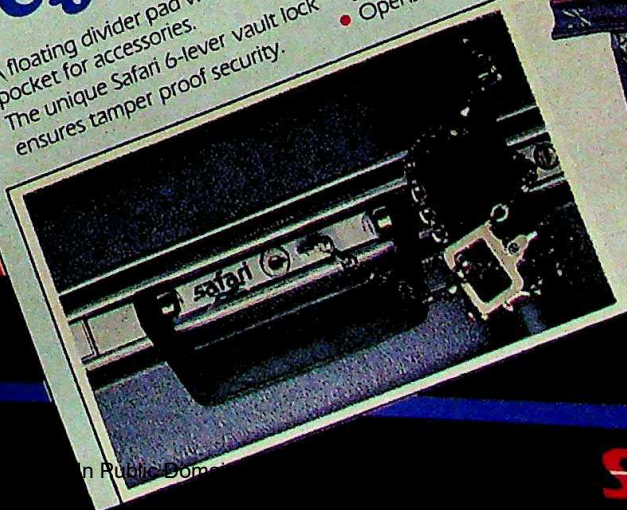

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A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

AIR CANADA

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health complications like adenomata, a lump in the breast, and azoospermia, a nil sperm count.

The tannery workers are the worst hit. Deserting their barren fields, they have ironically been driven to the very units that shook their placid lives. The number of workers has multiplied from a mere 5,000 two decades ago to about 50,000 today. It is their lot to work endless hours with smelly hides and burning chemicals; apply corrosive lime without gloves to cure skins; handle chloride and ammonium sulphate to delime skins and hides; pickle them with sulphuric acid, and finally treat them with highly poisonous titanium chromate. Not surprisingly, a tannery worker without a rash is a rarity.

While denying that the workers are not given protective gear, B. Akber Pasha, president of the Ambur Tanners' Association, admits: "We are guilty of generally polluting the environment and spoiling the drinking water, but it is not as if we are not prepared to remedy the situation." He points to the Ambur Tannery Effluent Treatment Service Industrial Cooperative Society, consisting of nearly all the 70 tanneries in Ambur. According to Pasha, the society is in the process of buying a 21.5-acre plot near Ambur town to locate a cooperative treatment plant. But adds Pasha: "We require state Government approval at different stages, and that has been a major cause for delay."

But it is also true that many units are reluctant to spend money on effluent treatment. For instance, although 12 tanneries in Ambur have individual effluent treatment plants, these are deliberately kept idle.

Pointing to another aspect of the issue, V. Narayana Murthi, a local farmer and social activist says: "Even the tanneries will find it difficult to get chloride-free soft water for their own consumption in the next few years." (At a conservative estimate, to get a kg of finished leather, 30 litres of water is required). The larger units are forced to buy soft water from outside the affected area and transport it by tankers. Though the tanners have been hoist with their own petard, this is poor consolation for the residents of this once prosperous area.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

MADHYA PRADESH

Quick Justice

Vora pursues press reports

SUKHIRAM, a low-paid helper employed by the Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board (MPEB) at Rajnandgaon, lost a leg in an on-the-job accident last year. Instead of helping him, the MPEB sacked him. His plight was highlighted by *Yugdharma*, a Raipur-based Hindi daily on July 15 this year. The chief minister's secretariat sent a query to MPEB along with the press clipping. The board promptly paid Sukhiram a compensation of Rs40,917 and assured Chief Minister Motilal Vora that the man would be hired as a peon.

On an average, Vora chooses at least three press reports to follow up every day.

A collector at Raisen disliked the full-grown trees in the compound of his official bungalow. Two years ago, to satisfy the burra sahib's whim, scores of trees in and around the bungalow were chopped down. *Navbharat*, a Hindi daily from Bhopal, broke the story. Vora ordered an inquiry and transferred the collector.

A cabinet minister's husband, a government employee, would only attend office once a month to collect his salary, a fact which was reported in a Bhopal daily. Vora read it and sent a note to his cabinet colleague, enclosing the clipping. Her husband is now one of the most punctual employees in his office.

For two-and-a-half years, Vora, 59, has been regularly acting on newspaper reports. Said Vora: "Newspapers tell me about incidents, developments and trends that I would not normally hear about through official channels." Every day he goes through newspaper clippings, carefully classified for him by his press staff, and on their basis moves the cumbersome wheels of the Government.

"He is the first chief minister to regularly take action on the basis of press reports," claims his Press Attache, Shyam Bihari Patel, 58, the brain behind the idea. On an average, Vora takes action on at least three press reports every day. His secretariat has so far dispatched 3,400 notes, letters, telex and wireless messages quoting newspaper stories.

In the normal course, the director of public relations sends newspaper clippings—about 2,000 every day—to various ministers, departmental heads and secretaries. But Public Relations Commissioner Lalit Joshi admits that "they rarely took critical reports seriously. But a personal letter from the chief minister—or the knowledge that one may arrive—has forced the bureaucracy to sit up and take action."

Opinion is sharply divided among officials on the usefulness of the exercise. Says S. Sathyam, commissioner gas relief: "I take press reports very seriously, but I wish they would be more careful about their facts."

Newsmen appreciate the impact their reports have made, but feel that in many cases the follow-up by the chief minister's secretariat is not adequate. Says *M.P. Chronicle* News Editor, Shravan Garg: "Officers at the commissioner and secretary level do not follow his orders."

And although Vora claims that he reacts to critical reports "with equal promptness", it would be naive to think that he would respond to even those which are politically inconvenient. Says Madan Mohan Joshi, resident editor of *Nai Dunia*: "We launched a campaign about large-scale indiscriminate felling of trees at Indore but there was no action against the culprits."

But as far as Mithileeh Satu, 14, of Raipur is concerned, the chief minister is a just man. The boy crippled by polio no longer walks to school on broken crutches. Vora gave him a tricycle and some money after reading about his plight in a Raipur daily.

—N.K. SINGH

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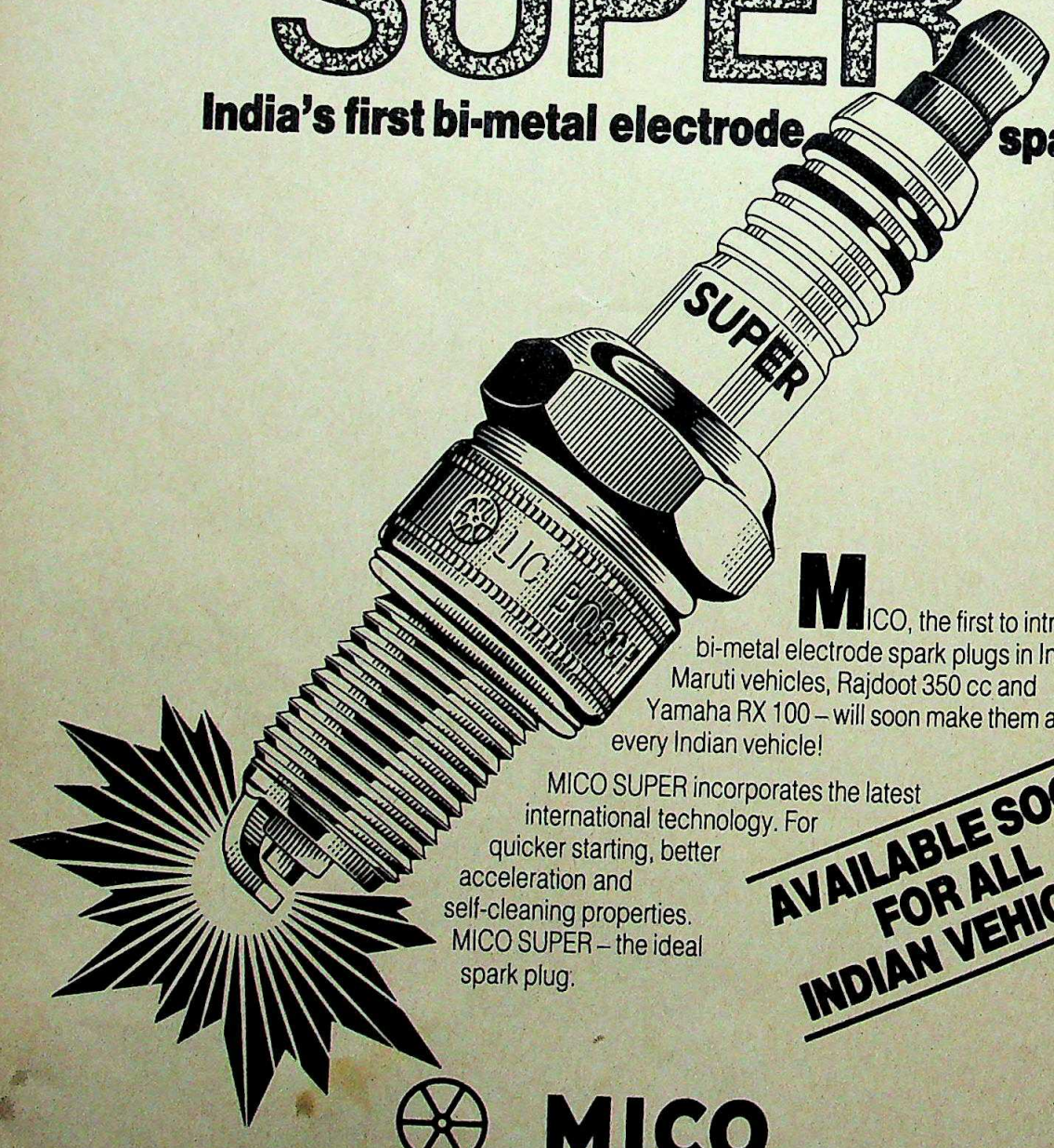

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INDIAN EXPRESS

Mounting Pressure

Prosecution and show cause notices pile up

DELHI'S breakfast fare was decidedly bland last fortnight without the juicy scoops and spicy mincemeat readers have come to expect of the *Indian Express*. And the prospects of more fireworks to round off a politically explosive year seemed bleak as the winter session of Parliament got going without the ammunition the *Express* provides opposition politicians.

The kingpins in proprietor Ram Nath Goenka's empire, Advisor S. Gurumurthy and Editor Arun Shourie, had their hands full dealing with the strike in the Delhi office, as well as the pile of show cause and prosecution notices various government offices have been heaping on the paper.

Since the September raids on the paper's establishments across the country, the paper has received no fewer than 22 show cause notices and 10 prosecution notices, says Gurumurthy. Of the prosecutions, three have been filed by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) under the Customs Act, two are under the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, three under the Companies Act, and one each for income tax and wealth tax violations.

The pressure is not only legal. Gurumurthy says imported facsimile equipment and presses worth Rs 4.5 crore have been lying at the Bombay docks for the past six weeks awaiting customs clearance. As if that were not enough, the State Bank of India has been talking tough about the company's credit limits. That, Gurumurthy adds, is after the bank had recommended higher credit limits just a few months ago.

The most worrying are the criminal charges filed by the DRI. One, in the New Delhi Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court, accuses Goenka, along with his erstwhile secretary, Renu Sharma, her brother, Arun Sharma, and trading agent R.P. Mittal, of evading customs duty to the tune of Rs 7.7 lakh in the import of a colour scanner. Half the cost is alleged to have been paid by the Sharmas in foreign currency abroad.

Another case concerns the import of printing machines. Government sources say other newspapers are also to be served show cause notices for importing similar machines. The idea is to prove to cynics that the attempt is not to victimise the *Express* alone. However, the move buttresses Gurumurthy's statements since the raids that "today it is happening to us, tomorrow it will happen to you. The rest of the press must take it as a danger signal."

Gurumurthy also continues to maintain that the strike in Delhi is a part of the pattern of government pressure, and that union President T.M. Nagarajan was intent on a strike, however much the management might have conceded during negotiations.

While Nagarajan dismisses such charges, fingers were being pointed at him from within his own ranks. Meanwhile, more and more strikers, including union executive members, had started signing the attendance registers at Goenka's Sunder Nagar residence, raising the percentage of those reporting for work to over eighty. But Shourie claims that work cannot be resumed because police protection is not forthcoming.

The Express saga has raised some prickly questions among journalists. Shourie received flak for involving the BJP in the October 28 fiasco. Even the Editors' Guild, at a recent meeting requested by Arun Shourie last fortnight, was sharply divided on the questions of an editor's role in a labour-management dispute and also about his seeking help from politicians.

Shourie himself launched a minor publicity campaign with the aid of video tapes to buttress his point that political participation had not been limited to the BJP and that there were more Delhi University students than politicians there. However, most of them happened to be active members of student parties associated with the BJP and the RSS.

While there was general agreement among journalists that politicians had no business in a newspaper's affairs, the economic probity of a newspaper company was discussed at length in newspaper columns. While some felt that those who accuse others of corruption must first ensure that they have a clean slate, Gurumurthy represents another section when he says that "then, only Bhagwan Sri Ramchandraji can make accusations. Nobody else is completely clean."

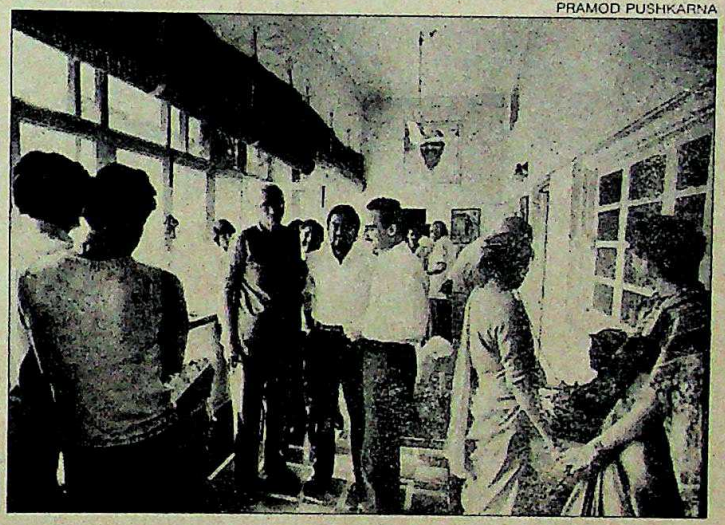
Meanwhile, even in the 10 other cities where the Express continued to print, there was less of the usual fare of scandal. Has the Express sheathed its claws? "How can you say such a thing?" responds Shourie, as if to abuse.

But with more people gradually signing up for work, including union executive members, the strike might fizzle out soon enough. As it is, what started out as a question of workers' demands has got mixed up with cries of press freedom, a crackdown by government agencies and questions of editorial ethics.

—DAVID DEVADAS

What had started as a strike by workers for better wages has not only involved political parties but also raised some prickly questions among journalists.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Shourie (centre) and staff at Goenka's residence: signing up

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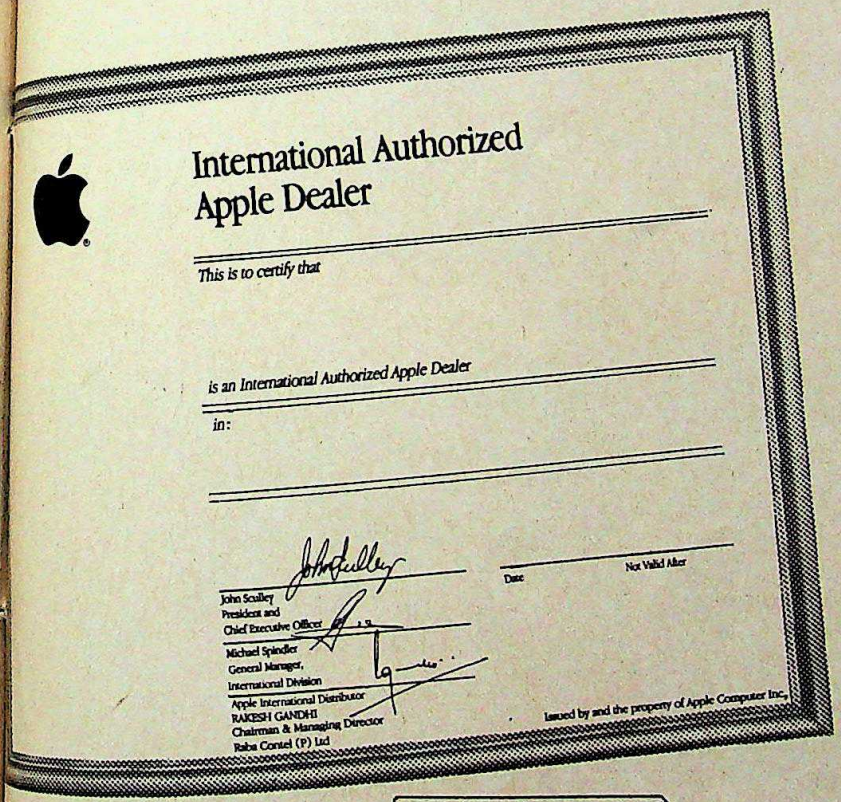

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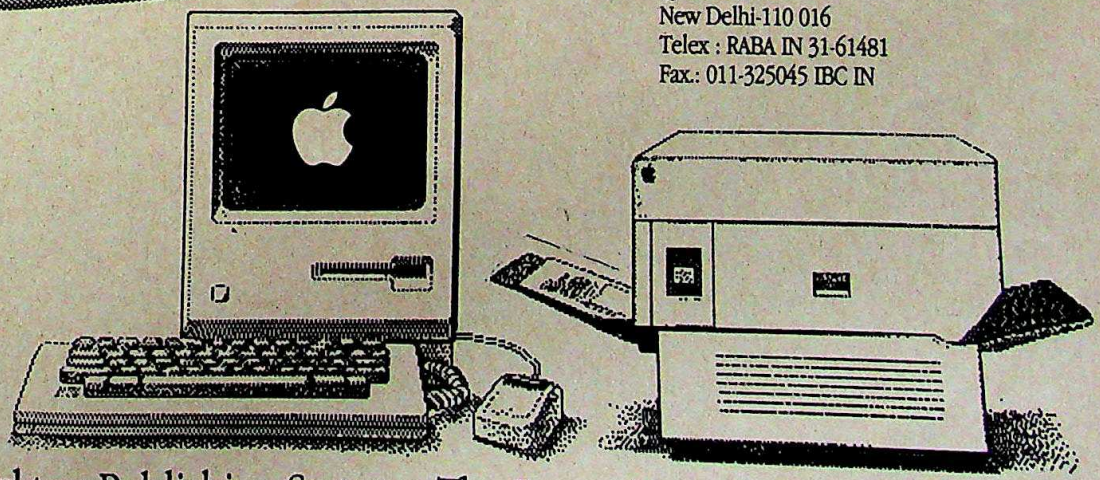

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PLAYBACK SINGERS

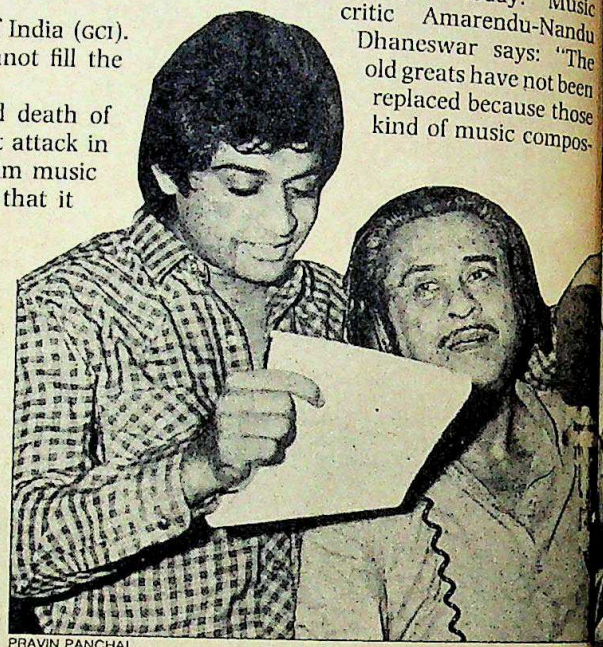
Filling the Void

A host of new singers in the reckoning

NO country has seen such a phenomenon: just a handful of singers dominating a vast music industry for close to four decades. Even today the names of the great vocalists from the golden period of Hindi film music unfailingly evoke nostalgia and excitement—Mohammad Rafi, Manna Dey, Talat Mehmood, Hemant Kumar, Geeta Dutt, Mukesh. But with Kishore Kumar now dead, with the golden voiced Lata Mangeshkar using every excuse to stay away from the new cacophonic sounds in Bombay's recording studios, and with even the ebullient Asha Bhosale tiring of belting out a string of unimaginative songs, it does seem as if an era is well and truly coming to an end. "Each one of them was so different in style, and their singing spans the entire range of Indian music," says Sanjeev Kohli, general manager, artistes and repertoire (A&R), at the Gramophone Company of India (GCI). "Today's singers just cannot fill the gap."

It was the unexpected death of Kishore Kumar, of a heart attack in October, that made the film music industry suddenly realise that it had failed to groom a successor to the versatile 58-year-old crooner. There is no male singer around who can take over Kishore's place, as he had so effortlessly done from Mohammad Rafi in the '70s. In response to the question "After Kishore, who?", all that could be heard was the echo of the dead singer's rich and resonant voice.

Kishore Kumar was the last of an extraordinary group of male playback singers. "We worked together for 38 years, but with his skill at unorthodox interpretations of songs it was always a challenge singing a duet with him," recalls Asha Bhosale. "I cannot see so much talent in anyone today." Music critic Amarendu-Nandu Dhaneswar says: "The old greats have not been replaced because those kind of music compos-



PRAVIN PANCHAL

Laxmikant (left) and Pyarelal: durable duo

Manna Dey (left) and (extreme right) Talat Mehmood

PRAVIN PANCHAL

Asha Bhosale (left) and Lata Mangeshkar: legends both

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...are no longer there to support and ...tain talent."

In the disco crazy '80s it is composers ...e Bappi Lahiri who have stolen the ...ow. Their strong emphasis on beat has ...en at the cost of the old melody, which ...s the soul of all memorable film songs. ...Lata, who has reduced her commit... to Hindi films considerably, said in ...nterview to INDIA TODAY six years ago: ...e stuff that you hear these days, do ...u call it music?"

But the new beat has come to stay. ...d with it has come a host of male and ...ale playback singers. They begin their ...eers in an entirely different manner from the singers of yesterday, simultaneously recording songs for films, performing on stage, and putting out cassettes of bhajans, ghazals or disco songs. "It is going to be a very different era, and I feel something new and exciting will emerge as we see the evolution of many new singers," says Nitin Mukesh, 37, son of the legendary Mukesh. "Maybe one of us will also become a legend."

Kishore and son Amit: in his father's footsteps

Nitin and Amit Kumar, 34, Kishore's son, are the only children of famous playback singers to have followed in their fathers' footsteps. Though the late singer had also become selective about his music, he featured in 60 per cent of the film songs recorded in Bombay. Little wonder then, that just two weeks after Kishore Kumar's death, the son was completing his father's assignments. Amit suddenly found himself committed to 11 recordings, as music directors lined up to use a voice resembling the departed singer's.

Besides Nitin and Amit, several other male playback singers have come up in recent years—Manhar, Shailendra Singh, Bhupendra, Yesudas, S. Balasubramaniam—but none of them has been able to make it to the top. Suresh Wadkar, 31, a playback singer with an original style, is most often mentioned as someone who could take on Kishore Kumar's mantle. He was eight when his parents put him in the custody of Pandit Jiyalal Vasant, a light classical vocalist, and unlike most playback singers, he has had years of classical training. Wadkar came into films when music director Ravindra Jain spotted him at a *Sur Singar Samsad* contest. "All singers are scared of standing before the studio mike, which we call the *bhoot*," says Wadkar. "To stay in *sur* before the mike, you have to have a classical base, and practise constantly."

The new singers have come at a time when the established names have faded out and the emphasis is on beat at the cost of melody.

Talat Aziz, 31, whose ghazals in *Umrao Jaan* and *Bazaar* became very popular, is another young playback voice on the horizon, as is Pankaj Udhas, 36, who recorded the well-known *Chitti ayee hai watan se...* for Mahesh Bhatt's *Naam*. Now that Kishore is dead and producers are more willing to try new voices, these ghazal singers—who became popular in the first place because of the decline in

SURESH JETHVA

Anuradha Podwal sings with Mohammad Aziz

Pankaj Udhas (left) and Talat Aziz: promising

Bappi Lahri: stealing the show

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Hindi film music—may be heard more often from film sound-tracks. "I recorded very few film songs after *Naam*," says Udhas, "but from next year I hope to devote more time to playback singing."

Two of the busiest singers today—Shabbir Kumar and Mohammad Aziz—model themselves completely on Mohammad Rafi, demonstrating the lack of new ideas in the film music industry. "Hindi film music is a rhapsody which has become absolutely stale and puerile," says lyric writer Amit Khanna.

"Lots of questions are asked about why standards have deteriorated, but in today's films where is the need for good music? And where are the music makers to create that music?" asks Manna Dey, 68, who appears in many concerts in India and abroad, but has not sung for a Hindi film for a long time.

One reason for the decline of Hindi playback singing has been the dramatic shift in film themes. Social or romantic themes have been replaced by a pot-pourri of violence, suspense, chases, and high-kicking macho romance. Inevitably, the demand is for a loud, rhythmic sound, not the delicate lyrics and melodious tunes of an earlier era. "Eighty per cent of today's film music cannot be good because of the situations on which the songs are picturised," says Laxmikant, part of the successful Laxmikant-Pyarelal duo.

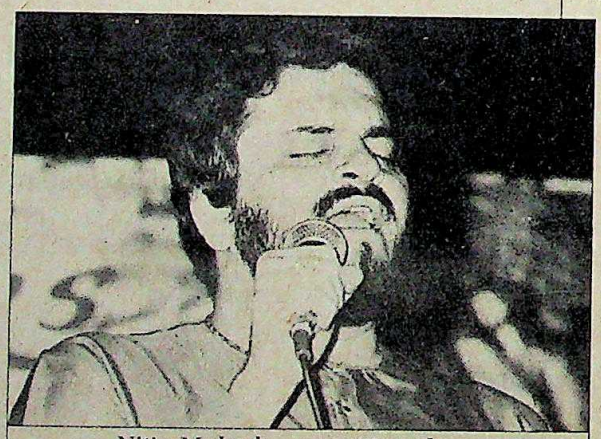
Talat Mehmood, 63, who has not sung for Hindi movies since 1970 says: "We struggled a lot, and used to take at least one week to record a song. Today the playback singer is told of the song just before the recording, and in 15 minutes it's all over. What you hear is all noise, there is no music or poetry left."

Even if the standard of the music has declined, the quality of the equipment available in the recording studios, and the cost of recording a song has gone up. In the last five years, there has been a major overhaul of equipment, and now many recording studios boast the latest in electronic sound wizardry, including the most modern sythesizers, sequencers and octo pads. But the cost of making a song has also gone up by at least 20 per cent. Today, from the time of conception of the lyrics and tune, to the finished audio tape, a producer spends at least Rs 50,000 on each song.

Of course, with big names the cost would escalate further. Laxmikant-Pyarelal, for instance, are said to be the highest paid music directors—around Rs 2 lakh per film. Lata, needless to say, commands the highest price for a singer—reportedly Rs 30,000 per song—followed by sister Asha who charges Rs 25,000. Kishore commanded the same price as Asha. But both Lata and Asha are known to charge much less or sometimes nothing at all, if they like an assignment but feel the producer cannot afford their price. The newer singers get paid between Rs 1,000 and Rs 5,000.

HMV

Mukesh: the end of an era



Nitin Mukesh: an exciting phase

While the death of Kishore Kumar has suddenly created a void which may take years to fill, the gradual withdrawal of Lata Mangeshkar, has brought forth a crop of young female playback singers. "With Lataji away for long periods and Ashaji far more selective now, music directors are really on the look-out for new female voices," says Kavita Krishnamurthy, whose latest success is the *Hawa hawai* number in *Mr India*.

Besides Krishnamurthy, names like Alisha, Sharon Prabhakar, Anuradha Podwal, Alka Yagnik and Sadhana Sargam testify to the widening horizons in the field of female playback singing. Says Krishnamurthy: "It's really an open field now and the range of songs being sung has widened also." The greater variety of songs now heard in films is reflected in the backgrounds of the singers. "I love singing pop and rock and the new generation does not want that soft old sound any more," says Alisha, who has the hit *Kate nahin katte* number in *Mr India* to her credit. The success of *Mr India*'s music has started a trend and filmgoers will be hearing similar music over and over again in several forthcoming films. "After *Mr India* I have recorded many songs on the same lines," says Alisha.

But as the rhythms in Hindi film music get frenetic, the question often asked is whether there will ever be a return to the golden age of melody. Even six years ago Lata had felt that the early signs of a revival were already there. "It is bound to return. The bang bang phase cannot last long," she said.

Since the early '70s for instance, the music of a film can no longer ensure success at the box-office as in the past. "Today the success of a film cassette is entirely dependent on the success of the film," says GCI's Kohli. His company sold 10 lakh cassettes of *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, the biggest seller of all times, but finds that a lot of non-film albums have better sales.

Kishore Kumar died at a time when all the great names associated with the Hindi film music industry had begun to wonder whether the golden age would ever come again. With his death, the question being raised is not just "after Kishore, who?" but also "after Kishore, what?" For if any of the younger male and female playback singers are to emerge as original singers, and not just imitators of the legendary greats, they will need the right kind of music and guidance from a new lot of music directors. And unless the Hindi film music industry can create new legends with its songs, it will never recapture its dominant position in the country's popular music scene.

—M. RAHMAN

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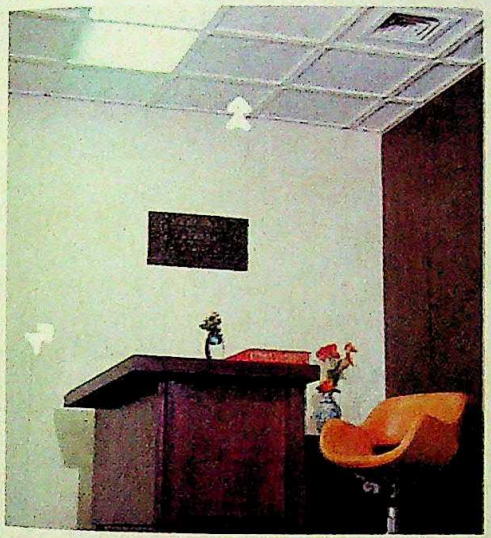

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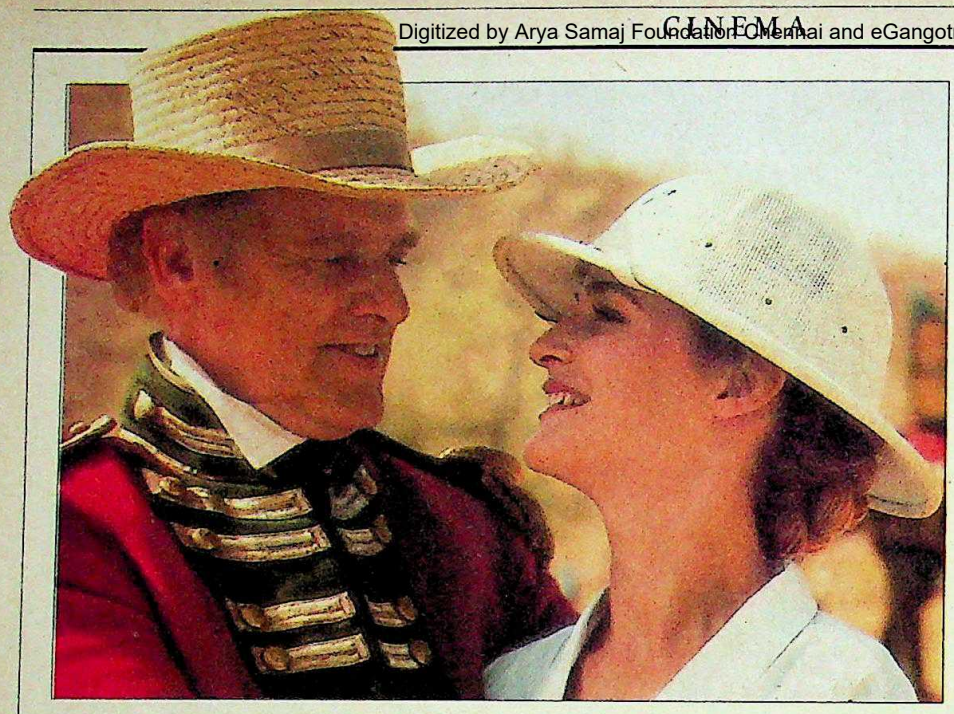
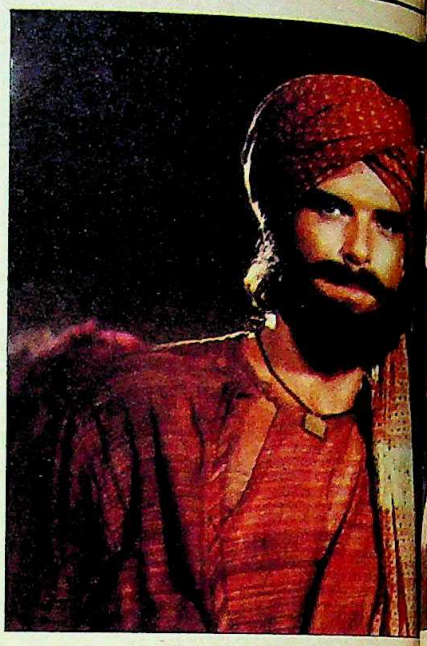




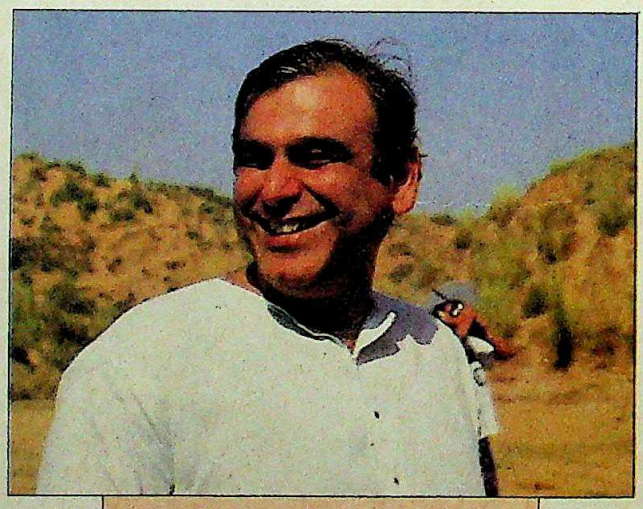
Scenes from the movie and (centre) Brosnan and Kapoor: changing landscapes

THE DECEIVERS

Rituals of Death

Merchant's new film is an adventure story with a twist

HERE he comes again, Ismail Merchant. And this time he's not making one of his elegant, low-key films, the kind mother would approve of. *The Deceivers* is a boy's own, action thriller, spilling over with bandits and corpses, that goes better with popcorn and Coke than with late afternoon cream teas. For the first time Merchant, 51, has taken on a new director, ventured out of the green, graceful world of his earlier films, and allowed himself the largest budget ever. He could have constructed three rooms with views in the $6 million (approximately Rs 7.8 crore) it's going to cost to make *The Deceivers*. But, this time, as Merchant says: "People will be sitting up in their seats to see what happens next."



His earlier films usually dealt with genteel English society, where people looked at each other over dinner menus. Somehow it worked. Now, after the mind-boggling success of *Room with a View*, Merchant has a new confidence and is out to conquer new worlds (He plans to release three unusual films next year, *The Deceivers*, *Perfect Murder* and *Slaves of New York*). His last release *Maurice*, a young man's coming to terms with his homosexuality, has grossed half-a-million dollars (about Rs 66 lakh) in one New York cinema alone. If the story didn't interest you, you'd still watch it anyway, for the way the camera moved, for the sweep of the music. Merchant-Ivory productions are always an elevating experience. You love them, these elegant drawing-room dramas, even if they go on forever and a year.

For the first time, Merchant has taken on a different director, ventured out of the green, graceful world of his earlier films, and allowed himself the largest budget ever.

The Deceivers, however, is all story and it belongs more to Hitchcock and Brian de Palma than to James Ivory's soft touches. "Merchant has never made a film of this nature or size," says co-producer Tim Van Rellim. A long way from *The Householder*, a heart-warming story about a newly-wed couple living in old Delhi, *The Deceivers*—starring Pierce Brosnan, Saeed Jaffrey and Shashi Kapoor—is also set in India. But what an India. Based on John Master's novel, it moves in the deadly world of thugs who waylaid travellers in the early 19th century and then strangled them with silk handkerchiefs. It is a secret cult of strange rituals and mass murder and a pace so swift, that a dozen innocent travellers would have been strangled to death in the time it takes the hero and heroine to kiss in *Room with a View*. "It is kind of like Ismail Merchant meets Hollywood," says Brosnan, who plays William Savage, the hero of the film.

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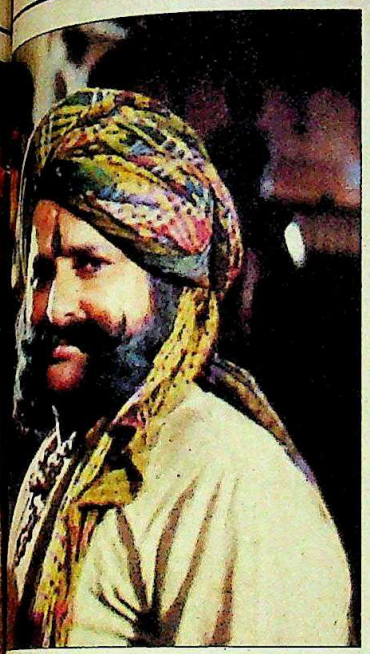
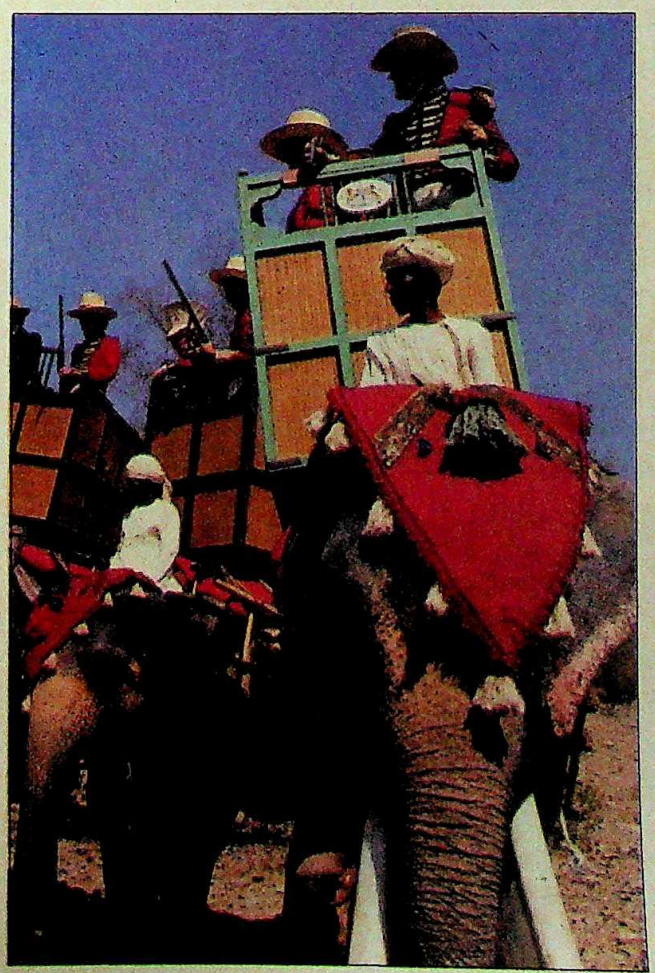


But of course Merchant would never content with just edge-of-the-seat ills and he probably wouldn't approve that description either. On the one nd, Savage, a British officer, is out to minate the thugs. But to do so, he also comes part of them—and he finds that who must kill, and most terri- of all, that he is beginning to joy it. How does a man live h a discovery like that? "It is out and out thriller," says ector Nicholas Meyer, whose ier films include *The Day After* *Star Trek II*. "But it is also the e of a man's journey into his rallabyrinth." The book ends an even greyer area, but, as Rellim says: "In a movie you l leave an audience at the of a branch, not knowing if 'll fall off."

It is the locations, really, that such a mystical spell on the ie, and Merchant certainly ows how to smell them out. *Deceivers* moves in lands erseen before, from the green gles near Khajuraho through ecreated English colony in a to the dry, yellow waste- s of Rajasthan, carefully ding all the trappings of the tionable Raj films. The land- e changes as the hero moves ser and farther away from ication and all that is polite. The film opens on an im- e stone gate, overgrown weeds and buzzing with ects. Heaven knows how Merchant found it, but it immediately gives the film its special tone. Behind it, is a grove of death, where hundreds of corpses have been thrown into unmarked graves. This is raw nature, with death lurking in the stillness, and a mysterious presence of the goddess Kali. Unlike Merchant's other films, these are settings that disturb, not please, the soul. The film is designed to get the audience to sometimes sit on the edge of their seats, to sometimes sit back and sigh at the splendour, but to leave the cinema just a bit transformed by man's potential for destruction.

Recreating the Raj: thrilling action



Some films are born controversial and some, like *The Deceivers*, have controversy thrust upon them. Merchant has been accused of glorifying sati in one scene, of debasing Indian culture in another and of filming pornography elsewhere, all of which he says is absolutely untrue. It is ironic that in the 25th year of their togetherness, when the Merchant-Ivory group should have been celebrating, they were hounded by numerous charges, 20 machine-gun wielding policemen who descended on their office and newspaper headlines that screamed: "Arrest warrant for Ismail Merchant." Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's one-time premonition of visiting Ismail in jail almost came true. But Merchant never did get arrested, and as he says in his typical, cheerful way, now that the film is almost complete: "Every newspaper and magazine in America has carried this story. Thanks to the absurd charges, today everyone knows about *The Deceivers*."

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA in Khajuraho

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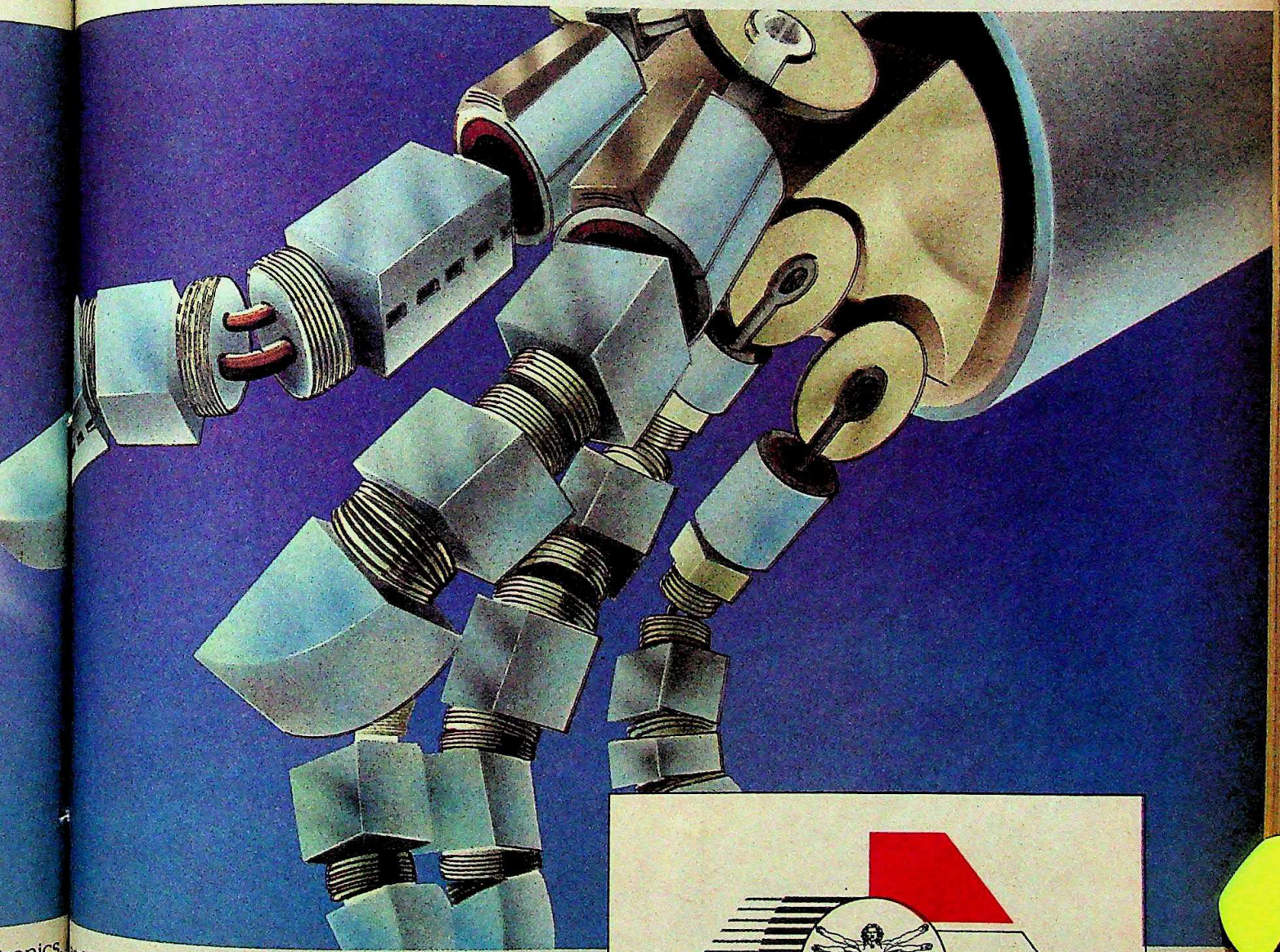

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THE HAJ

A Racket in Alms

The poor are sent to Mecca as beggars

FOR most of the 31,000 Indian Muslims who went on the pilgrimage to Mecca this year, the Haj was the fulfilment of a long-cherished religious dream. But for underworld gangs operating mainly from Bombay and the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, the Haj provided the opportunity for organising a highly lucrative alms racket utilising poor and handicapped peasants as beggars.

The vicious trade in beggars was poignantly highlighted when Sonarul Sheikh, 6, a handicapped child from Saddarput Bawtipura village in Murshidabad, was found abandoned in Medina after the Haj ended in August. Soon after, the Saudi authorities found Akhtar Ali, 9, a mentally retarded boy from Hazrapota village in Nadia district. The Medina governor, taking personal charge of the kids, sent them to the deportation centre from where the Indian Embassy flew them to Bombay to be handed over to the Haj Committee (India).

Even as Sonarul's mother, Abeda Bibi, arrived from West Bengal to claim her son who has a deformed leg, two Bengali girls with identical deformities—Mumtaz Quddus, 10, and Zarina Aziz, 6—were deported to Bombay from Saudi Arabia. And when the pilgrim ship M.V. Akbari docked last month, nearly 70 beggars including seven handicapped children disembarked.

"It is a well-organised racket by ruthless mafia gangs from Bombay using mentally retarded and handicapped children and adults," says Talmiz Ahmed, the Indian consul general in Jeddah. "Since more than a million pilgrims come from all over the world for Haj, huge amounts are collected by the gangs by employing the beggars."

In Saudi Arabia itself, not only are there no beggars, but begging itself is prohibited, with pilgrims encouraged instead to donate to charitable organisations. However, as Muslims are enjoined to "give alms from your properties with pleasure and perform Haj", the religious zeal of the pilgrims allows beggars to clandestinely collect vast amounts as alms. According to one Saudi estimate, this can be as much as Rs 1.5 lakh per beggar during the 40 days that Hajis are allowed to stay there.

Besides return passage, the beggars are reportedly assured up to Rs 10,000 from the gangs' agents once back in India. Of course, if they are abandoned in Saudi Arabia that money is pocketed by the gangs. Says Abeda Bibi: "My 40-year-old husband used to work breaking stones. But he is going blind. A man made him the offer of taking our youngest child to Mecca. He paid Rs 500 first and promised Rs 4,500 on return. I almost lost my son for Rs 500."

This year, nearly 25,000 Hajis were sent to Mecca through the Haj Committee—authorised to issue special pilgrim passports. But another 6,000 went on international passports with visas issued directly by the Saudi Consulate in Bombay, and it was among this lot that the beggars were detected. Nearly 300 beggars were apprehended en route to Jeddah and were promptly deported home. But an equal number are estimated to have slipped past immigration, and quietly gone about collecting alms.

"During Haj, no pilgrim will give less than 5 to 10 Rials (Rs 15 to Rs 30) each time to a beggar, and it will be reasonable to presume that a beggar will be able to get alms from at least 100 pilgrims every day," says a Saudi official. "With such high stakes, it's no wonder these gangs have become so bold."

A consular official pointed out that tightening visa regulations would put genuine pilgrims to much expense and suffering. As many are elderly, and from all over India, the Saudi Consulate in Bombay issues visas on the basis of documents submitted and doesn't insist on interviews. "We can easily tighten regulations here, but a more humane solution would be closer checking at immigration counters in Bombay, as done in Jeddah," says the official.

As yet, nothing is known about the identity of the gangs or the amounts they collect. But from all accounts, a Sheikh's ransom is there for the picking when a beggar gang mingles among the pilgrims in Mecca.

—M. RAHMAN

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI

Recruited by mafia gangs, handicapped children are being forced to beg amongst pilgrims.

(Clockwise from top) Akhtar Ali, Sonarul Sheikh, Mumtaz and Zarina

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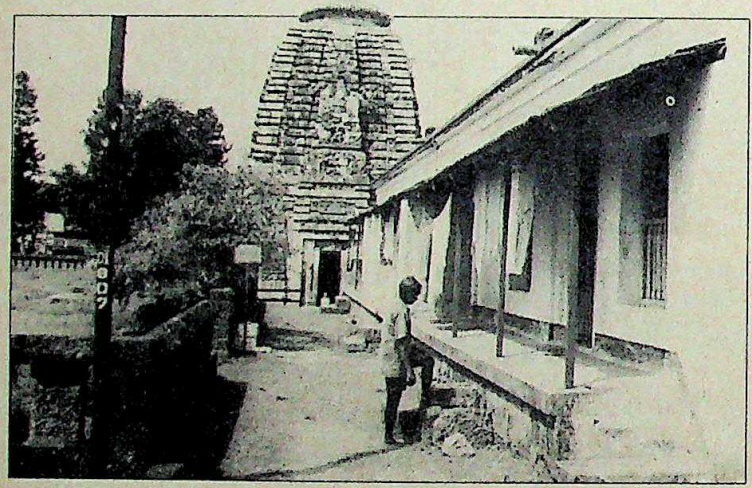
BHUBANESWAR

A Lost Heritage

Temples are endangered by encroachment

FOR centuries, Bhubaneswar has been known as *mandir malini*, a place garlanded by temples. That name may no longer be appropriate. Of about a thousand temples, only 312 survive, and of the countless Shivalingas that once dotted the place, only 450 remain. And even these leftovers of history are being threatened by high-rise buildings, residential and office complexes.

Questions about the impact of industrialisation on the temples were also raised recently in Parliament and the state Assembly. Two experts from UNESCO had voiced a similar concern during a visit early this year. Patnaik says that the setting up of a high-powered committee to coordinate the efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the State Archaeology Department (SAD) is now being considered.



Unauthorised construction in temple complex: damaging

Although the pace of destruction has been hastened now, it actually began 40 years ago when, after taking over the status of state capital from Cuttack, new Bhubaneswar began intruding on the old temple-town. Whatever little hope of their undamaged existence remained disappeared in 1980 when Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik launched an industrial drive in Orissa, resulting in the city's growth in a haphazard manner.

The state Government was propelled to some action only a few months ago when an alarm was raised by the Orissa chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). An INTACH survey revealed that 130 of the 312 surviving temples were unprotected. Warned B.K. Rath, secretary of the organisation's Orissa unit: "Fifty-two temples need urgent attention." The trust wants a 6 sq km area of the old town to be declared a "cultural heritage conservation zone".

Last fortnight, the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) also began negotiating with the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) for help with Bhubaneswar's planning. And, as part of its Rs 50-lakh plan to integrate the temple-town with the modern city, the BDA has approached H.B. Singh, a noted archaeologist from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and some local designers.

But critics point out that not only is the sum inadequate; all these promises also fail to hide the criminal neglect that has persisted. Several important temples have fallen to encroachment and, in some cases, unbridled construction has taken place within temple complexes. Some of these are the Muktesvara, Vaital Deul and Lingaraj temples as also the twin Pataleswar and Taleswar temples. Others in the old town—Drara Basini, Bhawani-Shanker, Sali Deul, and the Papanasini group of temples—have also not been spared. The general devil-may-care attitude is reflected in the fact that Subernesvar temple is now a stronghold of washermen and several houses under construction will choke its entry points. Again, houses have also telescoped into the Kotitirthalinga temple.

However, the ASI seems totally incapable of preventing this widespread intrusion. This, although since 1985, a separate circle of the ASI—covering the state's 13 districts and seven districts from neighbouring Madhya Pradesh—has been established.

The ASI can expect little assistance from SAD in preservation. Orissa is the only state which does not have a separate directorate of archaeology and SAD falls under the Department of Culture, which also looks after tourism. SAD has a measly budget of Rs 6 lakh and can spend only Rs 2 lakh annually on preservation. It is an indication of the state of their preparedness that neither ASI nor SAD are aware of the total number of temples and shrines in Orissa.

> Of the thousand temples that once existed in this town, only 312 survive today.

The ASI, in charge of preserving 20 temples in Bhubaneswar, plans to spend Rs 15.54 lakh on maintenance during the seventh plan. Sources in SAD, which looks after 159 protected temples in Orissa, claim that though conservation of 39 temples is complete, lack of funds is a major handicap.

Although there is a law prohibiting new construction within 30 metres of a monument, officials have turned a blind eye to repeated violation of this law. ASI sources say that they are helpless to prevent this. For instance, in Vaital Deul, of seventh century origin, two priests have constructed their residences within the temple complex. Although they have been offered compensation to move out, they refuse to do so and state officials simply haven't the courage to do anything that may invite the priests' wrath.

The lack of official will has also been exposed with regard to the encroachment of commercial buildings at the Lingaraj temple. The local municipality has been happy collecting taxes from shops instead of having them removed.

As a critic points out, little can be expected from a state government that cannot ensure the proper upkeep of even its museum in Bhubaneswar. Polite noise about high-powered committees is unlikely to hold the key to the survival of these ancient monuments.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

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PENGUIN INDIA

A Promising Venture

An ambitious entrant in book publishing

INDIA'S publishing business rarely makes news, content as it is to shuffle along in academic by-lanes and stick to the limited library market. The occasional best seller, by a Kuldip Nayar or Dominique Lapierre, only highlights the drought of good titles and eager readers.

But things could be changing. Penguin India formally launched itself on the publishing scene last fortnight with its first six titles. One of them—a definitive biography of J. Krishnamurthy by cultural czarina Pupul Jayakar—was heading for a second edition in less than two weeks of launching.

Indian paperback publishing in particular has been languishing in recent years, with pioneers like Jaico and Hind slowing down somewhat. And Penguin is the first major international publishing house to step into the vacuum. It aims to release two titles a month, laying stress on quality. A second objective: reach out to larger numbers of readers. As Peter Mayer, the trail-blazing head of Penguin books worldwide, said in New Delhi last fortnight: "We hope that from now on Indian authors will not have to go to Penguin abroad, and that we will be able to introduce Indian authors to the rest of the world."

Certainly, the first titles are promising. Besides the Krishnamurthy biography, there is Dom Moraes' first book of poems in more than a decade (with some excellent offerings), a translation of a novel by the best-selling Bengali novelist Sunil Gangopadhyay, and a promising first novel by Ranga Rao. Said Penguin India's Managing Director Aveek Sarkar: "The Penguin people in Britain say we have made a better start than either Penguin Canada or Penguin Australia."

Others are on their way. P.T. Usha's autobiography is being issued in mass market format (smaller size, and a low price of Rs 35), with an unusually large print run of over 5,000 that might even be stretched to 7,500. And Indian classics (with Penguin's trade mark black spine) will soon be on offer: like a fresh translation and partial re-interpretation of Kalidasa's poems and plays. Says Associate Editor David Davidar: "We will be offering a mix of translations from successful Indian language writers, re-issues of well-known writers as well as introducing new authors."

The initial publishing list plays safe with some well-known names: cartoons selected by Abu Abraham, selected essays by R.K. Narayan and a re-issue in hardback (under the Viking label) of Prakash Tandon's classic Punjab trilogy. Sometimes, of course, a new author could be well known too, like cartoonist R.K. Laxman, who is publishing his first novel. And two sports journalists are putting together a whimsical 'cricket book of lists', a la David Walechinsky.

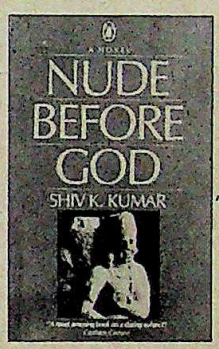
With the Ananda Bazar Patrika group being partners in Penguin India, journalism is also on offer: the Bhopal disaster and the Sri Lankan problem, for a start. Even non-journalistic books have journalists as authors: Rajmohan Gandhi on the Muslim mind, Anees Jung on a woman's journey through India.

The Indian publishing world had initially reacted with scepticism when Penguin announced its plans of doing in India what Allen Lane first did with Penguin in England 52 years ago: introduce quality books at an affordable price to an untapped readership. And Human Resource Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao warned at the launching that Penguin might soon run out of good authors if books were issued at the rate of two a month. But Davidar said he already had 50 commissioned manuscripts waiting to be printed, and a hundred works in Indian languages awaited good translators.

The challenge of quality also applies to book production. Indian paperback binding is notoriously bad, as is the paper used. Penguin says it has licked the binding problem, but the paper needs improvement (the print shows through on the other side). Would the books have looked better if published in England? Yes, marginally, as the paper used outside is better, but then the cost would also have been higher. The average Penguin India price varies between Rs 40 and Rs 50. And the print run will vary between 3,000 and 5,000.

Considering that India publishes some 20,000 titles a year in all the languages—making it among the top five countries in the world in terms of the number of titles—a quality paperback publisher should have little difficulty in finding that there are both authors and readers aplenty—if the product and the price are right.

—T.N. NINAN



Starting with six titles, the international publishing house plans to introduce quality, low-priced books in India.

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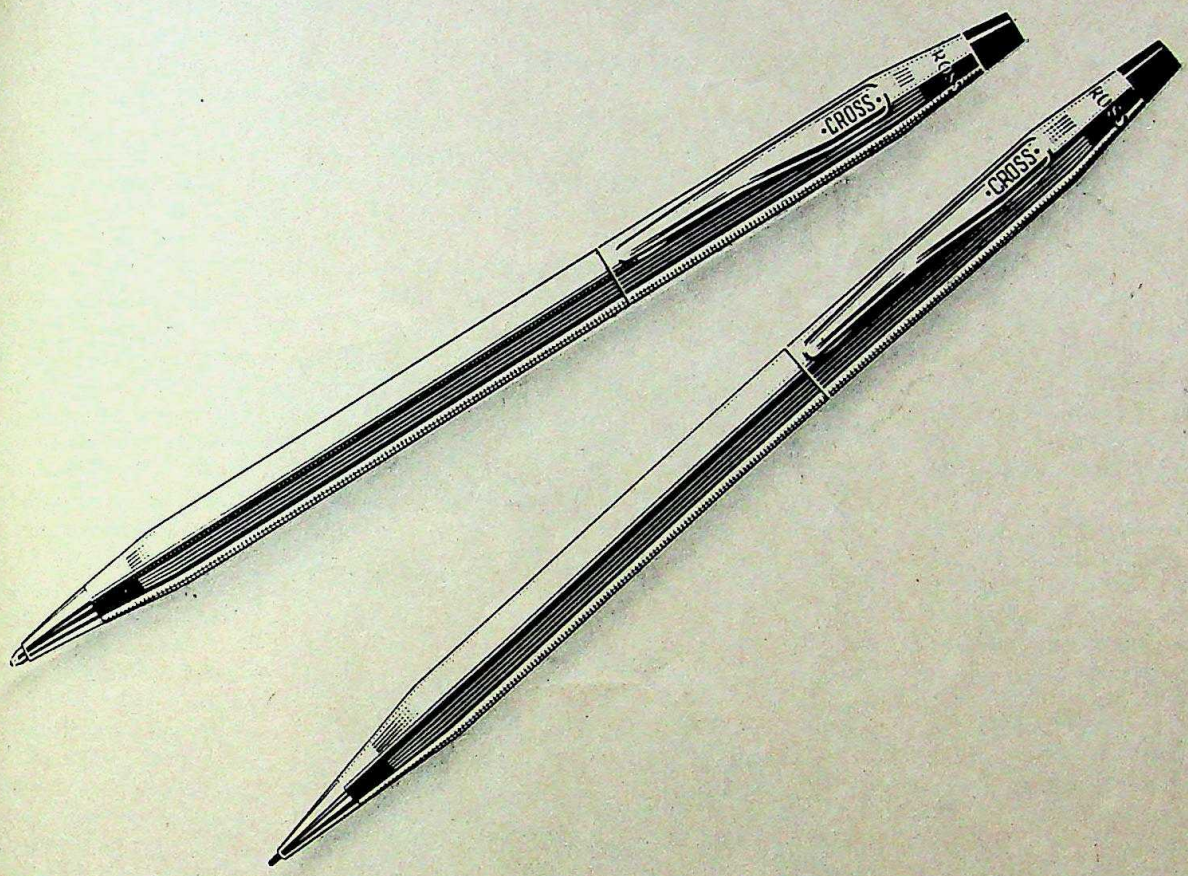

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NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

The Maverick Master

In his new book, he is as polemical as ever

A visitor entering the small detached house in the quiet, tree-lined Lathbury Road in the scholastic environs of Oxford will be greeted inevitably by strains of music, sometimes Schumann or even Bengal's Hemant Kumar. Those who meet him for the first time must always be unprepared for his pint size as Nirad C. Chaudhuri answers the door. Almost dainty and elfin in spotless dhoti and kurta, he looks 75—but is celebrating his 90th birthday next month.

Coinciding with his birthday is the publication of his latest book, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!—India 1921-1952*. It picks up the story of his life and thoughts from the point of time at which it was left in *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*, published in 1951. Controversial and polemical as ever, Chaudhuri may provoke another outcry with his new book.

Chaudhuri looks remarkably zestful and agile for a man his age. The most impressive aspect of the living-room is the books on display—Chateaubriand, Hugo, Moliere, Pascal, Flaubert and Rochefoucauld. He is either partial to French literature and philosophy or prefers to display them.

But it is music that galvanises him. He straightaway beards his visitor: "Tell me if you can recognise the music." When the guess is hopelessly wrong, he proceeds to expound on the merits of Medieval Baroque and then bounds across the room to change the record. This time it is easier—Bengali folk music. "Yes, but listen to the flawless texture, the tonality and the timbre. I have put together this system whose quality will be unmatched by all those expensive stereo systems," he expounds.

The resonance and acoustics are indeed superb. "By listening to the diction and cadence," he goes on, "I can pinpoint with precision the exact region in Bengal from where the singer comes." He looks up defiantly as though expecting to be probed further. When the dare goes unchallenged and the subject turns to his newest book, he seems almost thwarted.

Be it music or literature, Chaudhuri is virtually unstoppable. It is difficult to stem the torrent of words and views, interspersed with Latin, Greek or French quotations, as he leaps to pull one book or the other to drive home his point. Even when his arguments appear outlandish or whimsical, rarely does he seem to consider that there could be a differing point of view.

As a nonagenarian, Chaudhuri appears to find dissent either tiresome or exacting. But the image of a gruff, crabby curmudgeon who spouts eccentric and truculent theories ill suits him. He has a spry and arch sense of humour and often cracks up as he laughs delightedly in his shrill, falsetto style, having dismantled some popular notion or the other.

Chaudhuri has long been considered one of the finest and most important Indian writers of this century. *The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*, which covered the first 22 years of his life in Calcutta and Bengal, was described by V.S. Naipaul as "the one great book to have come out of the Indo-English encounter". His other works, less renowned, have included *A Passage to England, The Intellectual in India, To Live or Not to Live, Hinduism, Scholar Extraordinary, Clive of India* and *The Continent of Circe*, which was awarded the prestigious Duff Cooper prize. His newest book is already being acclaimed in British publishing circles as a 'classic autobiography'.

JITENDRA ARYA

"My views on Indian nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru are unflattering. So are my remarks on Mountbatten. But my attempt was to give a balanced interpretation of events."

The book is made up of three elements: the author's personal life which he has made the framework of whatever history he has wished to offer; his feelings about the public and historical events through which he has passed; and an account of what happened in India during the period 1921 to 1952.

Reviews in the British press are expected later this month and are widely anticipated to be mixed—from the laudatory to the scathing, since no two reviewers ever seem to agree on the merits of Chaudhuri's works. The book has also set a publishing record for its length—an extraordinary 963 pages.

"After I had submitted my manuscript, the publishers (Chatto and Windus) came to me and said they wanted it halved," says Chaudhuri. "I told them I wouldn't change a word. Six months later, they came back—this time with the assurance that nothing would be shortened. They were nice enough to phone me and check each time a comma had to be changed."

Chaudhuri still seems to be smarting from what he perceives as slights and affronts he has endured from fellow Bengalis for the last 40 years. The famous corrosive "Chaudhuri vitriol" and "waspish phraseology" is most evident when he warms to the topic of "fellow Bengalis". But he is quick to point out

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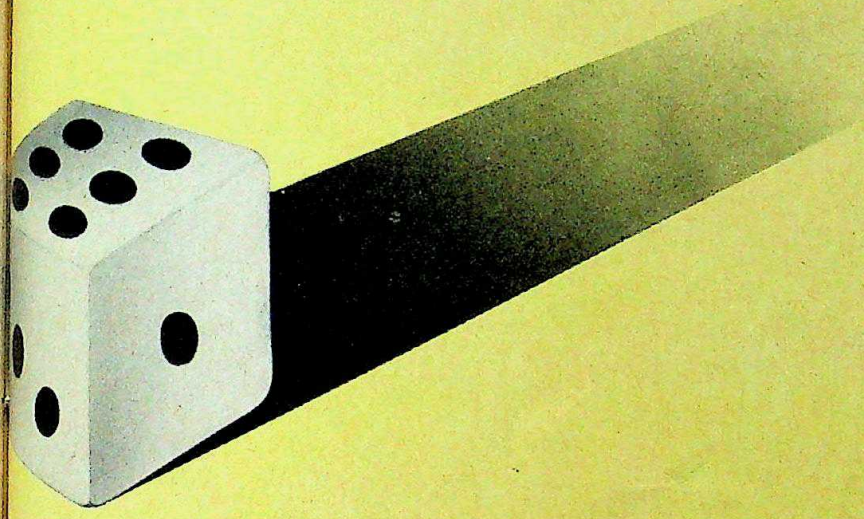

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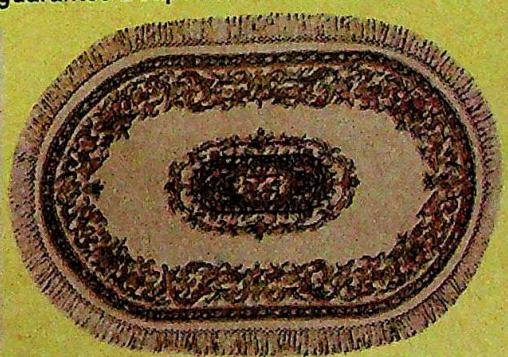

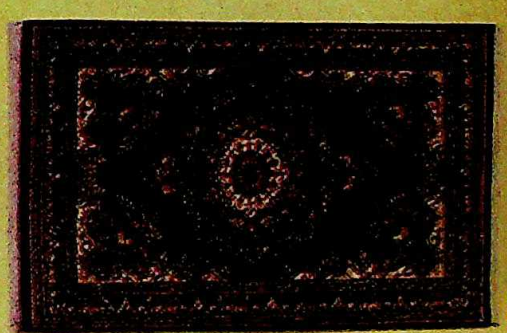

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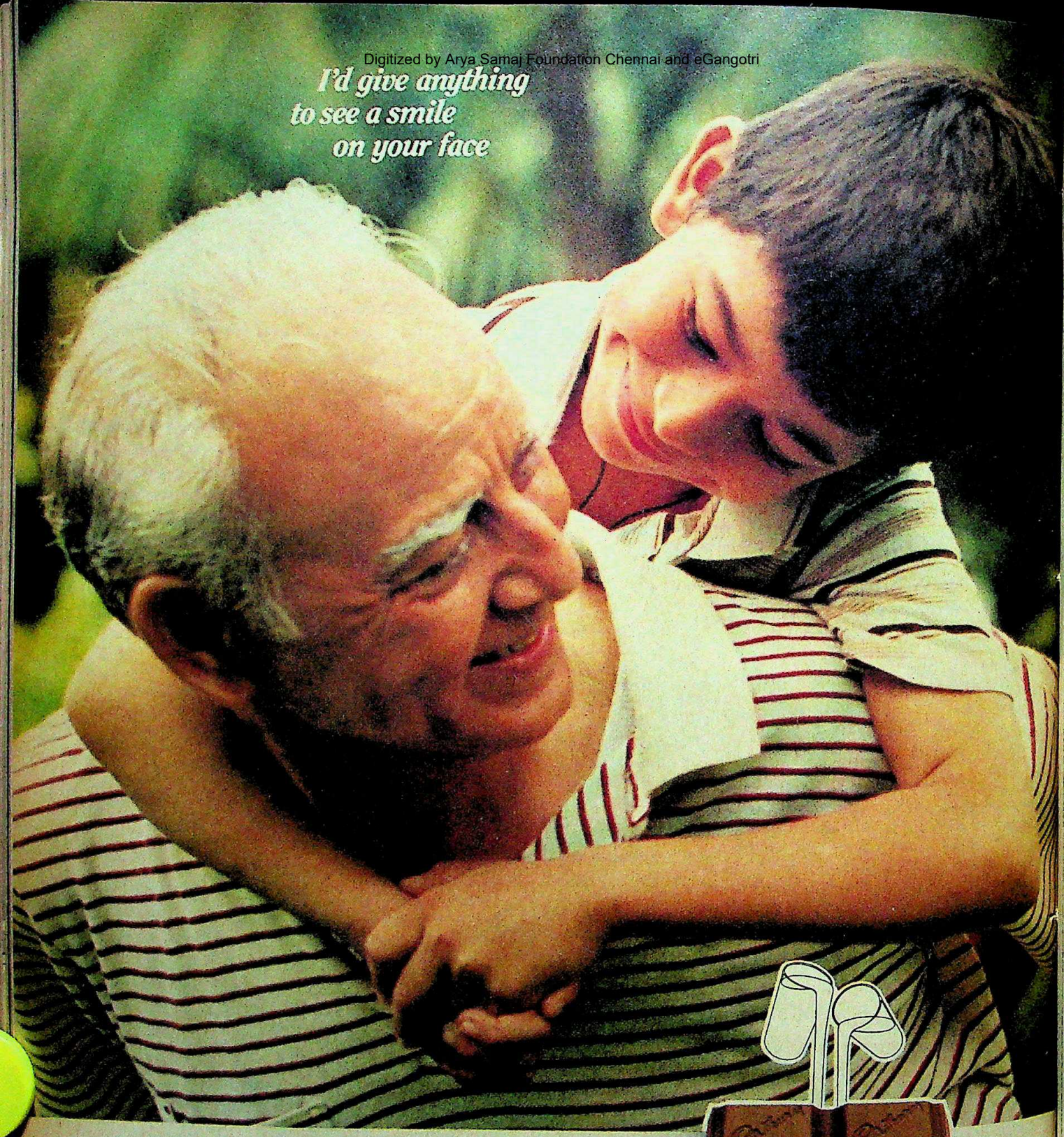

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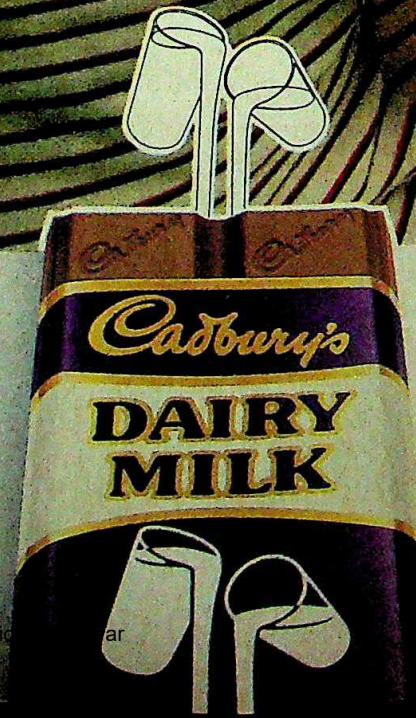

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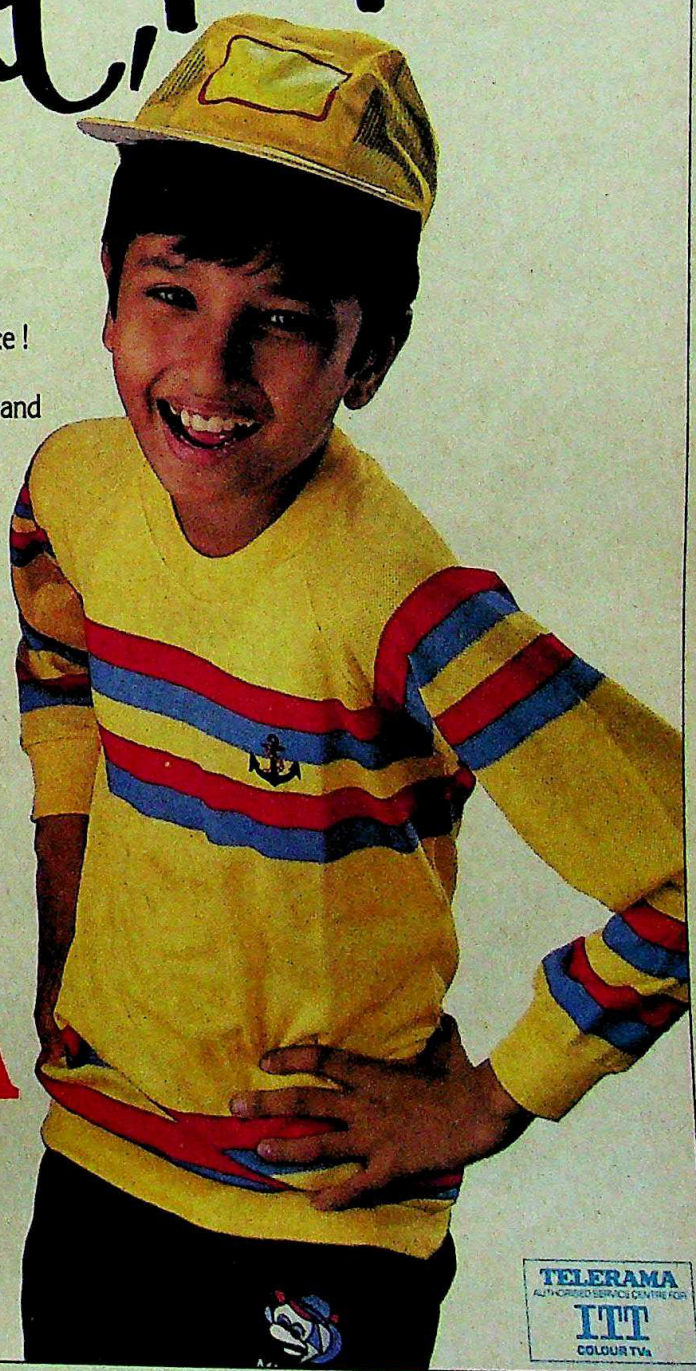

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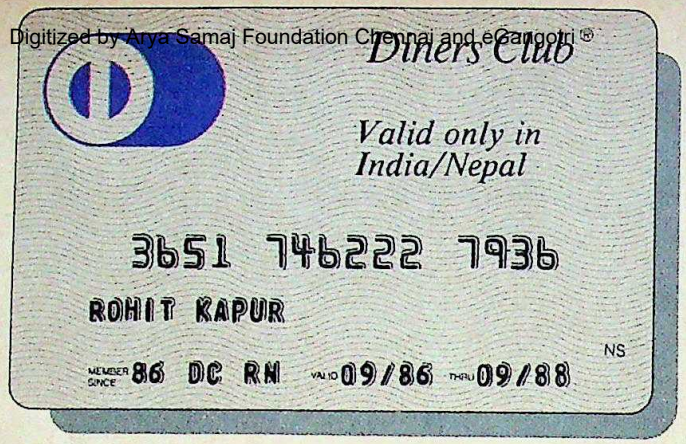

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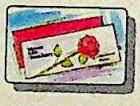
Fruit and flowers by telephone.  Gift vouchers.

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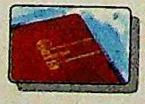
Free flight insurance. Commission-free travellers' cheques. Purchase bonus.  Diners diary.

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that he holds no malice towards them. "After all, over the years they have knocked down their greatest sons—Vivekananda, Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy, Subhas Chandra Bose. Their spite and venom towards them was extreme." Chaudhuri argues that it is pointless to venerate men after their death when so much animosity—provoked by petty jealousies—was shown towards them when they were alive.

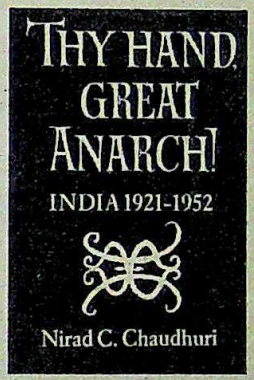
When queried if he expected more opprobrium to be heaped on his newest work by Bengalis, he seems momentarily pensive: "I think they will." Then, as though this uncharacteristic doubt is blasphemous, he agitatedly says: "Of course they will. Some of them will mock those passages relating to my marriage. Well, they can score their cheap points—for in all these years I have remained unaffected."

But when told that Bengali criticism does seem to greatly exercise him, Chaudhuri is dismissive and then chuckles suddenly: "Not at all. Do you know the intellectual calibre of their criticism? One of them actually said much of my work is 'polished' or 'even written' by an Englishman here!"

In *Great Anarch!* he castigates with an impartial hand cynical Indian nationalists, hypocritical Congress leaders and pusillanimous British politicians. "The book is part autobiography, but the main thrust is to give an accurate account of the final days of English rule in India—since none has been written so far." And pray, why not? Chaudhuri says that there are emotional compulsions on both the British and Indian historians to falsify history. Says he: "They have distorted the facts for their own narrow motives. My views on Indian nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru are unflattering. So are my remarks on Mountbatten, which will be unpopular in this country. But my attempt was to give a balanced interpretation of events as I lived through them." What Chaudhuri spurns as "current myths" could be historical fact for the reader, though. And even if one must often violently disagree with his views, his honesty evokes admiration.

Chaudhuri, in his book, has reinforced his views of Gandhi in that the Mahatma was driven by a resolve to abandon civilised life and revert to primitive existence. Chaudhuri sees Gandhiji's preachings as not only the rejection of European civilisation but of Hindu civilisation as well. His views on Nehru and Mountbatten are equally polemical.

Quite astonishingly, his kindest words seem to be reserved for Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Says Chaudhuri: "Now look here. The minimum demands of the Muslims have been known to everybody for years. Why did the British and Gandhi and Nehru cave in to Jinnah's demands instead of standing up to him? For his success, Jinnah has been relentlessly debunked over the years." Yet, partition and its resultant horrors were painful for Chaudhuri, who was appalled that both the British and Congress leaders had accepted the division.



Both as a political document and as an autobiography, the book is compelling. The controversial views expressed are likely to provoke mixed comments—from the laudatory to the scathing.

Chaudhuri is candid enough to admit that his view of the Indian nationalist movement could not be made independently of his attitude to things English. His historical view of British rule is that it was the "best political regime which had ever been seen in India" in spite of its shortcomings and positive evils. But he insists that this had not coloured his objectivity of the nationalist movement—Indian readers may disagree on this.

Despite the disputatious tenor of his arguments, *Great Anarch!* is a masterly work and an almost Gibbonian survey of Indian and Bengali politics that led up to and culminated in Independence. Both as a political document and as an autobiography, it is compelling and invaluable for the light it sheds on a crucial period of Indian history as well as being a revealing portrait of a remarkable man.

Chaudhuri seems to concede—and even take vicarious pleasure—that for the average reader, reading his magnum opus is going to be a daunting task. The reader needs to traverse a formidable literary minefield of allusions and citations. Again, throughout the 963 pages are French quotes—none with English translations. Why didn't he offer help to those who don't read French? "My job is not to help or spoon-feed them. Those who are literate enough will take the trouble to understand them," responds Chaudhuri. Was he prepared for another dose of salty reaction from India? This time, he chortles, tongue firmly in cheek: "Well, if I get good reviews in India, then I am in trouble, aren't I? I would say then that something is wrong with the book."

Great Anarch! fetched Chaudhuri a handsome advance and he was also helped by his many English admirers, notably Professor Edward Shils of Chicago and Cambridge. Both Chaudhuri and his wife, Amiya, live simply, but well. She is virtually bedridden. His well-known fetish "for the best"—be it wines, cutlery, music or objets d'art—is still evident. "I don't earn much. Royalties from my previous books still come in, but whatever I earn, I spend," he says. His great love remains the opera—which is "organic to his existence"—and in his spare time, he tends to his immaculate little garden.

His ascetic discipline in writing *Great Anarch!* has been quite remarkable. Since 1979, he has adopted a rigorous style—rising before dawn and working uninterrupted for four hours. It seems extraordinary that Chaudhuri did much of his work without notes. His controversial work is bound to raise an outcry. But the 'original angry Indian' remains totally impervious and unaffected as he bustles over to his tape deck and asks for the last time: "Now this is a Spanish operatic work. Tell me if you can identify the period."

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in Oxford

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MOTOR RALLYING

Quickening Interest

The sport accelerates to gain a wider acceptance

POWER excites, speed thrills and danger challenges. No wonder then that motor rallying, which had been chugging along in India since the early '50s, has accelerated with a powerful vrooom in the last five years. Fuelling it on its way are the jazzier range of automobiles, the spirit of adventure that's overtaking urban youth and the advertiser's burgeoning purse.

The heightened enthusiasm also owes much to the international competition that the Himalayan Car Rally provides annually. Competitors turn up from as far afield as Japan and Britain for this eight-year-young rally. And at last month's meet, out of a record 96 participants, 20 were foreign. For the first time, two big-time automobile companies (Nissan and Mitsubishi) sent official factory teams.

Next year, there might well be more, since the rally will officially enter the international league as part of a new Asia-Pacific circuit—along with the leading Chinese, Australian and New Zealand rallies. This means that any competitor who wants to win the Asia-Pacific championship will need to compete in all four. In addition, a gruelling new Himalayan rally will be flagged off next March—the Great Desert Himalayan.

But the Himalayan is only the icing on the rally cake—there are now 10 major rallies. While the Madras-based South India Rally (1,600-km long) has been held for the past 25 years, the popular Charminar Challenge at Hyderabad has been a four-wheeler competition since 1984 only—having begun as a two-wheeler rally in 1981. Yet, the number of entrants in the rally has already more than doubled.

In Karnataka, the number of motor sports clubs has grown from one in 1981 to seven today, and just about every month there is a rallying event in the state. These range from the big ones like the Karnataka 1000, the Rallye d' Endurance and the Coffee 500—which zooms 1,400 km through lush coffee estates—to week-end treasure-hunts.

Most young Indian rallyists got into it "by chance", they say. And, no doubt, by the thrill of speed. So when they happened to see a rally, their general reaction was: "Why not me?"

Badri Krishna Moorthy, 27, began rallying only this year. Krishna Moorthy, who's now working for a Ph.D. at Jawaharlal Nehru University, entered the Dara Hot Weather Rally this March. "We took a wrong turn and lost 10-12 minutes," he says, "and still came in fifth. We would easily have been second. That's when I realised, it's a cinch."

Nikhil Taneja, who earned his spurs this year in the Himalayan rally, coming in first among contestants with Indian cars, is just 21. "I got my inspiration from my father," says the young Taneja, who started his rallying career as his father's teen-aged team-mate. On the other hand, Taneja's navigator, 31-year-old Manjeev Bhalla, was bitten by the bug when he saw the first Himalayan rally rev its way through his hometown, Shimla, in 1980.

Wing Commander Vinod Nebb, who has been rallying since his college days in 1956, has been able to indulge his "craze" for fast cars even in the air force. He says rallying received a fillip when Air Marshal M.M. Singh took over as commander-in-chief, western command in 1985. That year, he selected a rally team personally.

The army has also enthusiastically backed the sport. Their ace team, Captain Kulbir Singh Chauhan and Major Sukhi Sekhon, were allowed a few months in England this year to study advanced rallying after their sterling performance in last year's Himalayan rally.

But the road to rallying is rough in more senses than one. For instance, a serious contender needs at least Rs 1 lakh to compete with an Indian car in the Himalayan rally. "This is no sport for a middle class person," says Nirmal Kaur, an IPS officer from the Bihar cadre. She had been rallying in a small way in Bihar but the Himalayan was her first big event. Even though Maruti Udyog gave her a car free, expenses were still over Rs 40,000.

A number of Indian rallyists are armed forces personnel, who get support from their units—vehicles, accessories and support teams. There are others from the urban rich with enough money to back a penchant for speed thrills. Vijay Mallya, head of the United Breweries group, for instance, has been an enthusiast, and continues to fund the sport.

But rallying also attracts a fair number of young middle class people with enough drive and determination to make

Photographs by RAKESH KHATR

Maruti Gypsy racing: new rage

the speedster dream come true. Alumni of institutions like the Doon School, St. Stephen's College or the Indian Institute of Technology, they have the gumption to convince the potential sponsor that his sticker, flashing past thousands of open-mouthed spectators, is worth his money.

Top Indian drivers like Rajeev Khanna are able to get even foreign sponsorship. Khanna's bid with an Opel Manta in this year's Himalayan rally was supported by Kenyan H.S. Choda. But, competing as he does at world levels, Khanna still finds the financial going bumpy: "The way we do it

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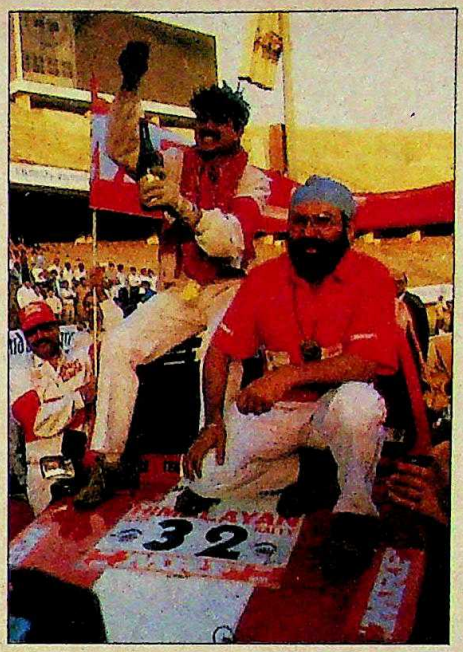

(Clockwise from bottom left) Ace rallyist Jayant Shah in action; the winning Mitsubishi; Taneja and Bhalla

manufacturers are ancillary manufacturers like MRF and Mico who, rally organisers say, have really helped the sport. Indeed, the capital's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, from where the Himalayan Car Rally was flagged off last month, looked like a gala fair ground with banners, balloons, hoardings, and pamphlets advertising everything from tyres to engine oil. Not only that, the sponsored cars advertised Calcutta tea companies, Bombay *dhabas* and Delhi dry-cleaners.

While this kind of advertising does prop up rallies, organisers complain that the amounts are nowhere near sufficient for them to run rallies the way they'd like to. Organiser Nazir Hoosein says his annual budget for the Himalayan rally is Rs 16 lakh. By contrast, the Australian Government alone contributes 1.5 million Australian dollars (Rs 1.4 crore) towards the Australian rally.

Yet, Hoosein says: "So far, we've been leading in Asia." And that's no mean feat. "Most people don't realise the tremendous effort that goes into controlling something that's running away from you every second in our country—we're not a precise people," he says. Yet, his avowed aim is that the Himalayan rally join the 11 rallies, mainly European, that comprise the world championship. That this will happen in the next few years, he is quite confident about. As he says: "It's just something that grew like a snowball. You can't stop it."

—DAVID DEVADAS with bureau reports

...ts about Rs 5 lakh to Rs 6 lakh. But if ...it the way it should be done with this ...t would cost Rs 30 lakh."

...allyists are hopeful that the exposure ...les get from the sport will lead to ...ased funding from automobile man... ...urers. Ravi Gupta, president of the ...Federation of Motor Sports Clubs in ..., holds that "once it becomes a ...r's market, not a seller's market, then ...will have to involve themselves". ...ut so far, that hasn't happened. ...ti Udyog Managing Director ...Bhargava says: "We don't spend much on the sport" because, though rallying has its value for both testing and—less so—marketing vehicles, neither function is important enough to the Indian automobile industry. As Bhargava explains: "The biggest selling cars have never been rallying cars," giving the example of the Volkswagon Beetle. As for the test function, he says that it will be a long time before India joins the league of car designers. "Developing a new model of a car, I was told once by Mr Suzuki, costs $500 million (Rs 650 crore)," he says.

Racing ahead of the heavyweight

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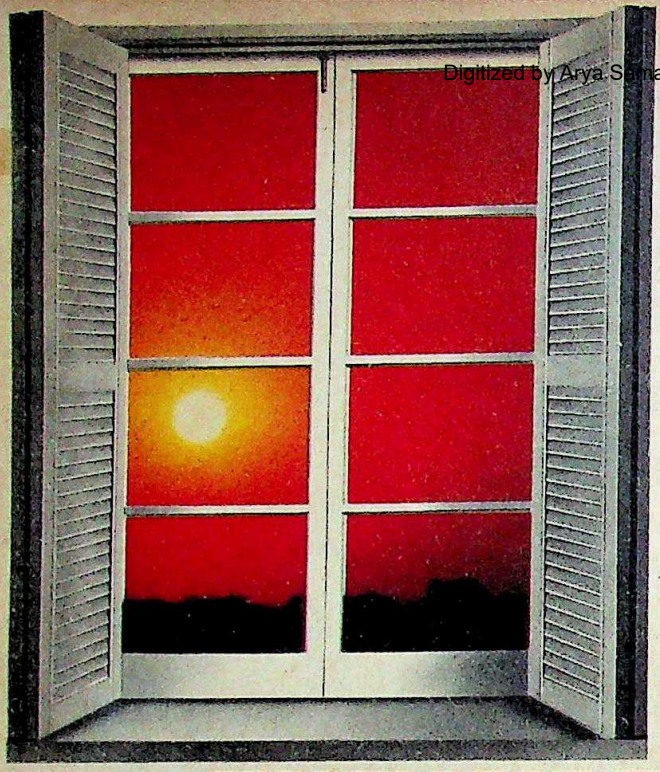

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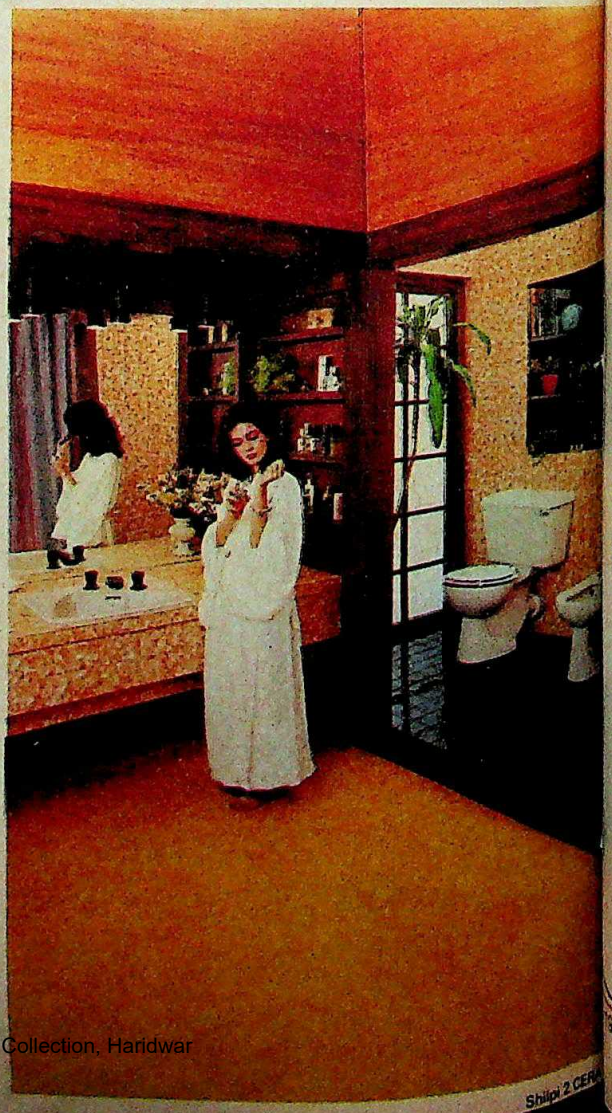

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◆ He's unsquashable. And for four-time national champion **Meherwan Daruvala**, 24, that's the name of the game. At the third INDIA TODAY Masters Squash Tournament in New Delhi, the left-hander made all the right moves. In straight sets, he outmanoeuvred his older opponent, Captain Narjit Singh, 31, and walked off with the top prize of Rs 10,000 for the second successive year. Said Daruvala: "The competition was stiff and I really enjoyed winning the tournament." Union

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Daruvala: unsquashable

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jagdish Tytler, who distributed the awards, was surprised at the interest this little known sport was generating. Obviously, there's more to squash than just a drink.

◆ So what's new with the baby boom? Test-tubes. And it's virtually turned India's only recognised practitioner into a delivery dynamo. Last fortnight, gynaecologist Dr **Indira Hinduja** brought to life three test-tube babies—two boys and a girl—in less than three hours. And at the King Edward's Medical Hospital in Bombay, the medical mistress

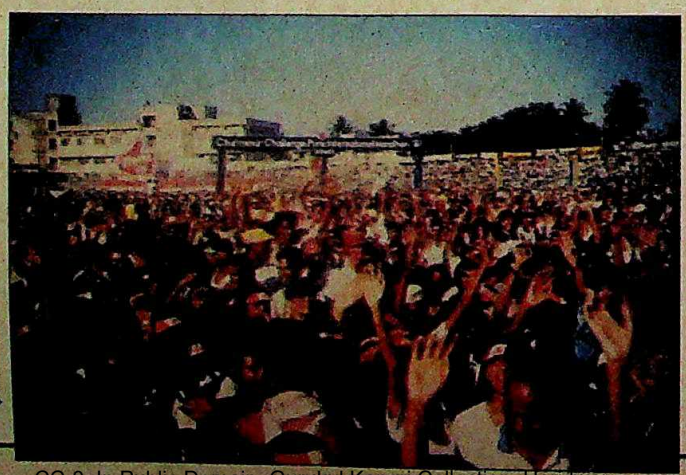
MUKESH PARPIANI

Hinduja: delivery dynamo

of female infertility is beseiged with 50 expectant enquiries a day. That's a far cry from her first test-tube success—the Chawda baby—in August 1986. Still, as she says: "I feel great having helped so many women conceive." Her infant phenomenon's grown up.

◆ It was a run for fun and fitness. And our 40th year of freedom. So, 20,000 sweated in support. Energised, no doubt, by the prime minister's festive flag-off. The fifth Pune International Marathon-cum-Freedom 40 Run had scores of sprinters pacing and panting 42 km cross-city. In a higher heat were the million-strong spectators. "I've never seen such crowds," said the dazed **Francios Blommarts**, 40. The Belgian runner raced to success in a record 2 hours 29 minutes. India's Suman Rawat won the women's Half-Marathon. And the finishers escaped the sport-struck mobs by the skin of their feet.

The Marathon Men



◆ Make-believe *Hero Heeralal* meets real-life heroine **Sanjana Kapoor**. Actually, he's her first on-screen leading man. Only, in the movie named after him, the hick-town rickshaw-driver — Nasiruddin Shah—displays his passions to perfection. He's comically cine-smitten, and walks and talks like film star Anil Kapoor. So, his lady love—directed by Ketan Mehta—keeps an aloof distance. "We wanted a touch-me-not city girl, not someone who looked like the girl next door," said producer Gul Anand: "Besides, she is relaxed before the camera." No doubt, after watching father Shashi Kapoor take countless cues. Anyway, her besotted paramour follows her all the way back to Bollywood. "It's a nice role," is all the pretty actress says.

Kapoor: touch-me-not

◆ Her roving eye halted at another red light. After documenting the travails of dancing girls in the acclaimed *India Cabaret*, **Mira Nair**, 30, zeroed in on street urchins. *Chall Bombay Chall* features the "spirit of survival" among the curb kids of film city. It was a heart-felt venture, said the New York-based film maker, who's: "passionate about everything Indian". But her 130 street scamps steal the show. At various pavement points, they meet their lead counterpart—a 10-year-old trying to make a few fast bucks so he can return to his rural roots. "What the kids had to say about life was a discovery," mused the director, and used their youthful insights to script the film.

SOONI TARAPOREVALA

Nair: with street scamps

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A Quiet Revolution

The computer takeover of the country has been slow but steady and, despite the snafus, the machines have proved that they are here to stay. Already, the chip is changing the Indian way of life—and work. A look at the changing scene.

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Questionable Verdict

The recent judgement of the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission that has indicted former finance minister V.P. Singh and his former subordinates, has turned what was touted as an independant inquiry into a political statement.

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"India is not our enemy"

J.R. Jayewardene has used the Indian action in Sri Lanka to his political advantage. With much of the Opposition to him in Sri Lanka now nipped in the bud, he has begun adopting a tough stance towards India. An exclusive interview.

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A Princely Affair

After months of speculation about the event, two of India's leading princely dynasties—Kashmir and Gwalior—consummated a spectacular matrimonial alliance last fortnight. A report plus exclusive photographs of the marriage.

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Fratricidal War

The festering fued in the Modi family is now in the open, with one section demanding a separation and the other trying to hold on. With the financial institutions taking a firm stand, the group seems to be faced with a vertical split.

BUSINESS 116

An Emotional Odyssey

Govind Nihalani's *Tamas*, based on Partition, is the most disturbing and relevant TV serial yet. It traces the trauma of those dark days on an almost epic scale. If *Buniyaad* created a nostalgia, *Tamas* goes for the gut. A preview of the serial.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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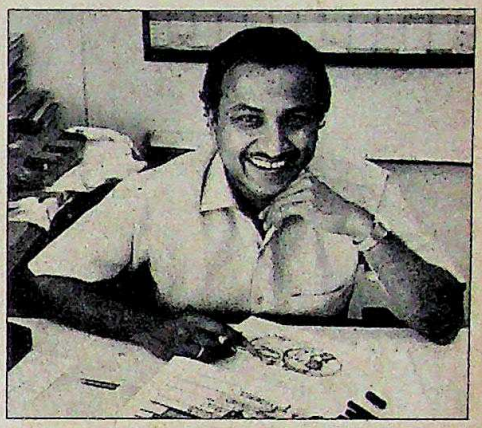
"THERE is a funny bone in me," says AJIT NINAN MATHEW *in simple explanation of his enviable ability to make people laugh with his cartoons. Drawn to cartooning when still in college in Madras, Ajit, 32, has for the last seven years been a delight to both readers of* INDIA TODAY *and to all his colleagues.*

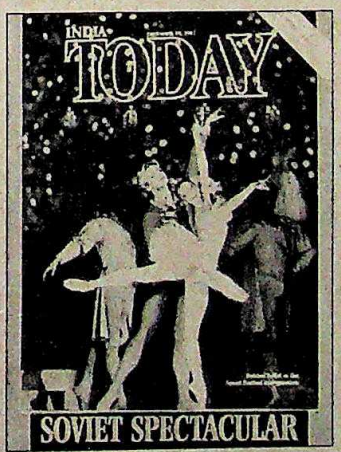
Last fortnight, formal recognition of his talent and prodigious productivity (4,200 cartoons since he joined the magazine) came in the form of the Sanskriti Award for Journalism—along with a cash prize of Rs 10,000, a further Rs 5,000 to facilitate professional work and a citation that spoke aptly of his lines possessing "clarity, humour and editorial richness". The award also recognised his work (84 comic strips) for INDIA TODAY*'s sister magazine for children,* TARGET, *for which he created the popular comic character, 'Detective Moochhwala'.*



Over the years since he joined the magazine after a stint in advertising (doing cartoon campaigns), Ajit's lines have improved, become less rigid and more humorous. And he has gained in confidence, hardly ever agonising over the composition of a cartoon. Ideas come to him easily, as does laughter.

"Life is tense these days," he says. "And I feel it is both a challenge and an obligation to make people laugh." He certainly manages that very well with his wide range of cartoons on politics, business, the environment and a great deal else. "Magazine cartooning is twice as rich as newspaper cartooning because of the range of subjects and the challenge to be topical for a longer period of time," he says. But his strength remains the pure entertainment in his lines, his ability to simplify complex issues in a single image, and the clarity of his final compositions. Rarely has an award been so richly deserved.

LETTERS



CULTURAL FEAST

Your cover story on the Festival of the USSR in India ("Soviet Spectacular", December 15) provided excellent coverage of the events. The inaugural function was an unimaginable treat with its agile acrobats, endearing clowns and perfect ballet dancers. Your pictures have aptly captured the cultural blitzkrieg that hit an unsuspecting capital.

New Delhi — KAMAL GUPTA

■ Was the Soviet festival brought to the country especially for our government officials? They got the best seats as well as the VIP car parks, all for free. And instead, those who paid for their tickets were harassed by unhelpful security staff and bad crowd arrangements.

New Delhi — ANITA MEATTLE

■ While the capital reels under the spectacular festival, many other parts of the country reel under the after-effects of drought. Surely the expense borne by the Indian Government on cultural extravaganzas is not as important as alleviating the misery of thousands who do not have work or food in the villages? It is evident that our leaders are doing everything but tackling the real problems facing the country.

Calcutta — ADITI GUPTA

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TARGET
THE CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE

INTERFACE

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CALLOUS TREATMENT

The story of Suman Sethia ("To Live or Let Die", December 15) was very tragic. Paralysed for life because of a minor family planning operation, she is condemned to live the life of a cripple. Why can't the state Government send Suman for treatment abroad—a privilege that is reserved for politicians—instead of forcing her to end her own life?

Lucknow — LT-COLONEL S.K. MUSHRAN

NO BENEFIT

This refers to your report ("A Family Concern", September 30). A.S. Krishna and Co has not benefited by the sale of its land—acquired earlier by the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority—to the Hyderabad Agricultural and Marketing Committee. The company's earlier agreement for the sale of the land to two cooperative housing societies for Rs 90 lakh did not reflect the market value as the buyers had undertaken to obtain denotification of the land acquisition notice. And evidence of the offer to sell the land to the societies was presented in court. It is also not true that the Government has paid compensation for the land without appealing to the higher court.

Guntur — A.S. KRISHNA

The errors are regretted. —Editor

LOST CHILDHOOD

The cover story ("The Burdened Child", November 30) raised some pertinent questions. Do we, for example, have competent teachers in schools? Why is there a sociological bias towards professions like computer science, engineering and medicine? The fault for the existing mess clearly lies with the Government.

Vallabh Vidyanagar — PRANAT PANIGRAHI

■ You've described the agony of only one section of children. There remains another section—in the rural areas—a high percentage of which is yet to step into a place called school. Is it with such education-deprived children that India will enter the 21st century?

Thiruppattur, Tamil Nadu — A. RAAM

FOR THE RECORD

Your report ("Falling in Line", October 31) says that I am accused of involvement in gems smuggling. This is an outright lie and a case of misreporting.

Bhubaneswar — S.K. PRUSTY, MLA

IDENTITY CRISIS

Your article ("The Donor's Dilemma", November 15) mistakenly says that I am a retired professor of Madras Medical College. Actually, I was a honorary assistant physician at the Government General Hospital, Madras. Also, I do not have four sons, as mentioned, but three.

Madras — P. KRISHNAN

HOMELESS PEOPLE

The plight of the Indians in Fiji is pitiable ("Marooned at Home", November 30). The Government's foreign policy requires fresh assessment.

Panaji — PROFESSOR L. RODRIGUES

RALLYING SCENE

Your article ("Quickening Interest", November 30) was interesting, but it did not mention that the pioneers of this rally are members of the Madras Motor Sports Club which has over the past 25 years been organising the Sholavaram Motor Races and other rallies.

Washington DC — ARVIND P. KUMAR

GLOBAL REALITY

Your feature ("Audacious Exchange", November 30) missed a global reality. A flourishing parallel market exists in every country where the official exchange rate for the local currency is artificially strengthened by the Government. It is not peculiar to India alone. The Reserve Bank may opt to keep the rupee value higher than reality in international markets. But continuous defiance of supply and demand economics only encourages parallel exchange.

Dusseldorf, West Germany — A. GOPAL

STRIKING ISSUE

With the blatantly orchestrated *Indian Express* strike ("Mounting Pressure", November 30), it is evident that Rajiv Gandhi is trying to do without imposing an emergency, what his mother dared to do only behind its facade.

Amritsar — R.C. KHANNA

UNFAIR TARGET

It's unfair to blame Kapil Dev for India's not making it to the finals ("Tears and Triumph", November 30). Knowing the situation, his controversial shot was absolutely justified.

New Delhi — NAVNEET KUMAR

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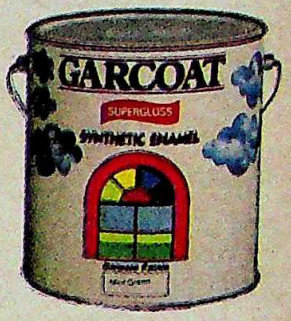

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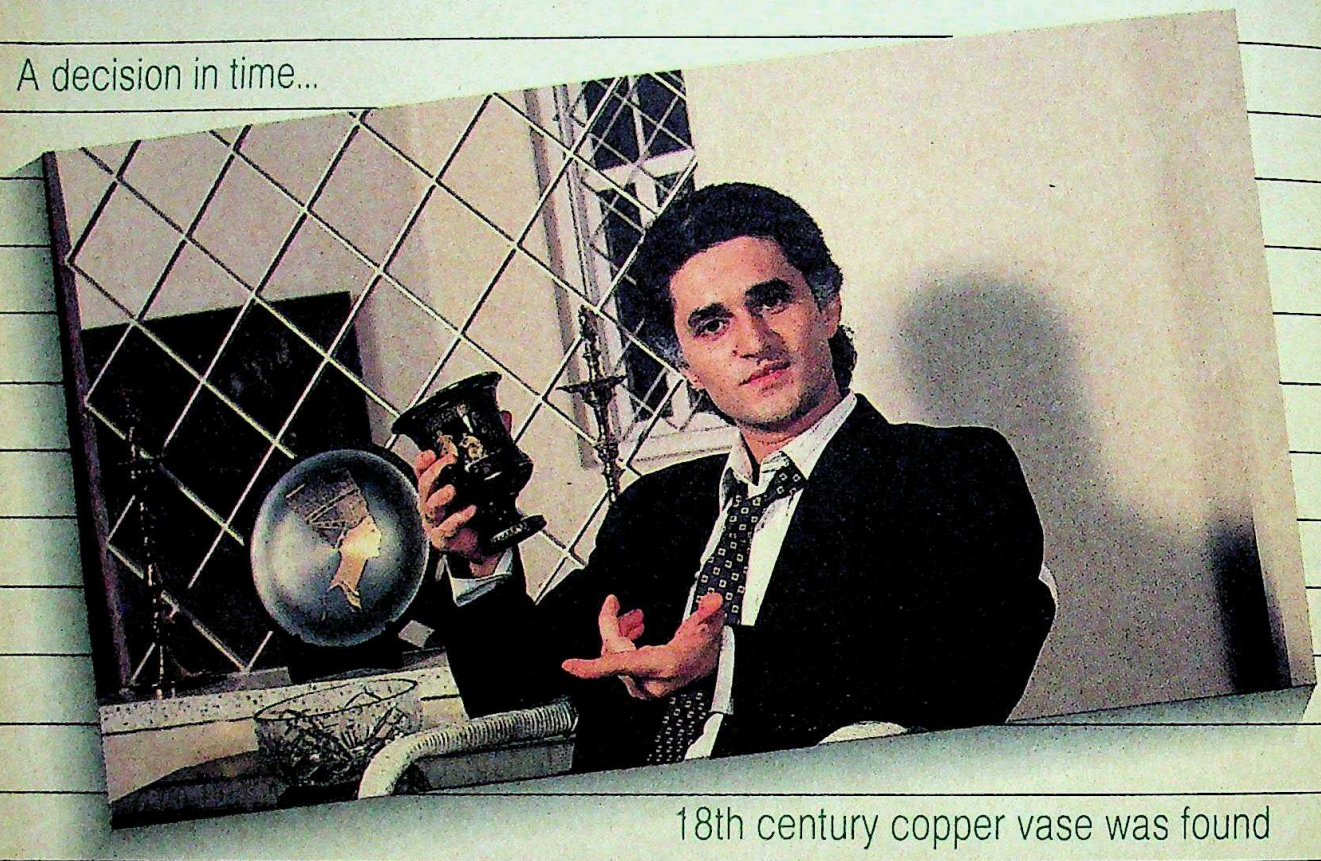

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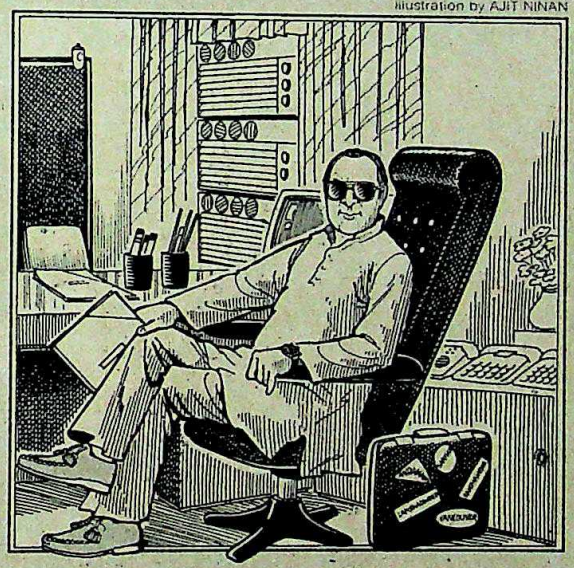
Penchant for Excess

POLITICS is partly about symbolism, and it is time a yuppie Rajiv Gandhi understood this. Especially in a poor country, a political leader has to avoid profligacy at public cost, and cultivate a climate of austerity, or at least exercise some personal restraint. Instead, the prime minister has been doing just the opposite. The latest in a steadily lengthening series of excesses is the apparent move to hold a meeting of the Union Cabinet in the Sariska game sanctuary in Rajasthan, some 200 km from New Delhi. Whether this is meant to take the country's highest decision-making body away from the slightly unreal world of New Delhi and closer to the grassroot is not clear, but a security-blanketed game park can hardly be a serious alternative. And it will be of a piece with earlier excesses: the holidays at Ranthambhor and in the Andamans, the use of a chartered Boeing 747 to go abroad, with another on stand-by, the penchant for such fancies as tasselled Gucci shoes. Yuppieism has its place, but not in Indian politics. Certainly, the sight of the entire cabinet taking off to a game park like migratory birds on a flight of fancy, must mark political insensitivity of an unusual order.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



The Sariska meeting may well be called off, with the same kind of re-think that has seen the reinstatement of Delhi's police commissioner. But so far the signals are not what one should expect from a government conscious of the fact that the country is going through a difficult economic year. If this were an isolated instance of the wrong signals being given to the country, it might be forgiven or even ignored as an aberration. But unfortunately, Rajiv Gandhi seems to have made a habit of ostentation. Even if his well-publicised menu of caviar and mushrooms stuffed with crabmeat aboard his flight to Vancouver is standard first class fare on Air-India, the prime minister can hardly defend the bread specially flown in from Rome and special raw silk baggage tags with his name screen-printed on them, or other Caesarian delights.

At the holiday in the Andamans a year ago, there was a gross misuse of the navy's facilities and access by the prime minister's foreign guests to normally prohibited areas. Now there is the prospect of a repeat story in the Lakshadweep Islands a few weeks from now. Holidays apart, there is the penchant for racing around at breakneck speeds (in violation of government regulations as to who is authorised to drive a government car, and local speed limits) in gifted Mercedes saloons and imported jeeps, and a taste for well-heeled friends, at least some of whom are not above using their prime ministerial connections to further line their pockets, or who have a taste for such esoteric objects as Italian tiles.

A man (even a prime minister) is entitled to his friends, of course, and to his personal tastes in holiday spots, clothes and anything else. The question is not even one of the country being unable to afford to keep a prime minister in dignity: the Government after all, is broke enough without the bill for Gulfstream executive jet aircraft or the petrol for running a fleet of fancy Mercedes cars so as to make no difference.

The point is much simpler, and concerns political morality, what is appropriate behaviour for a prime minister in one of the world's poorest countries and—going beyond all this—a question of political symbols and signals. Jawaharlal Nehru took his holidays as prime minister without causing public uproar, so did Indira Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi did not use an Ambassador car because she had no choice, and she often wore an HMT watch. Mrs Gandhi was no hermit, but she was reasonably austere in her personal habits and did not offend national sensibility with ostentation. Mahatma Gandhi in turn did not go around as a half-naked fakir for want of a shirt; and his choosing to travel third class on the Indian Railways was once again a political statement by a man uniquely endowed with a consciousness of how to communicate with the people in a largely illiterate but politically conscious country. Both Gandhi and Indira Gandhi were trying to identify with the country to which they belonged, and were conscious of the need for legitimacy in public behaviour. And neither Gucci shoes nor bread from Rome works towards that objective. If nothing else, then in Rajiv Gandhi's own political interest, it is time he reflected a more sober image as a leader who recognises speed limits and is conscious of basic Indian realities. Indeed, it is his yuppie image, his evident taste for luxury and the apparent feathering of nests by some of his friends that encourages a watching public to believe the worst about personal corruption by a ruling coterie. The fact is that the signals are all wrong.

It can, of course, be argued that a man is entitled to his private life, separate from his public role, and that personal issues are no concern of the public. And perhaps there would have been no questions asked if Rajiv Gandhi had remained an airline pilot, content to be a private citizen. But especially in politics, a man is also judged by his personal life, for surely his personal tastes say something about him and his predilections. The opposition leader who said the other day that India cannot be ruled by a man who wears Italian shoes was not stating a fact so much as reflecting a political reality that Rajiv Gandhi would do well to recognise, and which he will reject at his peril. Because it is often the small but significant things that encourage people to make up their mind about what a politician is really about.

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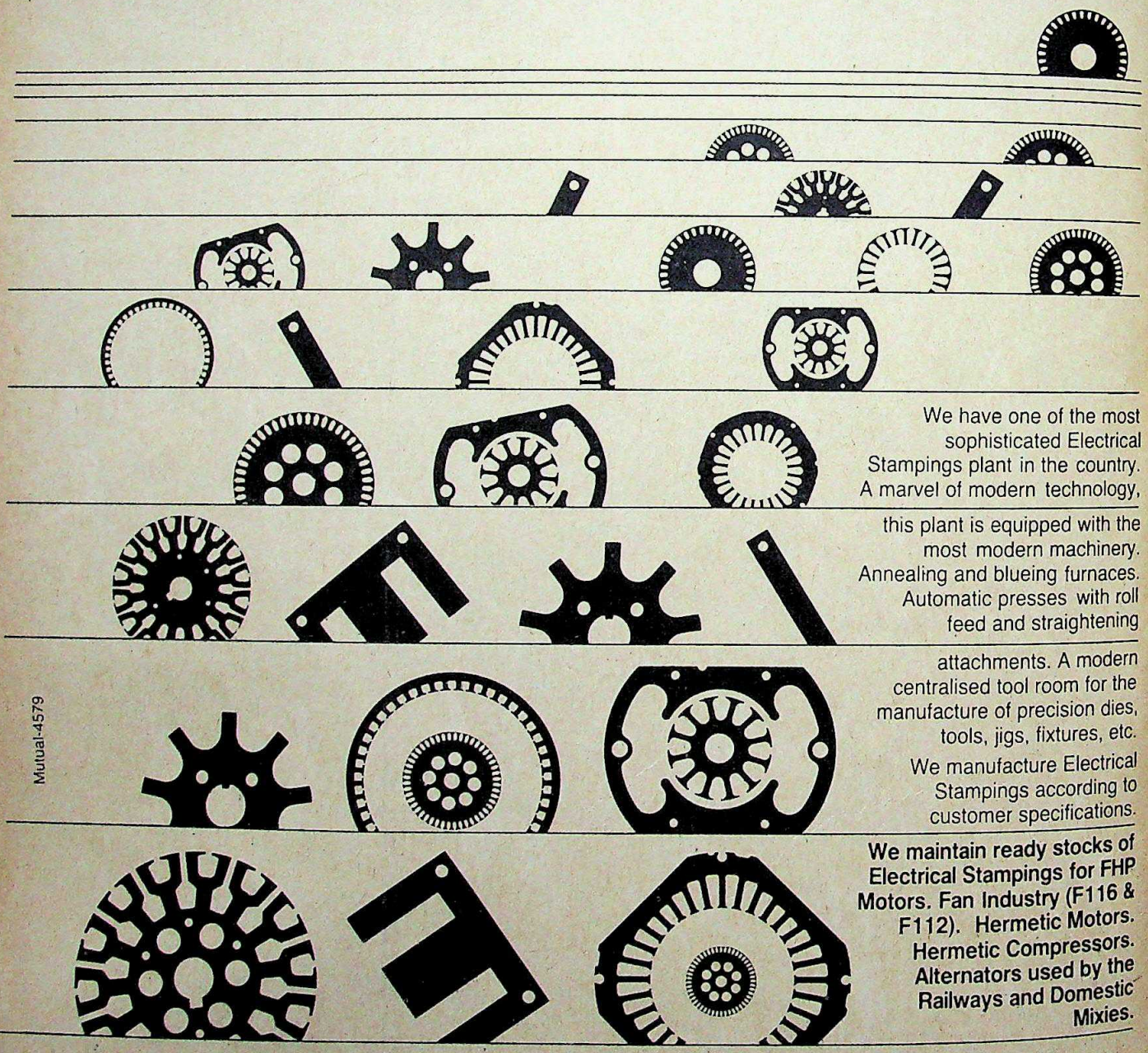

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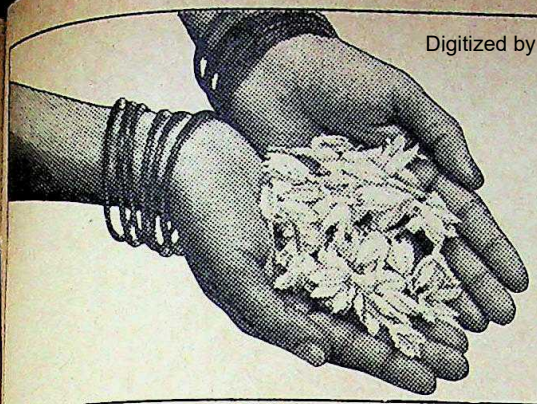

Videsh Sanchar Nigam's quarterly report to its customers

A. Traffic performance	For quarter ending Sept. 1986	For quarter ending Sept. 1987
TELEPHONE		
• No. of countries with ISD.	14	88
• No. of completed outgoing ISD calls/minutes in lakhs.	19/59	35/105
• No. of completed operator assisted calls/minutes in lakhs.	6.6/33	7/35
• No. of incoming calls/minutes in lakhs.	38/194	56/283
• Percentage of completion rate for outgoing calls (that reached the VSN's gateway) to foreign destinations.	43	41
• Percentage of completion rate for incoming calls (reaching the VSN's gateways from abroad) to inland network.	24	28
• Percentage availability of international circuits.	96	97
• Percentage availability of national circuits.	92	93
TELEX:		
• No. of outgoing calls/minutes in lakhs.	23/67	25/72
• No. of incoming calls/minutes in lakhs.	22/63	23/68
TELEGRAM:		
• No. of outward telegrams in lakhs.	3.2	2.8
• No. of inward telegrams in lakhs.	3.7	3.2
• No. of complaints for 1000 (outgoing and incoming) telegrams.	0.72	0.61
• No. of leased channels.	180	191
• No. of TV Pgms.	365	454
• Bureaufax pages O/G.	452	1222
• Bureaufax pages I/C.	1524	1313

B. Financial performance	For quarter* ending June 87 (Rs. in millions)	For quarter ending Sept. 1987 Rs.in millions)
• Revenue.	739	714
• Salaries & Wages.	24	29
• Maintenance & other charges.	62	98
• Surplus of revenue over optg. expenses.	278	250

* Data for quarter ending September 86 not available in this form.

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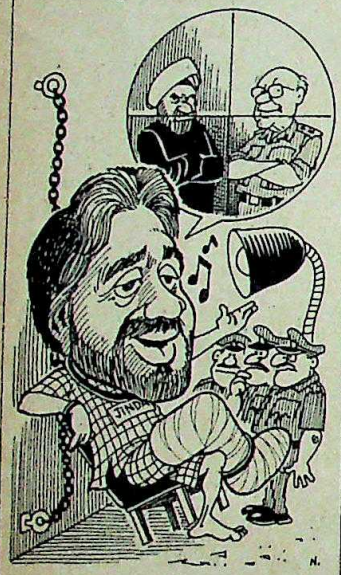
Surprise Confession

● Most CBI sleuths expected Harjinder Singh Jinda, the country's most wanted terrorist, to be a hard nut to crack. But the man blamed for some of the most vicious killings, including that of former army



chief General A.S. Vaidya, has been singing like a canary. He has admitted to his role in planning the Vaidya murder and looting the Ludhiana branch of the Punjab National bank. But Jinda has denied involvement in the mass murder of bus passengers in Haryana and Punjab. He is being interrogated at the Military Hospital in Delhi cantonment, after being arrested and shot in the leg by the Delhi police.

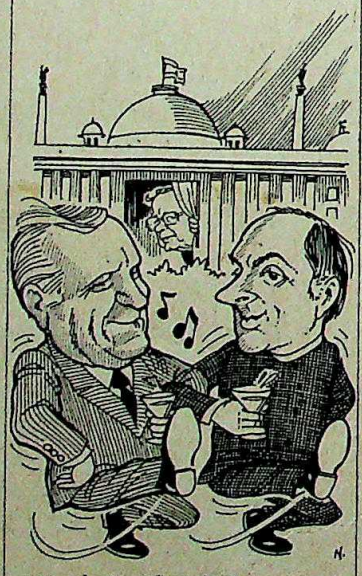
Jinda nevertheless remains a highly-motivated extremist and boasts openly that his gang "would get" Home Minister Buta Singh and Punjab police chief Julio Ribeiro. The CBI was forced to conduct its initial questioning of Jinda in the presence of army doctors at the Military Hospital where he was taken for treatment of his leg wound. At the end of the first round, the CBI men were more annoyed with the army doctors attending on Jinda than with Jinda himself. The medicos permitted no latitude with their patient and the CBI happily moved Jinda to one of its "better equipped" interrogation centres as soon as the doctors permitted.

Glaring Omission

● All of last fortnight, Parliament's Central Hall was alive with talk about yet another prime minister vs President fracas in the making. While much of this was based on hearsay or just plain wishful thinking by opposition politicians, there was at least one incident that could be confirmed as an unforgivable faux pas or a breach of etiquette on the part of the prime minister. During the inaugural function that preceded the Soviet festival in India—attended by the Indian and the Soviet prime minister and televised with great fanfare—the one VVIP missing was President R. Venkataraman. He had not been invited under some vague protocol compulsions.

Should he have been? Well,

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



considering that the inaugural was held in his own backyard—the sprawling lawns of Rashtrapati Bhawan—common courtesy dictated that the President should have been extended a formal invitation by the hosts, the Government of India. The prime minister's office has been silent on the subject. But then, it was precisely instances like this that ignited the fend between Rajiv Gandhi and Zail Singh.

Training Troubles

● Each year hundreds of armed services personnel close to retirement flock to the nation's capital to take benefit of second career training programmes offered by the Directorate of Resettlement. The

idea is to train these soldiers in civilian skills such as hotel management, computers, accounting and the like so that they can augment their retirement pensions with the money they can make in new jobs. According to practice, these servicemen were given annual leave to take these courses and provided mess and even family accommodation where available. But this year, these soldiers are up in arms against Defence Ministry bureaucrats who have erected a few road-blocks in the path of what was always considered a liberal plan. The officers henceforth have to come for the retraining scheme not on leave but on duty. This would be acceptable but for an incongruous new regulation that says—notwithstanding the fact that they are on duty—that they can no longer be given any services accommodation for the duration of their stay. Deprived of this benefit, the officers now have to double up in the cramped dwellings of relatives, overstay their welcome in the houses of friends, or, as in many cases, pay out of their pockets for cheap hotels, which are often worse than the barracks they are used to. So far, complaints from them to the army headquarters have received absolutely no response. The bureaucratic hand, having written, moves on.

Evergreen Aide

● Serla Grewal, 60, the evergreen secretary to the prime minister continues to ride high as the majorette domo within the prime minister's secretariat. In order to impress that she is in command, she circulated a recent note saying that all files from within the office—including those of Special Secretary Gopi Arora—must be routed through her.

According to earlier practice, Arora's files went directly to the prime minister. A verbal message to this effect has also

been sent to other ministries. Grewal took this action within a week of getting her extension last month. Already on a two-year extension, Grewal was given a second one for three more years. Sources in the prime minister's office say that Grewal has been rewarded because she is stodgily loyal, unambitious and unattached to any political lobby. As one insider put it: "Rajiv feels comfortable with her."

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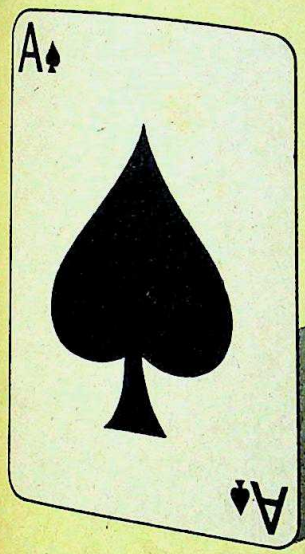

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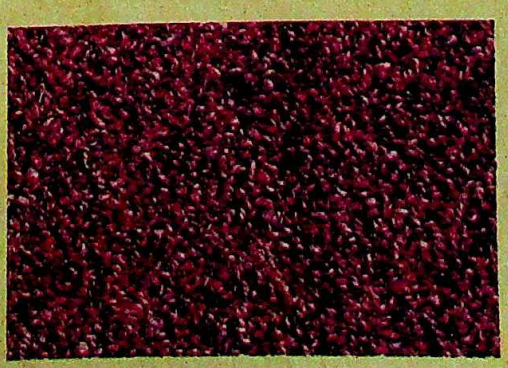

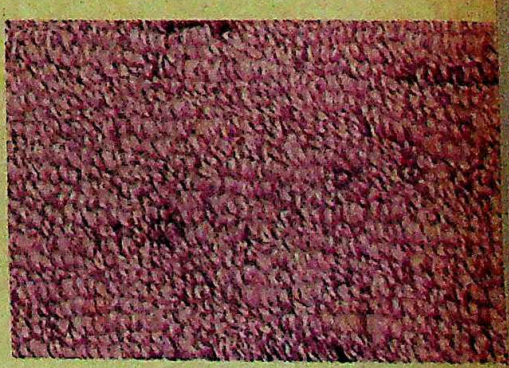

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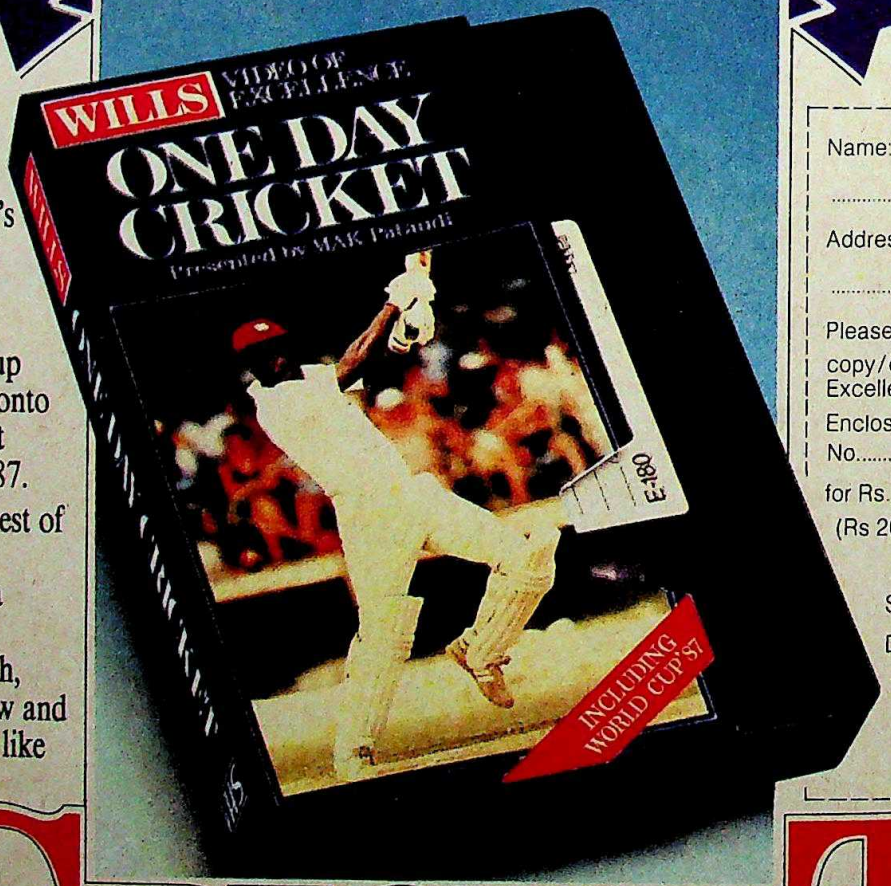

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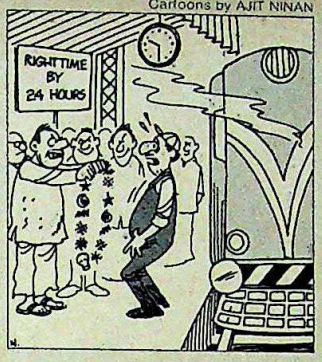
DELAY DILEMMA

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



■ Better late than never, read road signs all along the highways. The Indian Railways takes that salutary warning very seriously.

A Madras-bound express from Delhi has particularly built up a reputation of never running on time. With it routinely chugging into the station a few hours past the appointed arrival time, regular passengers now sit back uncomplainingly. But last fortnight, the railways had rare fare in store for them.

Dot on 9.35 p.m., the express puffed into Andhra Pradesh's Khammam station—as per schedule. The patiently waiting passengers could hardly believe their eyes. But they quickly rose to the occasion and garlanded the driver as he stepped out of the train.

Squirming in embarrassment, the driver chose not to reveal the fact that while the train had met the 9.35 p.m. deadline, it was exactly 24 hours behind schedule! Trust the railways to always live up to its reputation.

MOCK JUSTICE

■ Employees of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and Mayor Kamal Basu seem to be vying with each other in committing excesses. Basu recently spent over Rs 18 lakh from the employees' provident fund for staging an all-India Mayors' Conference. The employees retaliated by organising a street corner mock trial of the mayor.

To the delight of the motley crowd that gathered around to witness the "prosecution" of the big shot, an employee masquerading as the mayor was made to answer the 42-odd questions fired at him by a stern jury.

Though he proudly asserted: "I am mayor of this famous corporation and I can do what I like," the jurists finally broke the mock mayor's back, making him admit to the diversion of funds towards the mayors' meet. At least in the world of make-believe, there is room for poetic justice.

TICKET TROUBLE

■ It is a familiar sight in most metros. College youths clad in jeans, sporting a devil-may-care air and swinging precariously from the last step of a bus or suburban train. And travelling sans ticket is only part of the game. So last fortnight, when two well-turned out youngsters boarded a local train in Bombay's suburban Bandra without tickets, they were only moving with the times.

But the ticket-collector on duty had different ideas. He nabbed them in the first class compartment and found they had no money to pay up the fine. So he decided to spoil their fun this once and teach them the rules of the game.

The unsuspecting culprits were hustled off the train and marched in front of the first class ladies compartment. And there, in full view of the giggling occupants, he made them do 15 sit-ups—a humiliation the duo are not likely to forget in a hurry.

LIVING DEAD

■ Dead women sometimes tell tales. Janaki Alo Bhala, a nonagenarian adivasi from Murbad taluka in Thane district, had been getting a regular pension under the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana. But one fine day however, the office summarily listed the old woman as dead and conveniently stopped payment of her pension.

The old lady was, however, not prepared to take things lying down. She approached a welfare-organisation, the Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, which took up her case with the tehsil office. In any case, Janaki decided

that she would personally give the yojana officers the fright they deserved. Gliding into the room like one resurrected from the dead, she demanded her rights in eerily shrill tones. The clerk, in sheer surprise, immediately agreed to pay her a year's pension and also conduct an inquiry into the matter.

MONKEY PRANKS

■ In Punjab, extremists have had a field-day for a long while now, keeping the local police force wholly occupied. But recently, there was a welcome change. A mischievous monkey in Sangrur is giving the police headaches of rather a different sort.

For the playful primate has been going to town, looting shops and taking its pick of goodies at will. What has, however, caused ripples among the women members of the town is the fact that this particular monkey has rather taken a fancy to their sex. He has made a habit of tearing their clothes and even making obscene gestures.

The local police are at their wits end about how to bring the animal to heel. And while they rack their brains, the monkey continues to be at large. His latest prank is a flying kiss delivered with a rude smack of the lips. The womenfolk of Sangrur are going ape.

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3

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4

Remember and renew term deposits on due date.

5

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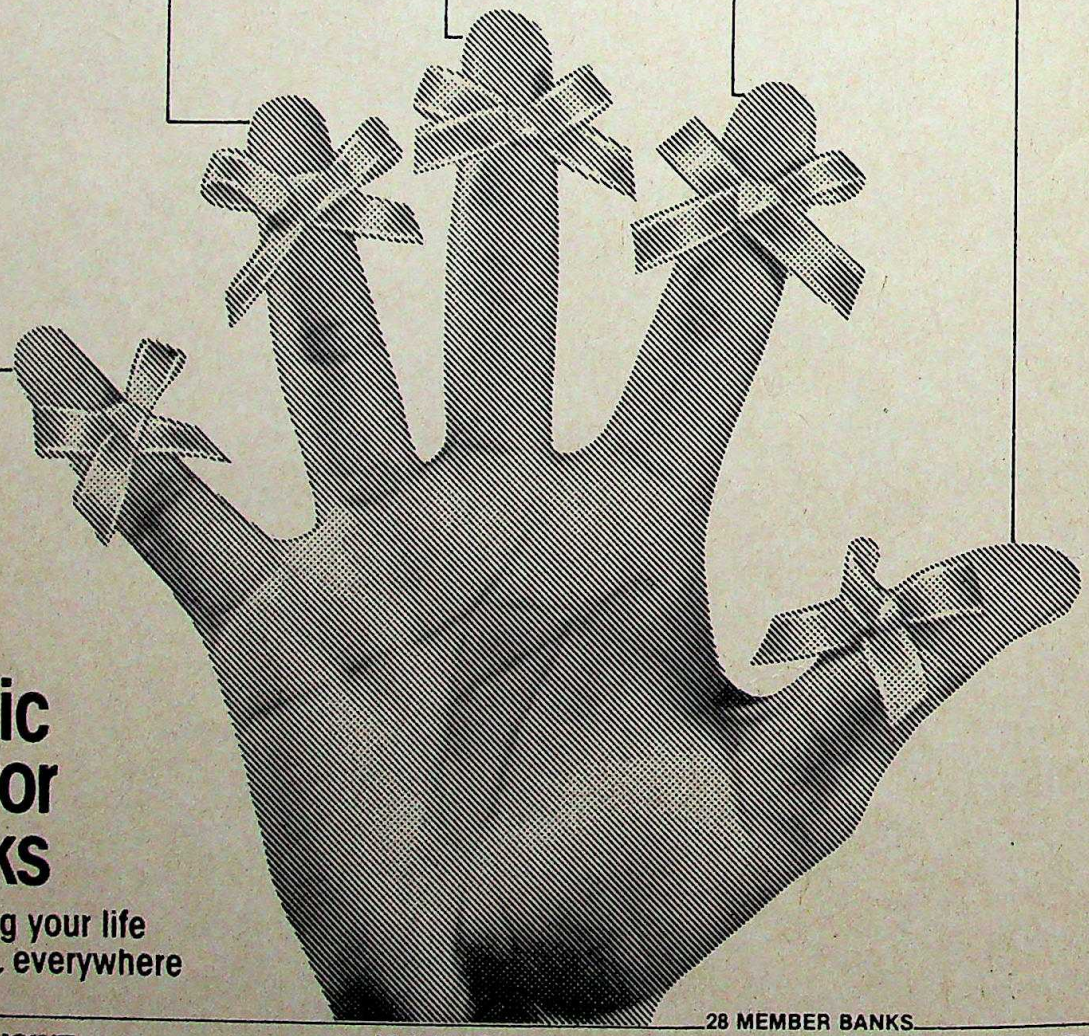

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• *Rama Rao campaigned for the Nagas who want to break away from India. In Haryana also he advocated separatism and casteist feelings. He is telling Punjabis to go away from India....He had stolen crores of rupees from income tax.*

■ Union Home Minister BUTA SINGH, at an election rally in Guntur, quoted in *Newstime*

• *Mr (Buta) Singh had no business to charge Mr Rama Rao with working for the division of the country because the latter campaigned for the Opposition in Nagaland and Haryana. Opposition is not treachery; it is legitimate politics.... Nor can the elastic ethics of electioneering pardon his pronouncement of Mr Rama Rao's guilt on various counts on which the courts still have to give their verdict.*

■ Editorial comment in *The Times of India*

• *After 47 days of cruel deprivation, you Mr Gandhi, have the pleasure of the Delhi edition of the Express at your breakfast table.*

■ December 2 editorial in the *Indian Express*, when the Delhi edition came back into circulation

• *Like those who had 'Ram' written on them did not sink while the bridge was being made to Lanka, I will never sink because Rajiv Gandhi is inscribed on me.*

■ BINDESHWARI DUBEY in *The Statesman*

• *There is far more flexibility in maintaining the Jan Morcha as a broad front. That is what it is today. As a front you don't need to fight anyone; indeed, you get the cooperation of all.*

■ V.P. SINGH in *Sunday Mail*

• *Rajiv Gandhi would have to resign six times as the Congress lost in six of the seven elections held after he came to power.*

■ JYOTI BASU on demands that NTR resign for the Guntur by-election defeat, in *The Telegraph*

• *Whether V.P. Singh has a stable mind is doubtful.*

■ Youth Congress(I) President GURUDAS KAMATH in *Onlooker*

• *The newspaper business is the most exciting ball game there is. I believe that any newspaper or magazine can be turned around.*

■ PRITISH NANDY in *Sunday*

• *I was once a lawyer.... Seeing the sort of people who become judges, I have little doubt that if I had persisted, I too would have made it to some bench and the Supreme Court. I gave up the profession because I realised it was uncreative of anything except money.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH, in his syndicated column

• *I am open to any business opportunity that presents itself.*

■ Industrialist S.K. BIRLA in *Sportsworld*

• *I was confident that one day the Indian captaincy would come my way. Of course, the odd thing is that I had to wait 95 Tests and 10 years for it!*

■ DILIP VENGSARKAR in *Sportsworld*

• *A lot of people at home have begun to write me off. I think they are being extremely hasty.*

■ P.T. USHA in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *Today, every single child sings in tune in the bathroom because of her (Lata Mangeshkar). This is a unique contribution which every classicist should appreciate.*

■ PANDIT JASRAJ in *Society*

• *Marriage doesn't suit me. The moment I think of marriage, I think of thorns, not roses.*

■ RAAKHEE in *The Times of India Sunday Review*

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

ANNUAL CARTOON CONTEST-1988

The Hindustan Times is casting its net far and wide once again to rope in as many budding cartoonists as possible. The response to our first cartoon contest last year established one delightful fact: humour is alive in India and is waiting to be tapped. If you have the talent to make Indians laugh, try your luck.

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1. "The Future"
2. Caricatures of prominent Indian/foreign personalities

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(in each category)

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There will be 10 consolation prizes of Rs. 500 each.

DEADLINE: Sunday, January 31, 1988.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. The contest is open to amateur, non-professional Indian cartoonists above the age of 18 years. (Those who earn a living from cartooning are not eligible.)
2. All works must be original and unpublished.
3. The size of the cartoon should not exceed 30×50 cm. or be less than 20×30 cm.
4. Each entrant should indicate name, age, address, occupation, telephone number (if any), on the reverse side, in BLOCK LETTERS.
5. Each contestant may take part in either contest or both, but submit no more than THREE entries in EACH category. All caricatures should be identified on the reverse side.
6. All prize-winning entries will become the property of The Hindustan Times. The Hindustan Times reserves the right to reproduce the award-winning cartoons in newspapers and magazines published by the HT Group.
7. All entries should be on white drawing paper and in black, waterproof ink. All drawings should be neat and clean. No drawings in colour will qualify.
8. The decision of the Jury will be final and irrevocable.

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CHAIRPERSON: PUPUL JAYAKAR
MEMBERS: SHASHI KAPOOR, ABBAS ALI BAIG, SUMAN DUBEY, ABU ABRAHAM AND SUDHIR DAR.

Entries should be addressed to: THE HINDUSTAN TIMES ANNUAL CARTOON CONTEST, 18-20, KASTURBA GANDHI MARG, NEW DELHI-110001.

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Constricted Credibility

The Thakkar-Natarajan Commission has congealed itself in controversy.

THE Fairfax findings flambeed the fortnight that was with its incendiary insinuations, but the blatancy of its bias constricted its credibility. The cast of characters it indicted was comprehensive but the fixation on the former finance minister revealed the real target. There could be no conflictions on the fact that the hiring of Hershman was questionable, but so were the conclusions drawn by the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission. Its efforts to colour the characters—a finance minister with an enviable record, senior bureaucrats under his bailiwick, a prominent industrialist and the representative of an anti-establishment newspaper—as dark and dangerous conspirators plotting against the country in company with the CIA, injured the imagination. Whatever its prerogatives—and pressures—the commission has congealed itself in controversy.

But where one debuted, another related one ended. After 47 days of enforced absence, the *Indian Express* was back, battered yet not beaten. But its surfeit of self-congratulations subverted the sympathy it was seeking. Like the targets it has taken on, the paper's pressing problem is to recapture its credibility.

That was also the problem with another extended absentee, Prakash Singh Badal, who returned to Punjab's political proscenium after a protracted period in detention. His first foray—the March for Justice—was foiled by force. But there was a sharper symbolism in his release. The current churnings in Punjab's political pot are an indication that President's Rule may have outlived its usefulness and a poll could possibly be peering around the corner.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Badal's release is symbolic of the current churning of Punjab's politics.

The one poll that did take place—in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh—was a confidence-creator for the Congress(I). But it also divulged its darker dimensions. Home Minister Buta Singh's libellous labelling of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao as anti-national was not merely a trespassing of electioneering boundaries but yet another sign that all opponents are automatically seen as enemies of the state.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The communists staged a massive show of strength in Delhi.

The Opposition, meanwhile, was consolidating its claims, but with a familiar fickleness of fortune. The communists left the right behind by staging a stunning show of strength in Delhi. The massive march through the capital culminated in a demand for mid-term elections and the resignation of Rajiv. But elsewhere, the formation of a fresh front, involving the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party, the Lok Dal(A) and the truncated Congress(S), offered little optimism for opposition unity. With the rightists refusing to accommodate the leftists, and vice versa, the Opposition remains divided down the middle. That, however, was no consolation for the ruling party. The concerted attacks in Parliament and the raising of embarrassing ghosts during the no-confidence motion against the Government means that its current complacency could be misplaced.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

The formation of a fresh opposition front offered little hope for unity.

But more serious opposition was unfolding in unexpected directions. The decision by a US Senate committee to equate India and Pakistan on the nuclear issue has once again soured Indo-US relations and posed a peculiar problem for Indian foreign policy. And this was more so after Rajiv's recent visit to Washington was trumpeted as a triumph. The simultaneous sanction for the suspended military aid to Islamabad by the US Congress is an additional signal that South Block has been taking too much for granted.

But considering that the Cabinet is gearing to gather in a game sanctuary at great cost and in the midst of an austerity drive, New Delhi's priorities are no longer linked with logic.

—DILIP BOBB

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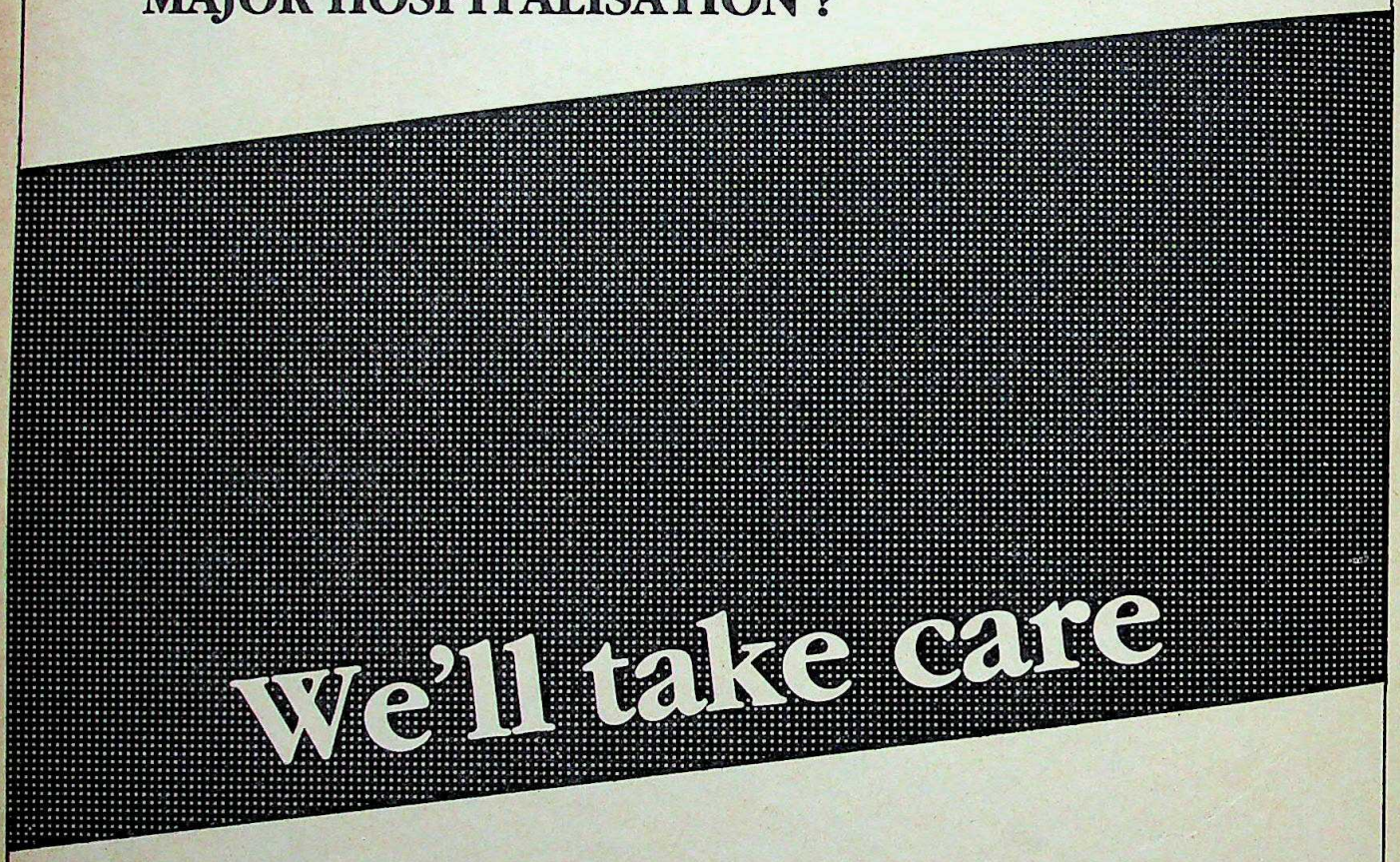

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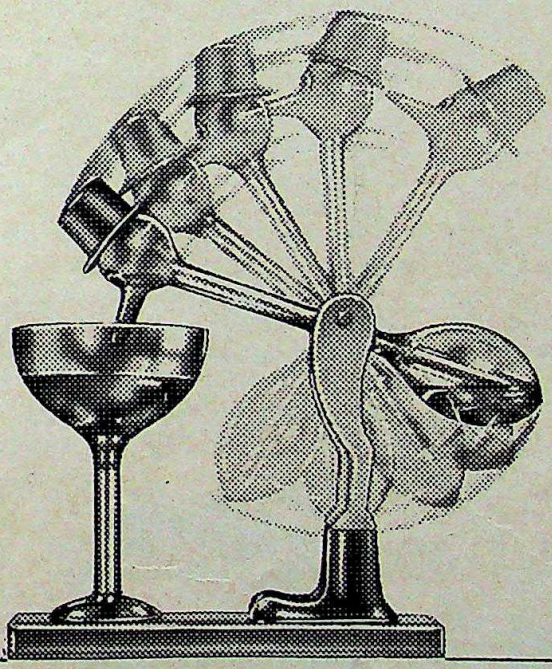

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THAKKAR-NATARAJAN COMMISSION

Questionable Verdict

Little is added to what was already known

THE main questions that were inevitably going to be asked about the inquiry into the Fairfax issue were just two—was it fair, and did it fit the facts. Last fortnight, as the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission finally unveiled its eagerly-awaited report, the answer to both questions could only be a resounding no.

Yes, it did pinpoint discrepancies in the functioning of the Finance Ministry under the then finance minister, V.P. Singh. Yes, there were bureaucratic norms that were ignored in the hiring of Fairfax. Yes, the involvement of outsiders like Bombay Dyeing Chairman Nusli Wadia and Indian Express Financial Adviser S. Gurumurthy was questionable. But in the end what was touted as an independent commission of inquiry produced what could best be described as a political document.

The 293-page report by Supreme Court judges M.P. Thakkar and S. Natarajan certainly indicted V.P. Singh, now the Government's most credible critic, and his two trusted lieutenants, former enforcement director Bhure Lal and former revenue secretary, Vinod Pande. But after eight months of occasionally controversial existence, the commission came out with few additional facts on an issue which at one stage threatened the Rajiv Gandhi Government.

But for the procedural violations by over-zealous bureaucrats, the report does not add much to what was already known. The strong but one-sided indictment of the Government's other main adversary—the Express group—has given the report additional political colour. In an attempt to over-stress justifiable points, the commission stretched them too far to be credible.

The main target of the report, V.P. Singh, lost no time in dismissing the document as a piece of political vendetta. "We had expected a report of a political nature. But we did not expect that Supreme Court judges would go about so brazenly indicting people without a hearing. It is a gross negation of justice." Added Arun Nehru, the prime minister's cousin and now a V.P. Singh ally: "It will not achieve even its political purposes. The people will see through the loopholes in the report."

The main thrust of the report, about engaging a foreign detective agency—"Fairfax and Hershman in particular"—being detrimental to the security of India, was equally forcefully contested by Gordon McKay, vice-president of the firm. "The commission has not made any inquiries in the US about us. It has reached conclusions ignoring facts. It is a political hatchet job for the salvation of the leader," he told INDIA TODAY over telephone from Virginia in the US.

That the commission has been selective in its interpretation of the facts is evident, even as its terms of reference themselves were biased. So the question of why the engagement of a foreign firm was found necessary by the Finance Ministry was not examined, and the commission dwells instead on how it was engaged.

The most glaring gap in the report concerns the most important question—what or who was being investigated by the Finance Ministry, and why? Yet, this has been given only a cursory mention in the report. And while the commission concludes that Fairfax could not have decided to work for the Government without advance payment of some sort, no real evidence is offered to back this conclusion.

The main charges against V.P.Singh are that he:

- ► did not inform the prime minister or the Cabinet on policy matters;
- ► did not maintain written records on policy decisions in the ministry;
- ► left important decisions to bureaucrats;
- ► called for government files from an-

M.P. Thakkar

S. Natarajan

In an attempt to over-stress justifiable points, the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission stretched them too far to be credible.

V.P. SINGH

"Justice has been denied"

Though indicted by the Thakkar-Natarajan report, an unrepentent V.P. Singh last fortnight questioned the commission's bonafides and findings. Excerpts from an interview with Senior Correspondent PANKAJ PACHAURI:

Q. Did you expect the report to be so hard-hitting?

A. By the very nature of its terms of references and the way it conducted its inquiry in secrecy, it was clear that the commission was set up for a political end. Its functioning was restricted to probing a probe. I never expected that two Supreme Court judges would go about so brazenly ignoring the law. Bhure Lal, Pande and I were never served notices under Section 8(b) though the commission has commented adversely on our conduct. Going by the law we should have been served notices.

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other ministry;

▶ made post facto remarks on the files; and

▶ embarrassed the Government by allowing his subordinates to engage an agency with former CIA officers.

The commission has concluded that these actions by V.P. Singh jeopardised the country's interest, a charge that the former finance minister ridicules (*see interview*). But in making their sweeping indictment, the judges seem to have conveniently ignored the submissions of the then revenue secretary, Pande, who in a written reply to the commission said, "The choice of the case, identification of the evidence, etc. to be procured, and the choice of the agency were regarded as operational matters to be decided by the director of enforcement and no reference to the Government was necessary. As a matter of principle, the ministry is not involved in operational affairs."

Regarding his action to send the Fairfax file to Singh even after he had left the Finance Ministry, he made it clear that he had informed the new minister, Brahm Dutt, about the action. Dutt did not question the action at that time.

Despite this, the commission has found Pande's role "disturbing". He has been accused of the following:

▶ He worked on oral clearance and did not keep minutes.

▶ He did not keep track of Bhure Lal's activities.

▶ He did not make sure whether Bhure Lal was investigating only Reliance or other firms as well.

▶ He sent a file to the head of another ministry flouting government business rules, and the file remained out of his department for two days.

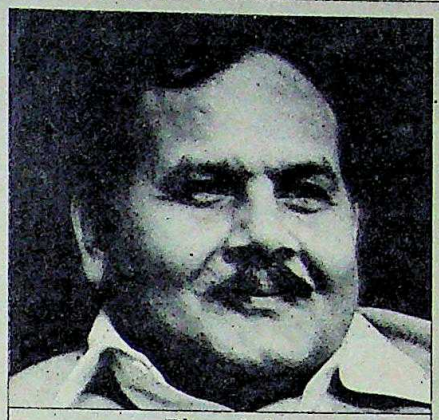
▶ He did not answer his minister's queries for twenty days.

But with the exception of the last charge, Pande had clarified all the other points on which the commission has castigated him. He had written to the commission that "Clearance about raids, screening of targets or any sensitive operational decision is generally made outside files. Considering the very nature of this decision it was not desirable to have wide-ranging consultations or discussions."

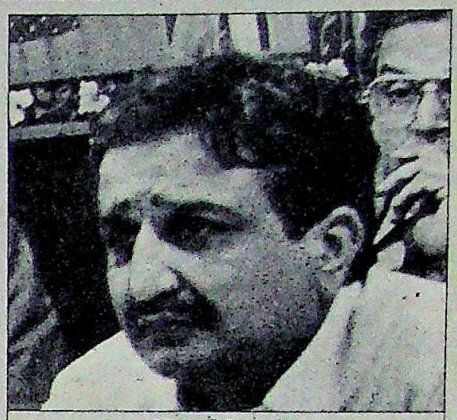
He also stated that the hiring of Fairfax was "not regarded as a significantly new decision". Other departments under Pande, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the Customs Directorate, frequently took the help of foreign agencies and individuals.

One recent example was General Vaidya's assassination where the US Federal Bureau of Investigation was approached for help. "The Government has officially gone on record that it asked the Swedish Government to investigate the Bofors deal. The agency of the other country was thus privy to all records pertaining to a sensitive arms deal," says Janata Party leader Madhu Dandavate. According to sources in the Directorate of Enforcement, the agency has a budget of about Rs 1 crore to meet payments to informers abroad. Clearly, the use of foreign agents is nothing unusual in the business of investigation.

Similarly, the commission has taken a myopic view of the role of Bhure Lal.

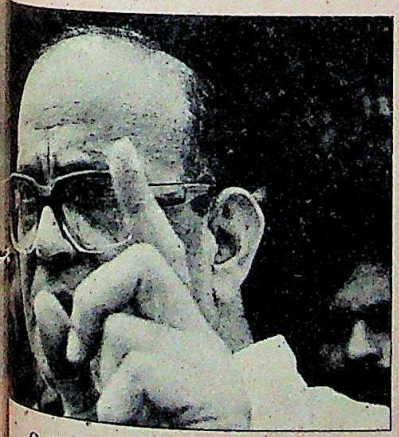


Bhure Lal



Vinod Pande

Ignoring the submissions of Bhure Lal and Pande, the commission has taken a myopic view of their role.



Q. Why do you think that was not done?

A. It would have given us a right to cross-examine other people. I would have asked the prime minister how many times his oral orders were executed by us, even on very sensitive issues. Payments to foreign informers are a routine practice. The commission has denied us our opportunity to be heard. This is an ominous sign. Justice has been denied.

Q. You have been charged with working against the national interest.

A. I must have worked against the prime minister's interests (laughs). Is bringing economic offenders to book against the national interest?

Q. What about Fairfax's CIA links?

A. If you start an agency in India you will hire people from the CBI and other agencies. Retired policemen become security officers.

Q. Would you still recommend hiring foreign agencies?

A. Yes. Everything to track down black money.

Q. Do you plan to take legal action against your indictment?

A. We will raise the issue from other platforms.

Q. Did the prime minister give his consent to what you had done?

A. It was discussed with him initially. Even after the controversy began I met him and offered to resign. All he wanted to know was whether the officers had extended their briefs. And he was satisfied with my answers.

Q. What will be the fall-out of the report on enforcement agencies?

A. They will be paralysed. Administrators go by precedent. If you hang a man at the top the rest get the message. Big business will rule the country.

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Declaring the functioning of the former enforcement director "intolerable", the commission has raised questions about Bhure Lal's conduct which include:

► He did not keep records of his meetings with Fairfax President Michael Hershman, Express Financial Adviser S. Gurumurthy, Express chairman Ram Nath Goenka, group manager of US Internal Revenue Services (IRS) J. Bruno and others.

► He did not take the help of the Indian Embassy in Washington during his overseas investigations, and did not even tell the ambassador about his visit.

► The antecedents of Fairfax were not cross-checked.

► No permission was taken from his seniors to hire Fairfax specifically.

► He filed his US tour report a month after his return, and did not respond to Brahm Dutt's questions on the subject for about 20 days.

► He relied heavily on Gurumurthy for his advice on which agency to engage.

What dilutes the credibility of the commission's charges is the attempt to censure the chief of an intelligence gathering and investigating agency for working in a cloak and dagger manner. The commission dwells at length on Bhure Lal meeting his contacts in parks, restaurants and other places instead of his office, while ignoring the fact that such meetings are part of his job and that no informer will show his face in the offices of the Finance Ministry.

In fact, officials currently in the directorate scoff at such nit-picking in the report. "FERA itself gives officials immunity against disclosing sources. Section 78 provides that no legal proceedings can be held against officials discharging their duties in good faith. Bhure Lal was not working for any other consideration but only pursuing offenders," said an assistant director.

Confirms the present Enforcement Director Anil Kumar: "All intelligence matters are not necessarily put on record."

To justify their action in not informing the Indian Embassy about their visits abroad, both Pande and Bhure Lal had told the commission that during their inquiries against Kirloskar and Thapar abroad, the companies concerned had immediately come to know about the investigations being made against them—through contacts in the Indian Embassy.

Bhure Lal's major transgression during the time he launched his crack-down on the most powerful and influential business houses in the country, was in taking the help of Gurumurthy and other outsiders like Nusli Wadia, people with an obvious axe to grind. Considering that the Express was gunning for Bombay Dyeing's arch rival, Reliance Industries, Bhure Lal might have exercised greater care in order to avoid the charge of being a partisan.

Michael Hershman

The report links Fairfax to the CIA, a contention that dovetails neatly with the destabilisation theory. It also makes a one-sided indictment of the Express, the Government's main adversary.

S. Gurumurthy

Surprisingly, the commission has blamed Gurumurthy for "non-cooperation" even though Gurumurthy insists that he had filed five applications running to more than 150 pages requesting the judges to give him a hearing. As he now says, "They did not want me to use my right of cross-examining other characters in the drama. The first thing I would have asked was about the forged letters on Fairfax stationery. And the Government did not want to face that."

Equally questionable is the parallel thrust of the report which paints Fairfax as an arm of the CIA, a contention that dovetails neatly with the destabilisation theory being floated by the Government. But Fairfax President Hershman, as an active lawyer in the Watergate crisis, can hardly be linked to the CIA's normal range of activities.

Further, McKay told INDIA TODAY that "The (Indian) Government is trying to ignore the great deal of work we had accomplished and given to it. No action has been taken on that." The Thakkar-Natarajan report prominently states that no information was passed on by Fairfax to the Government.

All this has cast doubts on the commission's findings. More important, if its recommendations are adhered to, it will cripple the workings of the Directorate of Enforcement. Said one senior directorate official: "All that the report has done is to send a chill down the spine of every professional Indian civil servant who will now be held accountable if he works against the wishes of the politicians."

The Thakkar-Natarajan report comes as a sequel to other commissions of inquiry that did not cover themselves with glory, or which proved controversial to the point of losing credibility. One was the report of the Mishra Commission, which went into the Delhi riots in 1984. And another was the report of the commission probing the events that led to Mrs Gandhi's assassination, a report that has not seen the light of day more than a year after it was submitted—by Justice Thakkar.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

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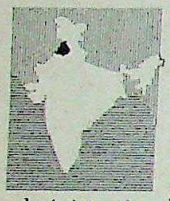
PUNJAB

Getting Messier

Counter-terrorist measures lead to further alienation



A modicum of normalcy is supposed to have returned to Punjab. At least officially. Governor Siddhartha Shankar Ray's latest report to the prime minister claims that his administration has begun to succeed in winning over the hearts of the "boys" (alienated Sikh youths). And senior Congress(I) party officials have also sent glowing reports about the success of their mass contact programme in Punjab that is expected to last until next March. "Unified" Akali Dal leader Prakash Singh Badal is now a free man after a year-long imprisonment, setting off fresh speculation that some sort of new adjustment with the Centre is in the making. But the hasty manner in which the state machinery moved to stop last fortnight's Badal-led 'March for Justice' to New Delhi indicates that any adjustments will be a tortuous exercise.

Yes, there is a rekindling of the political process in Punjab. But all it illuminates on close scrutiny is that the mess in the state is becoming increasingly messier. Countering terrorism has become a meaningless numbers game in which the victims today fear as much from a repressive and rapacious police force as from the terrorists. The local Congress(I) is divided as never before. There are serious differences between Home Minister Buta Singh and the Ray-Ribeiro regime that have served to cripple the state administration. And the Akali factions have been talking about unity which, however, may come only at the further sacrifice of secular principles.

As historian and Punjab accord architect Dr Attar Singh puts it: "What has been happening during these last few months is the erosion in the moderate base of the Akalis. This is because the Centre has no clearly enunciated policy or ideology towards Punjab other than repression. I really wonder if the Centre knows what's going on here or is even serious about a solution." Counters Ghulam Nabi Azad, Congress(I) general secretary in charge of Punjab: "We are simply telling the people of Punjab the consequence of continued support for the terrorists. And we are also giving them the opportunity to boycott the extremists and to talk to us."

Badal's release from prison was partly motivated by the Congress(I) campaign. As a senior high command man explained: "Our rallies would have lacked credibility if people were given the impression that we were free to hold rallies while important Akali leaders were locked up." But the Congress(I) initiative, undertaken to demonstrate that the party is not a spent force and is not afraid of tackling terrorism head-on, has been far from the resounding success it has been made out to be. The crowds have been largely unresponsive, especially the Sikh peasantry and youth—at Sohana in Ropar district there were just seven people.

But even as the Congress(I) jathas limped along, the local party began to war with itself. During the first phase of the jathas, five general secretaries were summarily dropped as office-bearers on the ground that they did not participate fully. Among those dropped were some big names with solid high command connections—Harbir Singh, a nephew of Agriculture Minister G.S. Dhillon who is also close to Buta Singh; Gurbir Singh and Brahm Mahendra, both close associates of Communications Minister Arjun Singh; Ashwini Sikri, a close confidant of former AICC(I) General Secretary R.L. Bhatia.

Reacting sharply to Azad's remark that he had dropped "inactive" office-bearers, Gurbir Singh retorted: "I do not bother if I remain an office-bearer or not. What is serious is that Azad has been surrounded and insulated by the very

March for Justice being stopped: indecisive policy

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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PRAKASH SINGH BADAL

"I've lost faith"

PRAKASH Singh Badal's release from prison last fortnight fuelled the speculation that the Centre is willing to start the political process again in Punjab. Looking rested but weak, Badal talked to Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *in Chandigarh:*

Q. Do you favour unity with the Longowal faction of the Akali Dal?

A. I am totally in favour of Panthic unity. But certain principles have to be seen. For example, Barnala is a major hurdle because of his excommunication and his surrender to the Centre.

Q. How deep do you expect this unity to go? Will it mean unity with the Baba Joginder Singh and other extremist factions?

A. It should be as complete as possible.

Q. What is your position on the separation between Church and State? Do you accept the supremacy of the Akal Takht even in political matters?

A. There can be no compromise on that. The Akal Takht is supreme.

Q. People say you have made a deal with the Centre, that you have its backing.

A. I will never make a deal with the Congress Party. I have always remained steadfast in never dealing with them and I won't in the future. They have always betrayed the Sikhs and discriminate against our aspirations. I've lost total faith in them.

Q. Do you support the Khalistan demand?

A. That is not for me to answer. That demand comes up because of the Centre's policies of suppression.

Q. What then is your platform? If there is an election what will you compaign for?

A. First, let the Centre meet its commitments. They must free the Jodhpur detenus and military personnel and must stop repression and the killing of innocent people. They do not even allow peaceful marches. All other parties are allowed to march but our planned march to Delhi was stopped.

Q. What if Chandigarh is transferred to Punjab?

A. Those believing this live in a fool's paradise. They couldn't give it when there was a Congress government in Haryana. Do you think they can do that with the Opposition in power?

Q. What will you do to fight terrorism?

A. The solution is not by bullets. The more you kill the more seeds you sow.

people in the state Congress(I) who have done great damage to Punjab. The need was to bring Hindus and Sikhs together and to placate the deep resentment of the youth and peasantry against the brutalisation of the system. But the opposite seems to be happening."

THE one thing that stands out in stark relief in Punjab is that civil rights—arrests, detentions, fake encounters—have become a major universal issue. And the ramifications of what is popularly described as the "gun and lathi raj" are discussed not only in the villages and university campuses but also among leading industrialists, bureaucrats, and even police officials. Most maintain that abandoning a political solution and the process of wound-healing in favour of bullets has served only to widen the chasm between Delhi and Amritsar, and raised popular anger in Punjab to the post-Bluestar level.

As former state finance minister Balwant Singh puts it: "Ribeiro may be a folk hero in Delhi with all the publicity he gets, but in Punjab he has the image of a General Dyer." But even in Delhi the image of the Ray-Ribeiro regime seems to be changing because of several high-level reports that have been sent to the Home Ministry not only from Punjab bureaucrats but also from the Intelligence Bureau about the mood of the people. And this is partly the reason for the rekindling of the political process. Even staunchly loyal Congress(I) MPs who earlier supported President's Rule in the state have begun to express some misgivings. As Vishwajit Prithvijit Singh, MP, said in Parliament: "When the state starts suppressing, that repression creates a further movement. The further movement has an in-built tendency to further state repression which causes further movement. This becomes a never-ending cycle...I pray to God we find a solution and do not have to extend this rule any further."

Over the last year there have been at least a dozen magisterial inquiries into killings and police encounters in places like Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Batala, and Nakodar in which the security and paramilitary forces have been indicted, but no action has been taken. "It is not just fake encounters and killings that have alienated the people," says Dr S.S. Dosanj, chairman of the journalism department, Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana. "There are reports of widespread extortion by the police where policemen regularly arrest innocent people on false charges and release them for money."

Supporters of the Ray-Ribeiro reign argue that this is the price people often have to pay in the fight against terrorism. But this atmosphere can hardly be said to be one in which, as Ray has claimed, the hearts of the youth are won. And it is impossible to say whether, as Ribeiro has often claimed, the terrorists have been isolated or are on the run. True, many big league terrorists have been caught and killed, and terrorist gangs have been

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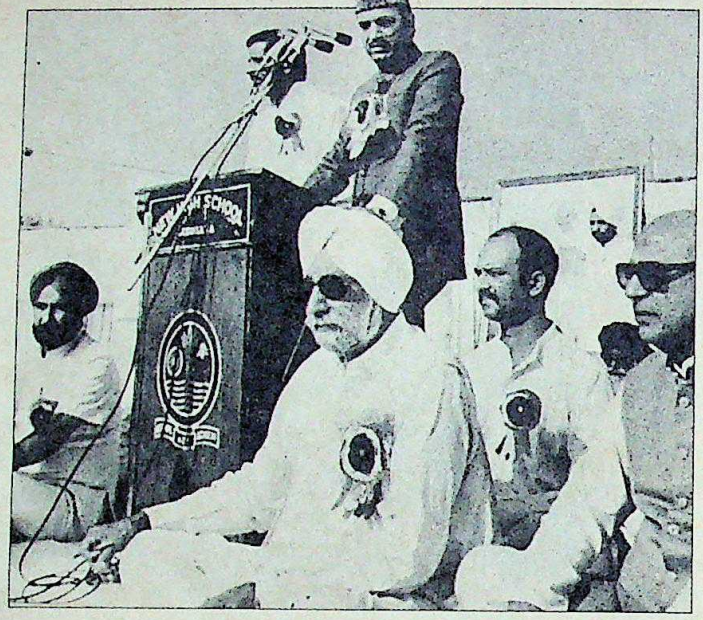
smashed. But the manpower pool from which they draw fresh recruits "continues to get larger", confided a police official. And numbers are really meaningless in demonstrating what the influence of the extremists actually is. Since President's Rule was declared, about 300 extremists have reportedly been killed and about 5,000 are in jail according to the best estimates available. But the number of killings by terrorists—now mostly those of informers—have also gone up from about 80 a month when President's Rule was declared to more than 100.



Azad in Ludhiana: poor showing

Perhaps the best parameter to gauge the extremists' influence is the Golden Temple. It continues to be under the control of various groups who take orders from the powerful Panthic Committee, rather than from the SGPC and nobody has been able to alter that situation. In Gurdaspur, Faridkot, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar districts, terrorists still control large blocks of areas through killings and unbridled extortion. And the state's colleges and universities shut down regularly to protest police actions.

In this vitiated atmosphere, the Congress(I) mass contact programme can hardly be expected to make any headway in rural Punjab. So far the campaign, while dividing the state's Congress(I), has also had the unexpected effect of fostering new unity moves between the two main Akali factions—Longowal and the United Akali Dal (UAD). So virulent have been the attacks on the Akalis during the mass contact meetings at the assembly constituency levels by Congress(I) spokesmen, that the Akalis are convinced that the Congress(I) is preparing for elections at the end of March. Both the factions believe that the Congress(I) may be pandering to the Hindu vote and that if any election is held along communal lines, a divided Akali Dal will suffer. Barnala has appointed a committee to negotiate unity with the UAD and sources close to him say he will be willing to step down from office if he is seen as the main hurdle to unity. As Barnala says: "The talks will be complicated, but we are determined not to let the Centre divide us any more."

Ever since President's Rule was declared in the state, Ray and Buta Singh have been feuding over the appointment of key officials in the state. Ray has been by-passing Singh and reporting directly to the prime minister. During the SGPC elections, Ray quietly backed the UAD candidate while Buta Singh solidly supported the Barnala candidate. According to insiders, a Barnala victory would establish his faction's control over the SGPC and this would remove one of the main political reasons—the control of the SGPC by G.S. Tohra—due to which President's Rule had been declared in the state. It would also strengthen the argument of those favouring a return of the Barnala government. Ray did not welcome this prospect.

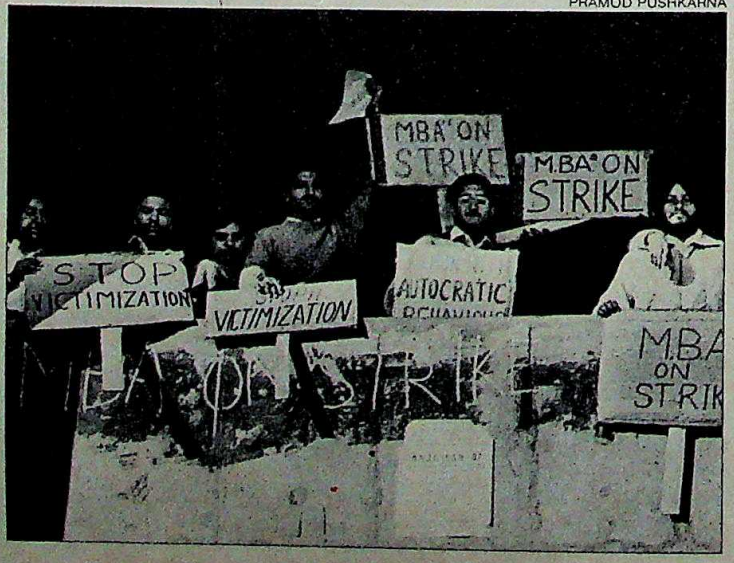
Indecisiveness and factionalism at the Central level have further weakened the Congress(I)'s image in the state. Central rule, unpopular because of its association with repression, is rendered doubly so because the state administration barely breathes. Notwithstanding promises by Ray and Ribeiro of major administrative reforms following President's Rule, the officials in power—chief secretary, home secretary, revenue secretary, and senior police officials—are the same who worked under the Barnala government. IAS officials at the divisional and district levels have been totally sidelined. And bureaucratic feuding has intensified to such an extent that local papers carry daily charges of corruption, openly hurled by officials against one another.

As Punjab drifts in a sea of uncertainty, the Centre's image—notwithstanding the mass contact programme which has been rendered irrelevant—continues to take a battering. If Akali unity becomes a reality, the party, in order to recoup grassroots support, will be forced to undertake a new morcha for Sikh demands. A morcha is almost certain to divert a large portion of the government machinery to control it. As government attention is diverted, extremist groups will gain time to regroup, gain more strength and pressure the moderate Akalis to shift further into their camp. This denouement, a consequence of the Centre's own policies in Punjab—wooden inflexibility and the unwillingness to seek a political solution—would ultimately be totally unacceptable to the Centre and plunge the state into irretrievable chaos.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

Students on strike: uncertain future

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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MAHARASHTRA

Violent Wrangling

Partisan politics in the Congress(I) takes a serious turn

INFIGHTING is an endemic problem in the Congress(I), often posing a greater threat to the party than any challenge from the Opposition. In Maharashtra, partisan squabbles among Congressmen have reached a fever pitch, even though the party commands an overwhelming majority in the state Assembly. But for the first time last fortnight, the internecine wrangling between dissident groups and the chief minister's men led to violence involving a young minister of state from S.B. Chavan's ministry.

Shrikant Jichkar, Maharashtra's 33-year-old minister of state for finance, was on a day-long tour of his former assembly constituency in Vidarbha when his motorcade ran into trouble at a remote village near Nagpur. The rear glass of Jichkar's official car was smashed, the national flag on the bonnet allegedly torn, several policemen and government officials injured, and 18 people from the village, including an MLA, roughed up in a lathi-charge. A shaken Jichkar managed to escape from the violence, and said later: "I was very lucky to escape being hurt in the attack."

As police filed charges for various offences including unlawful assembly, rioting, assault, insult to the national flag and attempted murder, the arrest of two Congress(I) MLAs who led the confrontation with the minister sparked off strong protests from opponents of the chief minister within the party. As the two legislators, Sunil Shinde and Ranjit Deshmukh

initially refused to take bail and were lodged in Nagpur Central Jail; three prominent Congress(I) leaders—former chief ministers Sharad Pawar and Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar, and former deputy chief

VASANTRAO PATIL

"I'm not a kingmaker"

FOR the past year, Vasantrao Patil, 70, Maharashtra's political strongman, has been waging a relentless campaign to oust Chief Minister S.B. Chavan. Recently, Patil set up the Rashtriya Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmers' organisation, along with Sharad Pawar and Congress(I) dissidents in the state. Before leaving on a state-wide tour to garner support for the Sanghatana, Patil spoke to Chief Correspondent M. RAHMAN. *Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. Is the setting up of the Rashtriya Shetkari Sanghatana an attempt to continue with your campaign against Chief Minister S.B. Chavan?

A. That's not true. It is correct that earlier I was against him as his manner of functioning is such that he cannot get support from others. His way of relating to party workers is very temperamental. I told the party high command that if the chief minister was retained, it would be dangerous for the party. They agreed to remove him, then changed their mind. If Chavan helps us now, we will welcome him; if he opposes us, we'll fight him. We do not at all want to create unnecessary conflict, but we do have a right to demand certain things on the farmers' behalf.

Q. But what was the need to set up the farmers' organisation? This could as well be done through the Congress(I).

A. Since 1942, we have been saying that our country's government will be a farmers' government. Farmers have a majority in the assemblies, in Parliament, but nothing much is done for them because only those who are organised get their demands met. So, it is necessary to organise the farmers separately.

Q. Has Rajiv Gandhi okayed the new organisation?

A. I told him we were setting it up, and he gave the go-ahead. There are other organisations in the country which run on the Congress name, like the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). The Congress(I) has no problem with it. We also recognise the Congress(I), so why stop us?

Q. Are you going to fight Sharad Joshi's Shetkari Sanghatana which is opposed to the Congress(I)?

A. We haven't started the new organisation because the Congress(I) is threatened by Joshi's Sanghatana. We are going to fight for farmers' rights. We've no intention of challenging Joshi.

Q. Is it that even after retiring from politics you want to continue as a king-maker in the Congress(I)?

A. Until our Sanghatana participates in electoral politics, there is no question of my being a king-maker. Of course, if the wrong candidates are chosen by the Congress(I), it is our right to say they won't be good for the party.

Q. Did the high command promise you that Chavan would be removed?

A. I am no longer interested in that. Earlier I used to speak according to what I was told. Now they have changed their mind. So it is up to them.

Q. But is it not absurd that even though the Congress(I) is strong in Maharashtra, the Government is unstable and chief ministers are changed?

A. It is difficult for me to comment on this. But take my experience. I was working for the Congress(I) in Delhi in 1983 when the high command asked me to take over as chief minister here. I worked for two-and-a-half years in this capacity and then I won the assembly poll. But four months after that, I was removed. There was no reason for my removal, so the high command created one, saying

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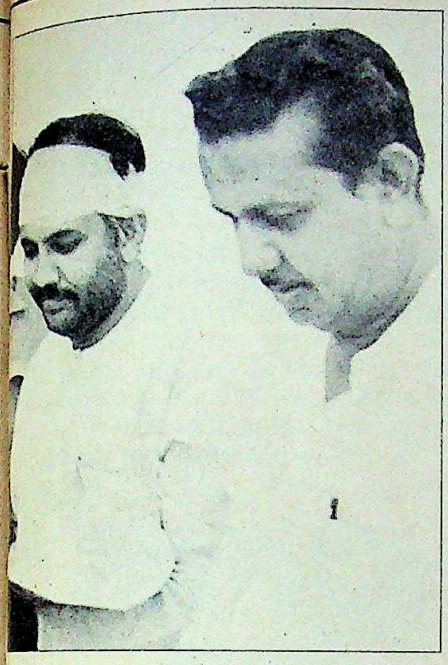

Jichkar (left); Shinde and Deshmukh: political burlesque

minister Ramrao Adik—flew down from Bombay to confer with their incarcerated followers. Since Shinde is from Pawar's group (he rejoined the ruling Congress(I) along with Pawar last December) and Deshmukh was associated with Nilangekar, the incident further strained the already embittered relations between Chavan and the dissident leaders.

In a detailed report submitted to Chavan and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Jichkar complained that though Shinde has rejoined the Congress(I), he "still behaves like an opposition member".

Jichkar's tour of Katol constituency was organised by a local panchayat samiti president. The day's packed programme included the inauguration of projects in five villages before a discourse on the Ramayana by the minister at Katol town. What infuriated Shinde—who presents Katol in the Assembly was that the projects, financed through the district development committee, had been taken up without consulting him.

According to Jichkar, Shinde and Deshmukh, who is a legislator from the adjoining constituency, accosted the minister at the second village and asked him to call off the day's programme. Jichkar categorically refused, with the result that Shinde went to the third village ahead of the minister, "broke the inauguration stone, tore the banner, snatched the microphone and garlands, and left by jeep taking it all with him".

At the fourth village, however, Shinde was held back by the organisers. Consequently, a loud-speaker was set up outside the pandal blaring film songs to drown out the minister's speech.

The political burlesque turned serious though, before Jichkar could reach the last villages cheduled for a visit on the day's programme. As his motorcade was passing through Shinde's village Sawargaon, according to the minister, the road was blockaded, his car stoned by Shinde and Deshmukh, and the national flag on the car pulled and torn. A little before this Shinde also allegedly threatened a Congress(I) worker in the village with a gun when he was stopped from pulling down a welcome arch.

Both Shinde and Deshmukh, of

NAMAS BHOJANI

that since I could not get along with the state party chief, they would appoint another person (Prabha Rau, then an opponent of Dada, was made the PCC(I) president). But they could at least have discussed it with me.

Q. *Why are you opposed to Chavan?*

A. Nobody can go to his house to meet him. MLAs are stopped by securitymen from entering his office. If he behaves like this, what weight will the MLAs have with the people?

Q. *Are most of the MLAs with you and opposed to Chavan?*

A. That will become evident when the time comes.

Q. *Isn't the opposition to Chavan a result of his policies towards the sugar cooperatives, like restricting the supply of irrigation to eight months a year? After all, he's called you a "Shakar Maharishi".*

A. He does not understand anything. He has never run a sugar cooperative. The state Government should decide once and for all in consultation with the Centre whether it wants the sugar industry or not. If the decision is to close it down, then close it down.

Q. *It is said that you want your son Prakash to become a minister, and that Chavan tried to mend fences with you by offering him a ministership?*

A. This is another example of the propaganda meant to sow doubts in my followers' minds. Am I the sort of leader to ignore the rights of party leaders already in the queue and appoint my son as minister? Such talk won't entrap me. Ministerships have to be given to those to whom it's due, not to my son.

Q. *If Chavan is unsuitable, who do you think should be chief minister?*

A. I don't want to say anything about that now.

Q. *But recently, you mentioned your old opponent Sharad Pawar's name?*

A. What I had to say, I did. But if the high command does not want to do it, let it be.

Q. *Do you see Pawar as your successor?*

A. There is no question of a successor. I was asked whether Pawar and I can work together, and I had replied that there was no question of my coming in his way. If he were to become chief minister, I would support him.

Q. *Are you expecting a mid-term poll in the country?*

A. It's not likely. The majority in the party is with the prime minister. Even after all the uproar in Parliament and the talk that he will run away to Italy, he is very much there and doing well.

Q. *But don't you think Rajiv Gandhi has failed to fulfil the initial promise?*

A. He is running the Government well even if he does not have a full cabinet.

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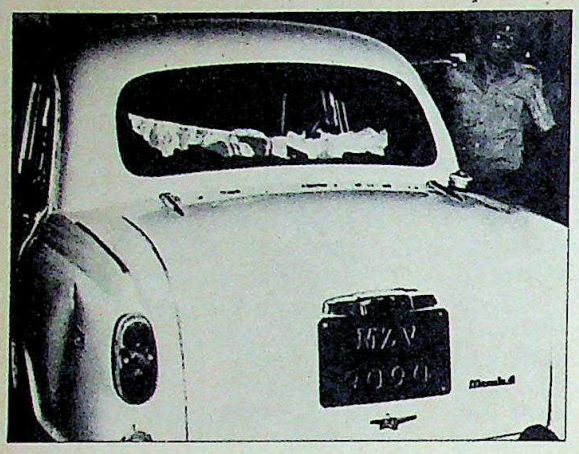


Jichkar's damaged car: lucky escape

course, deny the entire incident, maintaining that they and their followers were set upon by the police when they approached the minister's car in Sawargaon. Their refusal to come out of jail in protest against the attempted murder charge slapped on them by the police following the gun incident, threatened to bring all dissident MLAs in direct confrontation with Chavan. But the Government sensibly reduced the charge to a less serious one.

But as soon as they stepped out of Nagpur Jail, the MLAs again picked up their fight with the minister of state for finance, demanding that he should be expelled from the ministry. "A minister who fabricates false cases against MLAs from his own party should be thrown out," Shinde declared.

Though Pawar has maintained a low profile throughout months of dissident activity in Maharashtra, the Sawargaon incident infuriated him enough to strongly criticise the Government's action. "In all constituencies it is the convention to consult the local legislator for projects financed through the district development committee," he complained, "and as far as the police case goes, it is strange that the alleged assailants were injured while the target of the attack remained unscathed."

In all this, Jichkar appeared a most unlikely candidate to be placed in the eye of the storm. A dynamic and erudite politician, he is known as much for his lectures on both Marxism and Ramayana as for his passion for collecting post-graduate degrees. Besides MAs in several subjects, he has also passed the MD, IAS and IPS exams.

In an otherwise successful and unblemished career, he has failed only once. He lost the last assembly election from Katol to former associate Shinde, who joined the Congress(S) a few months before the poll.

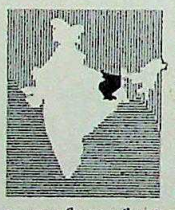
After Chavan became chief minister last year, Jichkar was inducted as a minister and was subsequently elected to the legislative council. Meanwhile, Shinde rejoined the Congress(I) and is now faced with the possibility that in the next election, the Katol assembly ticket may once again go to Jichkar. Clearly the return of the prodigals from the Congress(S) may have strengthened the ruling party in the Assembly, but it has also created the prospect of renewed squabbling within the Congress(I).

—M. RAHMAN

BIHAR

Force Farce

A police officer is hamstrung



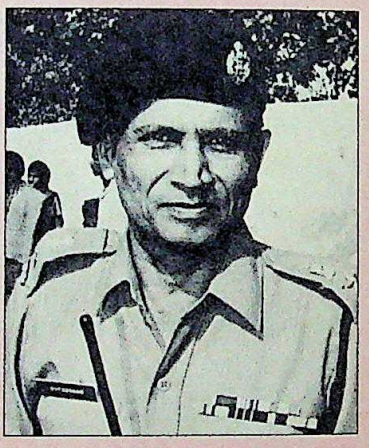
IN a state where might is right and lawlessness a way of life, Sudershan Prasad Singh, transferred to Patna as superintendent of police, was determined to make the town free of crime. An upright officer, he decided to first set his own house in order and discipline the police force. And in consultation with some senior officers, he prepared a blueprint to work to his goal. But last fortnight, Singh found that the exercise in trying to reform the police force had backfired on him.

Singh's troubles began when he circulated a five-page note to Patna's 53 police stations, which laid down strict duty and discipline rules. The note was followed up by frequent roll calls and initiation of action against those who were absent. This seemed to upset the all-powerful thana level officers union, the Bihar Police Association (BPA), who have taught many tough officers a lesson before.

Singh's decision to suspend and arrest Nooruddin Khan, officer-in-charge of Chowk police station on the charges of suppressing crime and trying to extort money from a widow, was the chance the BPA had been waiting for. Though the Bihar police manual authorises an SP to take action against officers for dereliction of duty, the association immediately passed a resolution demanding Singh's suspension and arrest, holding his action violative of the police code.

An association spokesman said that Singh's action contravened Section 840(C) of the manual, which clearly stated that no policeman could be suspended as a punishment. Besides the thana-level officer's union showing its strength threatened to lodge an FIR and then arrest any superior officer who entered the thana and used abusive language against any junior officer. Singh denies having done this.

Even though he may have acted within his rights, Singh has stirred up a hornets' nest. The extreme tone of the resolution and a threat by BPA members to launch a stir shook the Government. Former advocate general Tarakant Jha felt the association resolution indicated that the Government had lost control of police administration. And senior advocate K.P. Singh was of the opinion that the BPA's threat and demand for revocation had no legal sanctity.



Patna Superintendent of Police S.P. Singh's attempts to reform the police have backfired.

The state Government was, however, not taking any chances. Despite the widespread public sympathy for Singh, and support for him from a section of senior officials which included Senior Superintendent of Police Vishnu Dayal Ram, the Government that had brought him to Patna only a few weeks ago, deserted him. Bowing to pressure, the order against Khan was revoked.

This is not the first time the Govern-

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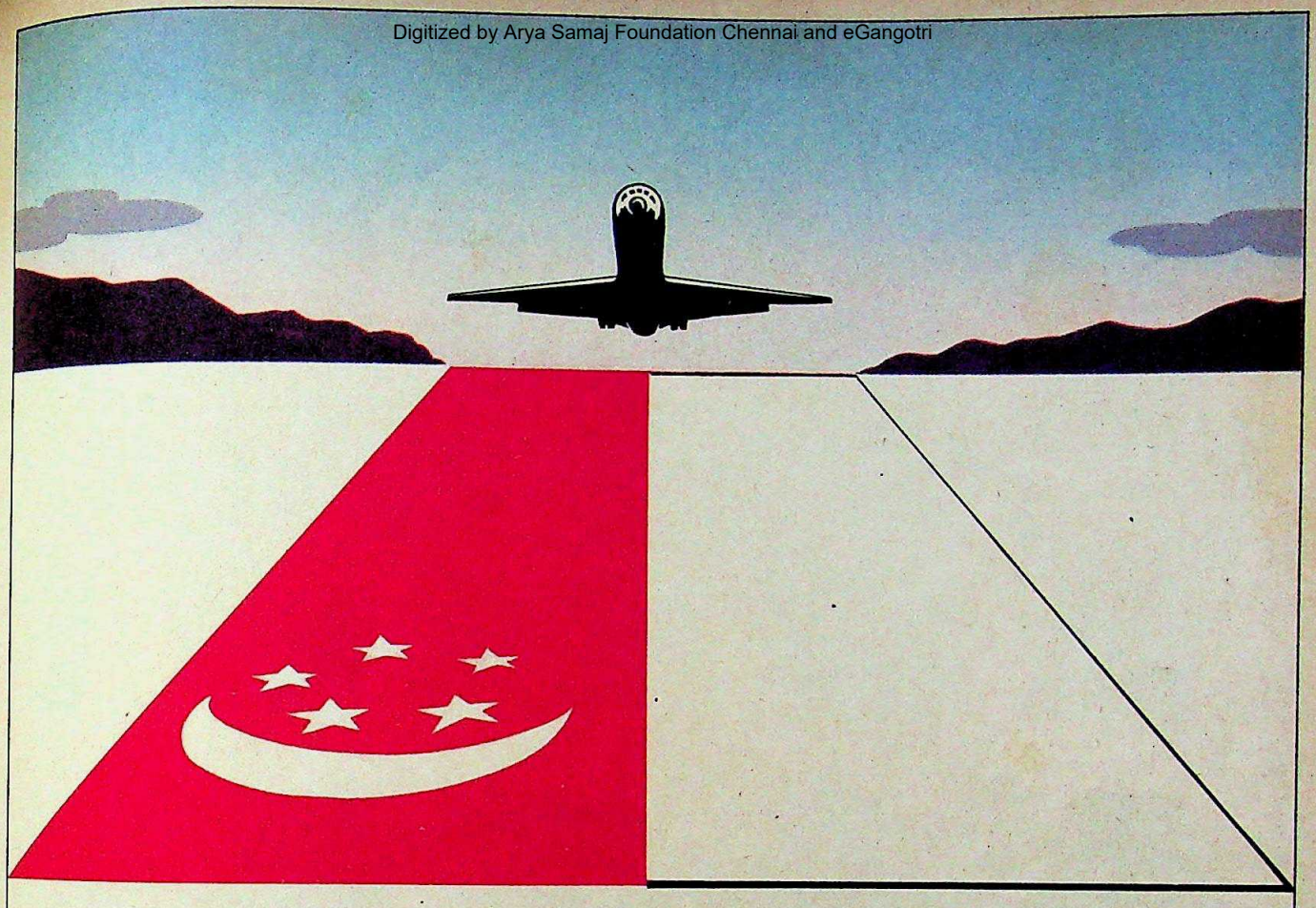

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A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

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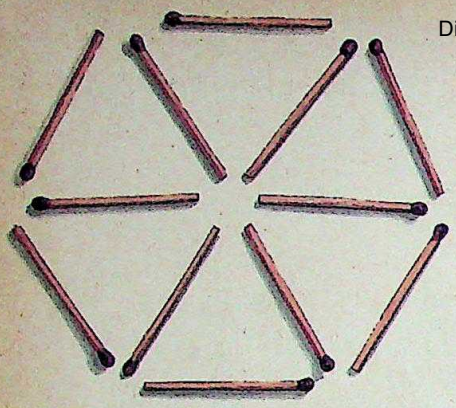

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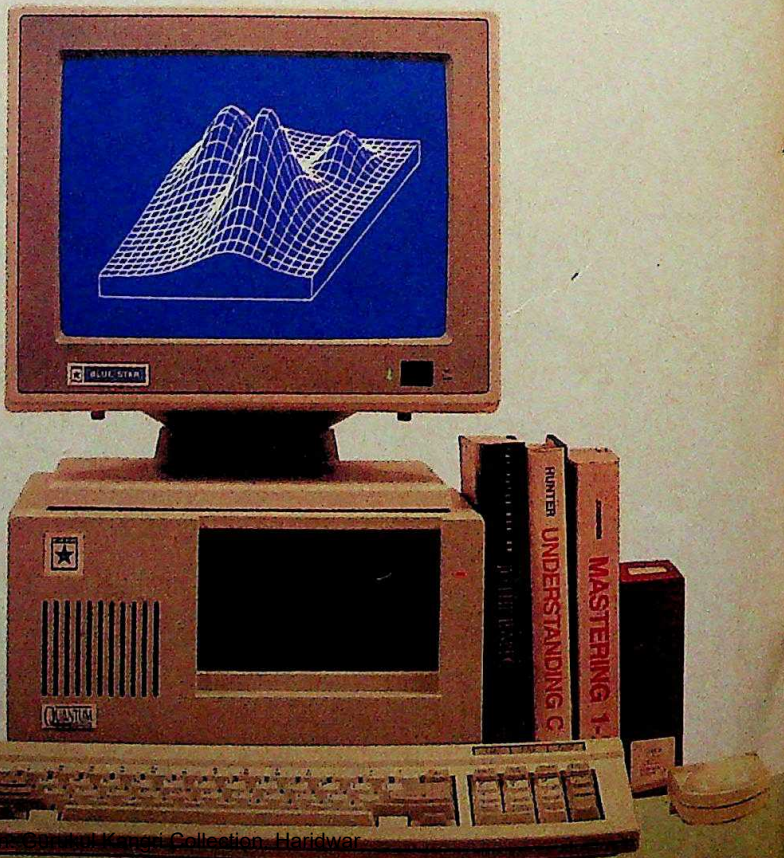

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ment has bowed to BPA demands. Instances abound of officers being transferred as they attempted to restore some order in the police ranks. Like in a game of musical chairs, in a six-month duration last year, three SPs were posted and transferred from Palamau simply because their subordinates were not cooperative and the local politicians didn't like them. And in May 1985, in what became a celebrated case, D.N. Gautam was unceremoniously posted out from Munger on Chief Minister Bindeswari Dubey's orders, when he clashed with the BPA for suspending some thana officials on grounds of corruption.

More recently, S.D. Mehra, deputy superintendent of police in Bhagalpur, who had tried to cleanse the thanas of corruption was not only harassed but deserted by the force when trying to control a violent mob. His jeep was set on fire and the mob proceeded to toss the deserted police officer into the fire where he met his tragic end.

Last fortnight, in the wake of the Singh episode, Congress(I) MLA Shakil-uz-Zaman (a former NSUI general secretary) and senior youth Congress(I) leader Munna Shahi urged the chief minister to ban trade unionism among the policemen as "it is the root cause of the growing indiscipline and lawlessness" in the force.

But not everyone thinks this is the solution. Some senior officials in the state Government are of the opinion that the brutality of the thana-level officer has been nurtured by the system. Most policemen upto the sub-inspector level live and work in sub-human conditions. Police stations and town outposts have no urinals. Of the 53 police stations in Patna, half have neither vehicles nor proper buildings. And according to the BPA, there were 60 junior officers in Patna, who didn't even have a proper place to work or keep their papers in. Nor were these 60 allotted a house or barrack facility. Association sources also claimed that 25 per cent of the state's policemen are posted in the residences of senior officials who treat them like "domestic servants".

Whatever the roots of the discord, there is little doubt the BPA resolution demanding the arrest of a superintendent of police has no parallel. However, if the collapse of the law and order machinery in the state is to be prevented, the Government will have to extend support to officers working at streamlining the police force.

—FARZAND AHMED

LAST WORD/RAJINDER PURI

Culture Blues

WHEN the doorbell rang, the last person I expected to see was Uncle Bholu. But there he was, standing sheepishly, carrying a rolled bedding and dust from the village he had retired to after service.

"Uncle Bholu!" I exclaimed. "What a surprise! What brings you to Delhi?" "The Soviet Cultural Festival," Uncle Bholu said. "I simply could not resist it!"

"Marvellous," I said. "You've come to the right place, I'll show you around." After all, he was my favourite uncle.

First, we went to receive Soviet Premier Ryzhkov who was to be present at the inauguration of the festival. Unfortunately, we could not catch a glimpse of the leaders because of the milling crowds of policemen who blocked our view. But while returning we did see a memorable sight. "Look," said Uncle Bholu, pointing. "There's a policeman pushing a car all by himself! Why doesn't anyone help him?"

"That's not a policeman, Uncle Bholu," I said sternly. "That's Police Commissioner Ved Marwah. And nobody dares help him because he has just disgraced himself by committing the most unpardonable crime. His car drove faster than Rajiv's. Only Rajiv Gandhi is allowed to break speed limits in our city!"

"Oh," said Uncle Bholu, and fell silent.

Another day, we went to see the Bolshoi. Unfortunately, an accident occurred on the way and Uncle Bholu could not fulfil his lifelong ambition. Policemen suddenly stopped all the cars and forced all the occupants out. The prime minister's car was to pass. One IAS officer insisted on remaining in his car. The policemen lifted him bodily and threw him to the ground. A big altercation followed as the IAS officer screamed who he was and the policemen kept slapping him.

"Why does everyone have to get out of the car?" Uncle Bholu whispered.

"Because the police don't want anyone to drive forward and run his car against the prime minister's!" I whispered back impatiently.

"Oh," said Uncle Bholu, and gave a blank look.

The third time we were lucky. We managed to get in to see the Russian circus. Alas, at the most climactic moment something happened to ruin Uncle Bholu's evening. A Russian gymnast was performing the highlight of the programme, a balancing act which required total concentration. After a roll of drums, the arena fell silent. Just then a terrible din occurred. People with tickets, who had been kept out of the Rs 100 enclosure to accommodate VIPs, their friends and relatives with free passes, surged forward amidst scuffles and shouting. In all that noise, the gymnast lost his concentration and fell down.

Later, wishing Uncle Bholu goodbye at the railway station, I felt quite apologetic. But he was very cheerful. "What an experience!" he said with a beaming smile. "A unique exhibition of culture!"

"But you hardly saw anything of the Soviet Festival," I protested.

"I meant the exhibition of Indian culture, nephew," Uncle Bholu said gently.

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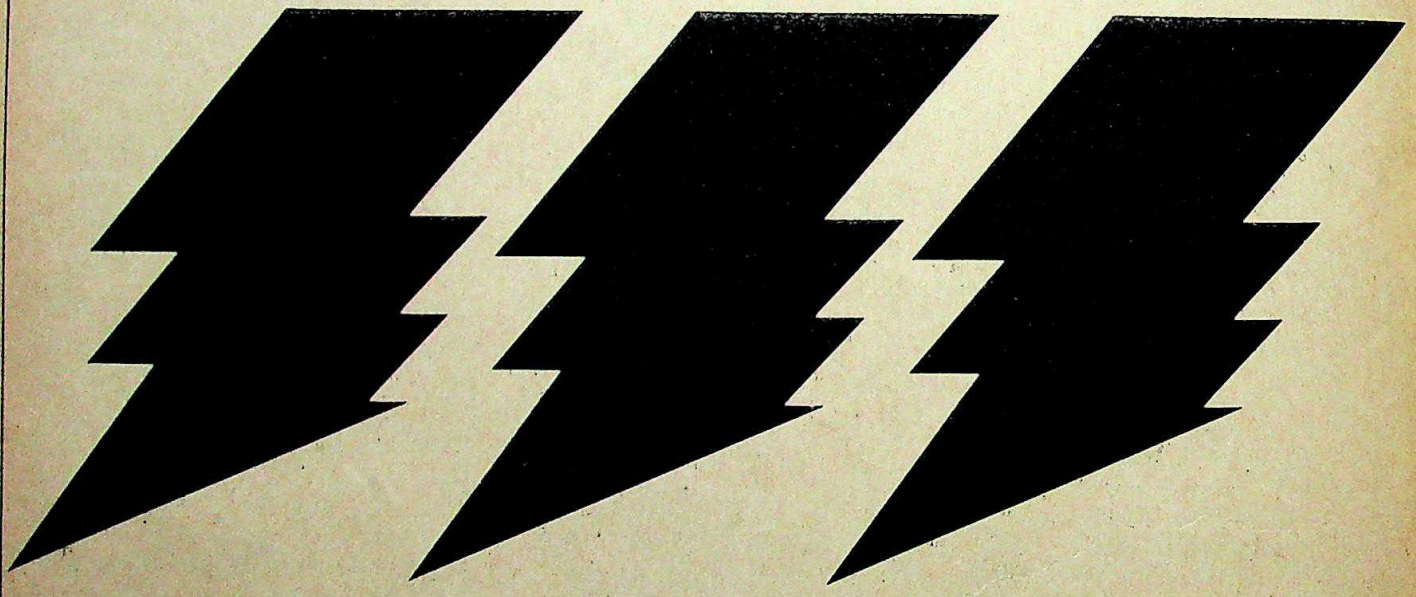

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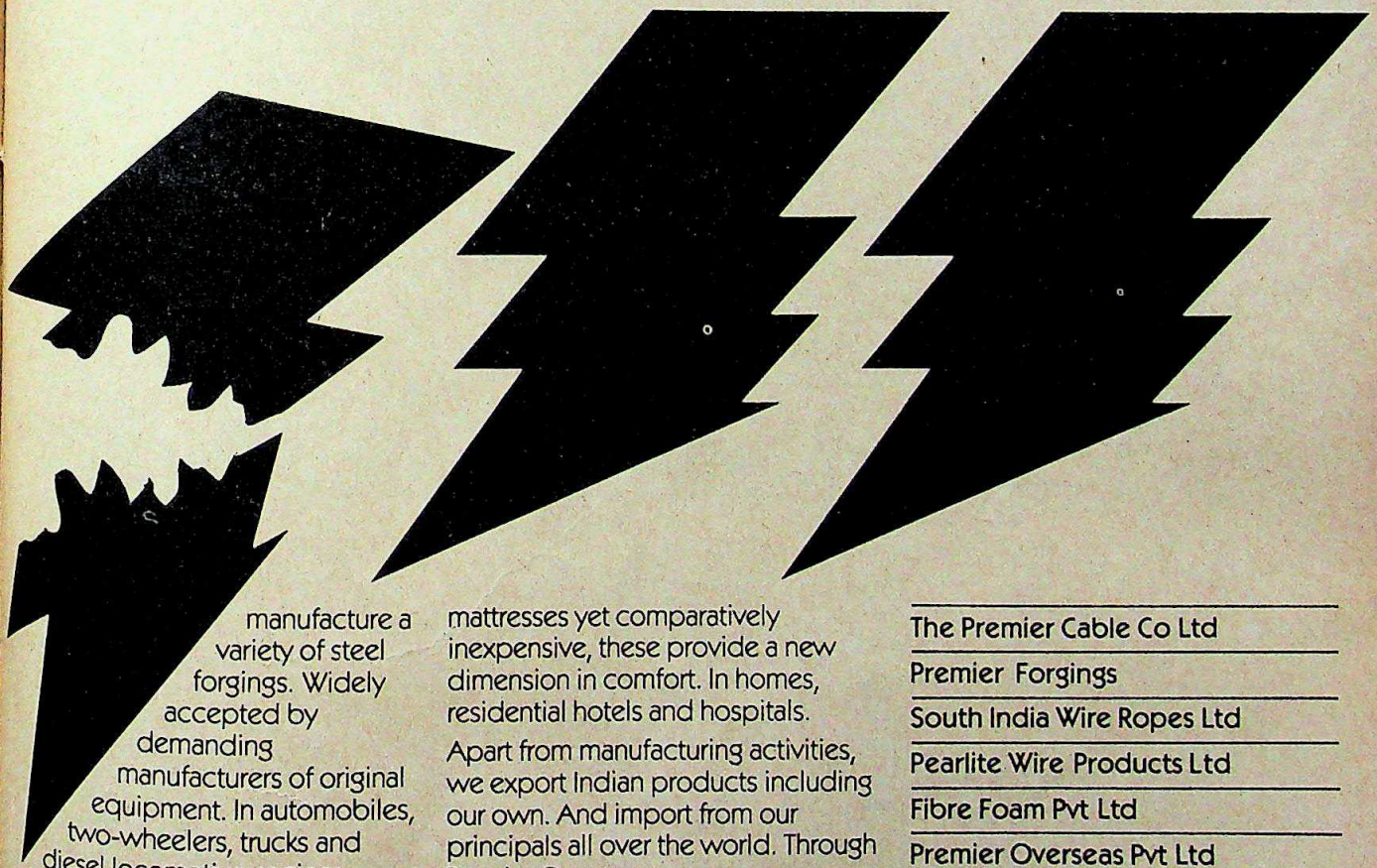

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KARNATAKA

Loan Drama

Janata protests, Poojary wins

NEVER has a loan mela been embroiled in so many controversies as state PCC(I) chief Janardhan Poojary's for one lakh women entrepreneurs at Bangalore on December 5. Nor has any other loan mela had to overcome a campaign by the ruling Janata Party to scuttle it.

On December 5, Rs 30 crore was disbursed by 638 bank branches in a much publicised loan mela only for women. Burka-clad Hasina of Tannery Road, (one of the beneficiaries who plans to start a cloth business) said: "We've always been Congress supporters. This mela has strengthened our support." But hundreds of disgruntled women were seen streaming out of the gaily-decorated venue as they had been told that the money would be disbursed at the banks, two days later. Said Jyothi of Madivala who walked out while Poojary was addressing the 60,000-strong crowd: "Who wants to listen to boring speeches?" Nevertheless her vote she says will definitely go to Poojary.

One of the biggest scandals precipitated by this loan mela was that 85,000 loan application forms had been routed by the Syndicate Bank (the convener bank for the loan mela) through one individual—Congress 'social worker' Kan Kanady Sundar. Former slum convener of the state PCC(I) for five years, Sundar, 56, said: "Poojary trusts me because he knows I am hard working and clean. I've been doing work for this loan mela for the past six months." To the charge that the application forms had to be bought by the poor for sums ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 500, Sundar, displaying 15 meticulously-kept files, said: "All the details regarding the beneficiaries are in these files. You can choose people at random and check up with them whether they have paid any money for the forms."

Characteristically, Poojary chooses to disregard criticism and continues to repose faith in Sundar's abilities to identify the poor. In the October 31, 1985 Bangalore loan mela, 12,000 of the 30,000 beneficiaries had come through Sundar; in the October 31, 1986 mela, 28,500 of 78,000; in the July 4, 1987 mela 10,170 of the 40,000; and in the mela last fortnight, 70,000 of the one lakh women entrepreneurs had come through Sundar.

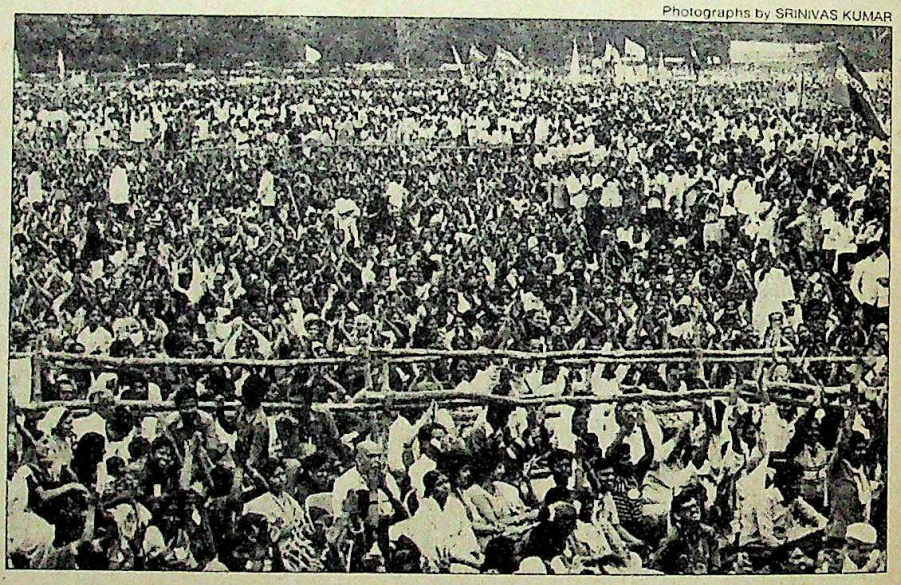
Predictably the Janata Party is up in arms: partymen were unable to even get the application forms. Says state party President M.P. Prakash: "Surely there is a limit to the political mileage the Congress can get out of these loan melas."

The decibel level of the anti-Poojary tirade increased sharply with the publication of the confidential minutes of a bank officers meeting held on November 4 and 10 to discuss the women's loan mela. The minutes demonstrate that Poojary had instructed the banks to make food and transport arrangements for the beneficiaries, that the applications received through the social workers should be given 'top priority' status, and that the no-dues certificates should be waived while granting the loans.

Several bankmen admitted that the loans were disbursed in total violation of RBI rules. Said a bank manager: "I would say RBI norms have been violated as no attempt has been made to assess the viability of the project—how can 200 people run cloth businesses in the same locality? Also the credit-worthiness of the beneficiary is not assessed nor is the productive worth of the venture." Janata sources claim the banks have spent Rs 2 crore in food and transport arrangements for the loan mela.

Prakash shot off a strongly-worded letter to R.N. Malhotra, RBI governor urging him to probe the loan mela as Poojary was "flouting RBI regulations to strengthen the organisational set-up of the Congress(I)" and that "application forms were given only to those people who were nominated by Poojary".

Photographs by SRINIVAS KUMAR



A section of the crowd at the loan mela (above); and Poojary: contentious issue

Initially the Janata had planned to storm the venue with 15,000 loan seekers but abandoned this plan as the violence that would follow might have tarnished their image. Consequently, on December 3, partymen held a series of demonstrations including one before the Syndicate Bank demanding that they be given 50,000 forms. They circulated a questionnaire to be filled by the beneficiary with questions such as 'have you heard about Janardhan Poojary, if so your opinion about him? And if you get a chance would you vote for him?'

Poojary insisted that the questionnaires had been concocted to tarnish his image. On December 5, just before he was to set off to the venue, he was gheraoed by the Yuva Janata activists who brought with them about 60 women seeking loans. Most of them like Annapoorni of Yeshwantpur and Lalitha of Jayanagar had been refused

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loans for no accountable reason other than the fact that their applications were not routed through Congress agents. Janata activists also appealed to the high court but no stay was granted. Said party worker Narayana Rao. "We tried everything to prevent this loan mela. Now we can only hope that rain will prevent it from taking place." But even the rains did not oblige.

"The Janata Party was hell-bent on scuttling the loan mela because they realised how popular it is. They are scared because the Congress is working," exulted Poojary. He claimed that no action could be taken on the loan application forms forwarded by the chief minister because they did not contain signatures or even the name of the bank branch from where the loan was sought to be obtained. As to giving Sundar 85,000 forms, Poojary remarked: "He is a genuine social worker. The point is, if a Congressman misutilises these forms I can take action, but if a Janata man plays mischief, I am helpless."

COMMENTING on the allegation that the melas flout RBI norms, Poojary exclaimed: "The whole idea of the loan mela is to generate income for the poorest of the poor. So what if 200 cloth businesses are started in one locality? As for waiving no-dues certificates the bank managers have been asked to use their discretion. Why do you want to be so stringent with the poor?" He admits that many of the loans will be used for consumption but adds that it is better for the poor to be indebted to a bank rather than to money-lenders. "Even a debtor is a respectable customer for the bank," he says.

Last fortnight the Janata Party decided to hold state-wide dharnas to protest against the Poojary loan melas. Says Prakash: "We are not against loan melas but the unscrupulous and partisan manner in which it is conducted."

Poojary countered sarcastically: "Now that they realise that the programme is popular they claim they are not against loan melas. When we first started they did nothing but criticise the programme itself." Asked whether he would go slow with his future loan melas, in view of the dust and din kicked up, an irrepressible Poojary said: "I draw courage from the people. I don't care what the Janata does to scuttle this programme. Of course I will go ahead." Barely had the sun set on the December 5 loan mela when he began processing forms for fresh loan melas to be held in Raichur and Bijapur next month.

—ANITA PRATAP

DOWRY DEATH

Public Outcry

IN Deorala, 18-year-old Roop Kanwar's sati raised a storm. Only two months later, Shashikala, a 25-year-old housewife committed suicide, in Tiptur, Karnataka. Allegedly a victim of dowry harassment, her death has created an unprecedented public outcry in the state.

On November 6, a day before she died, neighbours heard Shashikala being rebuked by her father-in-law. H.R. Anantharamaiah, a rich landowner. She had phoned her mother in Bangalore to take her away, and had even tried to borrow Rs 20 for bus fare, without luck. The next day, at 12.30 p.m., her husband, Dr H.A. Ramaswamy, claimed he found her body hanging in the bathroom. But the Bangalore Media Women's Forum probing the incident, found Ramaswamy's conduct "suspicious". And the police registered a case of tampering with evidence against him.

In a diary, Shashikala voiced her anguish over abuse by her husband and in-laws who tormented her for inadequate dowry: Rs 25,000 and 43 tolas of gold that she got with her.

In the wake of this incident, residents raised an outcry, strongly condemning the family. Not willing to accept it as suicide, they suspect foul play. Some ask: "If she'd hanged herself, why wasn't her face distorted?" On the day the family was arrested, a large crowd gathered outside their house. And under pressure, the police made the handcuffed trio walk to the sessions court while the 10,000-strong crowd heckled, taunted and spat at them.

Shashikala at her wedding: victimised

Dowry deaths have been on the rise in the state. From 22 such cases in 1984, they have shot up to 50 this year. But only one case in Belgaum ended with conviction. Ramaswamy and his parents have been charged with abetment to suicide under Section 304(B) of the Indian Penal Code which can draw a life sentence. In view of the protest, the case has been transferred to the Corps of Detectives (COD). But whether the trio fall into the COD dragnet or not, they have already been convicted in the people's court. Says M.V. Seetharamaiah, Tiptur's leading criminal lawyer: "The people will severely punish them."

And they have been doing just that. On being released on bail, the in-laws had fled to Ammasandra, a neighbouring town. But they were relentlessly hounded by the locals, who like the people of Tiptur, subjected them to a scathing social boycott. The Rotary Club expelled Ramaswamy while a colleague, Dr Subba Rao, is approaching the Indian Medical Association to strip him of his membership. And local advocates have refused to fight for the accused. Unable to return to Tiptur due to social ostracisation, Ramaswamy and his parents are now staying in a lodge in Tumkur.

In her diary, Shashikala wrote: "I may bring myself to forgive my husband, but even God won't forgive my in-laws." Going by the overwhelming public response, it seems certain that her death will be at least partially avenged by society.

—ANITA PRATAP

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GUJARAT

A Dry Run

Scandal hits Water Board

ONE—or more—man crusades against the Government are notoriously unsuccessful. But the lone ranger against the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewage Board seems to be firing successful salvoes. Former Irrigation Department employee J.J. Shrimali, dismissed in March this year for anti-corruption propaganda, first lodged complaints against the board's functioning with the Vigilance Department and the Department of Public and Personal Grievances at the Centre and then filed a public interest writ petition in the Gujarat High Court in July. In October, the court issued notices to the respondents—Health Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, Vigilance Commissioner K. Shivraj and newly-appointed board Chairman V.B. Patel, and others—asking them why the petition should not be admitted.

Among the charges:

Submergible pumps were ordered this year without inviting tenders from selected firms (Calama, KSB, Pulin Pumps and SU Pumps and Amrita Engineering). The average rate per pump was Rs 1.5 lakh, with accessories and installation, but market rates did not exceed Rs 50,000 per pump. So machinery which could have been bought for under Rs 2 crore was purchased for Rs 3.5 crore. J.D. Modi, the board's chief engineer (mechanical), was defensive: "The pumps had to be acquired on emergency basis and we selected reliable companies." But that does not explain the inflated rates. The case is now being probed by the Vigilance Department.

Then, in April 1986, without issuing public tenders, PVC pipes worth Rs 4 crore were ordered from five firms (Plastotax, Slovin Plastics, Gupta Plastics, Bharat Pipes and Fittings and Omniplast). Pipes made by Gupta Plastics (which is partly owned by a former business associate of Union Minister of State for Finance B.K. Gadhvi) Plastotax and Bharat Pipes and Fittings failed to withstand tests carried out by technical experts of the Scarcity Cell (water supply). On the recommendation of the Scarcity Cell, the board has blocked payments to these companies.

Minister Patel is personally accused of having overruled the board to order two rigs (used for drilling wells) in 1986 from M/s Apollo Pvt. Ltd. owned by Congress(I) MLA from Mehsana Manibhai Patel. In all, 20 rigs were bought by the board for Rs 7 crore. Tenders were not issued because Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi wanted speedy implementation of water supply schemes in his March 1986 visit. But the rigs were bought nearly two months after Rajiv's visit—time enough for short-notice tenders.

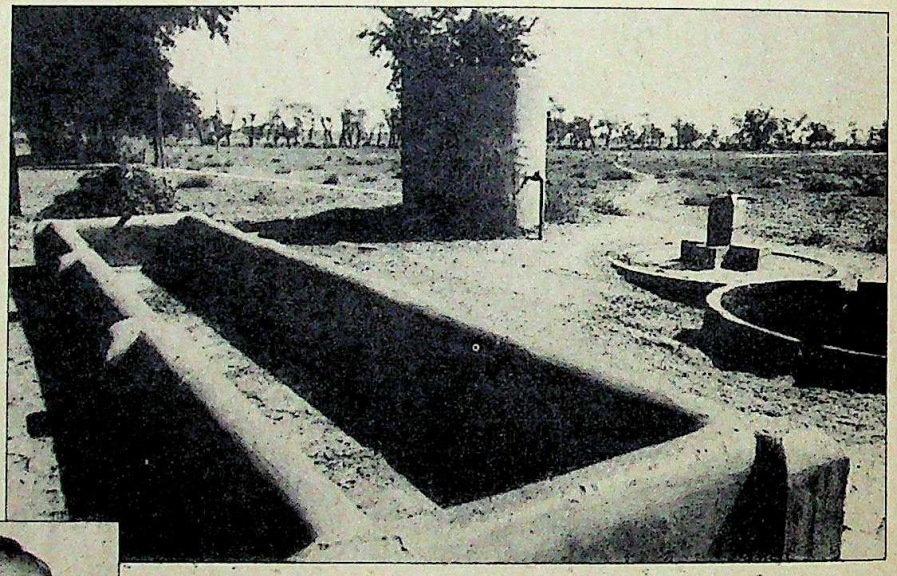
When INDIA TODAY contacted Patel, he asked for a list of questions, then refused a meeting saying he "would know very little about the board". Patel is the minister in charge of the board.

Also, work on water supply schemes has been highly substandard. In the World Bank-aided Deodhar scheme in Banaskantha district, Chimanagadh village has been left high and dry though the scheme became operative over six months ago because the pipeline leaked at many places, unable to withstand the pressure of water. The sarpanch of Gandhinagar-Ghodala village in Mehsana district lodged a complaint with board officials about substandard pipes. The Vellampura, Kalyanpur and Mohanpur scheme was completed three years ago, but is still inoperative.

Board Member Secretary Y.N. Nanjudhiah dismisses the charges as a vilification campaign by some employees following the suspension of four clerks on disciplinary grounds. Says he: "These disgruntled employees have ganged up with Shrimali to defame officials. There is little doubt that Shrimali's campaign is motivated." But a state crime branch probe conducted at the Vigilance Department's instance found Shrimali innocent of charges of blackmailing.

It is not as if the board is incapable of executing quality work. Some of the Dutch-aided schemes in north Gujarat are doing well. Said a Dutch expert: "Initially their work was not up to the mark, but close monitoring ensured it."

Despite the petition, the Government has not taken any action yet. Says a senior Vigilance Department officer: "If the Government means business, the best way to ascertain the extent of corruption committed by officials would be to probe their family assets and property." Until that happens, Don Quixotes like Shrimali will have to continue tilting at windmills. —UDAY MAHURKAR



Inoperative water scheme in Kalyanpur and (inset) Patel: wasteful expenditure

A writ petition in the state high court has accused Health Minister Vallabhbhai Patel of involvement in corruption and inefficiency in the Water Supply Board.

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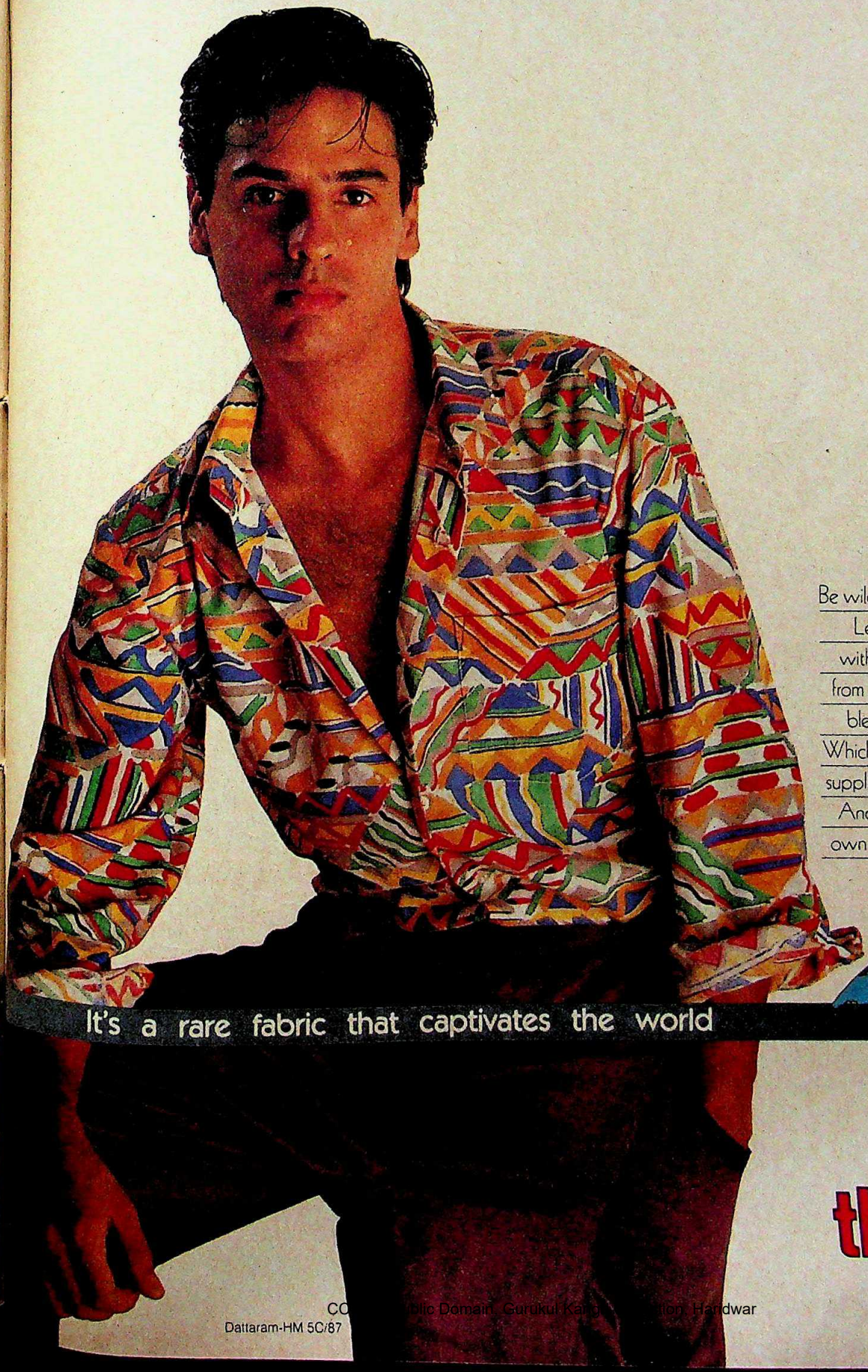
HINDOOSTAN MILLS



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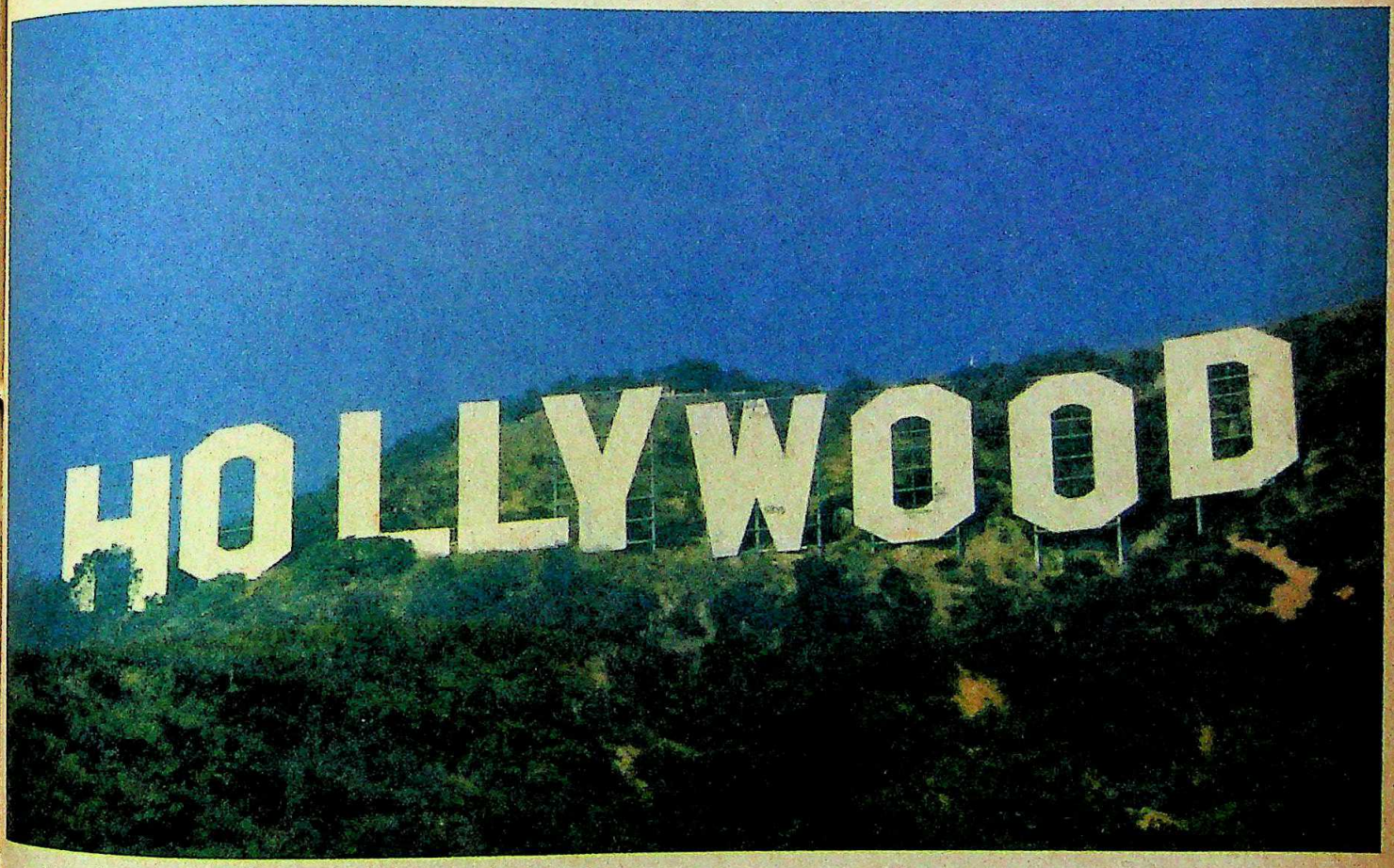

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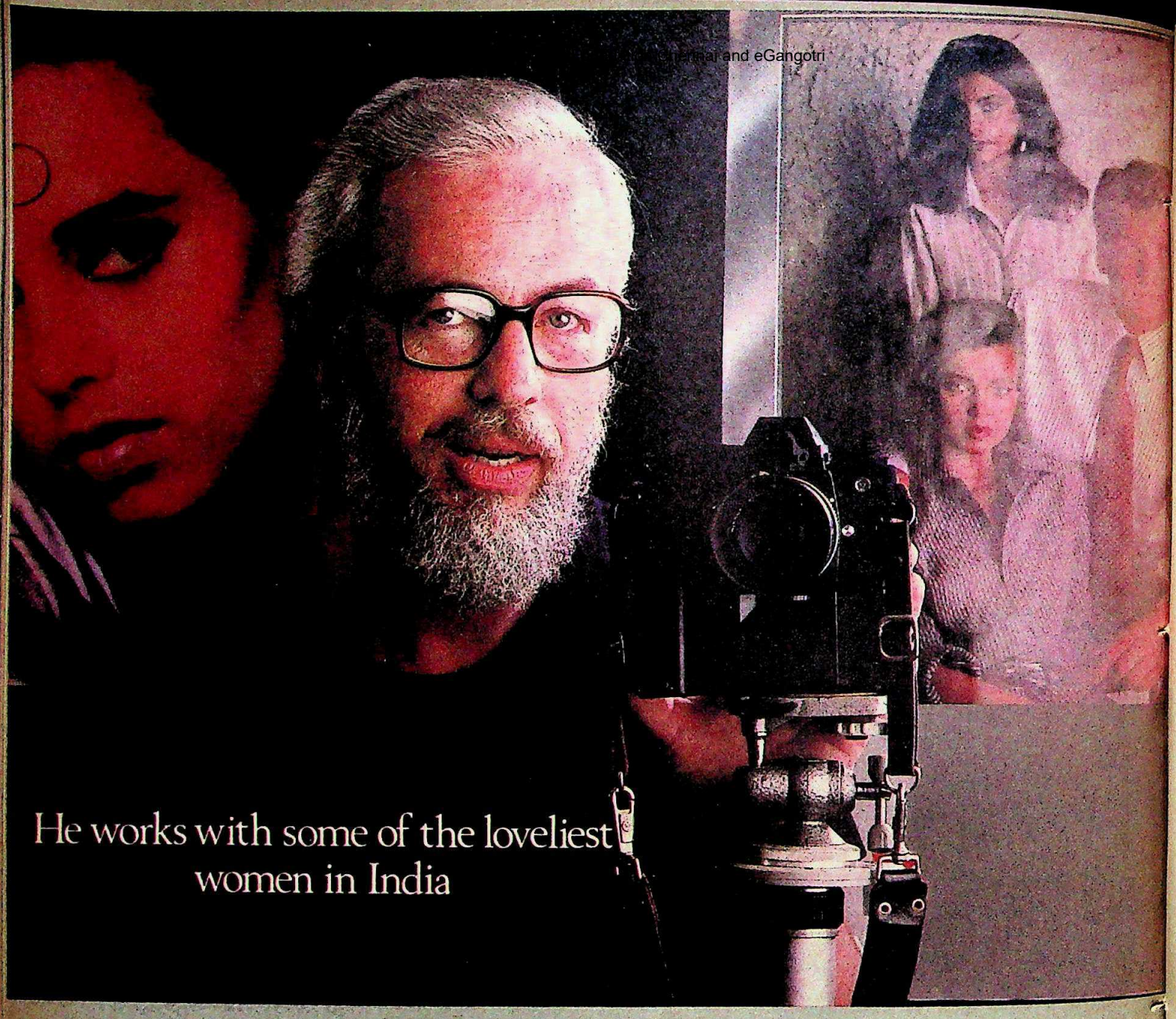

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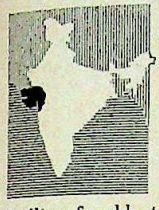
GUJARAT

Widening Rift

Dissidence damages Congress



THE issue was serious enough for Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to intervene—in his capacity as party president. But the political convulsions from the snowballing feud between Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary and Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) President Ahmed Patel have already left the state unit in dangerous disarray.

Patel triggered off the crisis by expelling Sahadev Chaudhary, a close ally and relative of the chief minister, from the party for six years. The chief minister retaliated by ordering a raid on a cattle camp run by the PCC(I) in Rafaleshwar. In his report, Rajkot District Collector R. Takru—who supervised the raid—alleged "large-scale irregularities" in the camp's management implying that funds had been misappropriated.

Interestingly, the chief minister himself is on the committee of the Gujarat Rahat Samiti, a trust floated by the PCC(I) which manages the camp. But it is essentially Patel who, as the committee's managing trustee, bears responsibility for the accounts. The message from Chaudhary was clear: he would not hesitate to retaliate if Patel continued his campaign.

Patel and party leader Vadilal Kamdar, who is the organiser of the camp, refuted the allegations. Said Patel: "The Government is free to conduct an independent probe into the whole affair." Added Kamdar: "Our accounts are clear and will be made public as soon as they are audited. The samiti has become the victim of dirty politics."

Chaudhary on his part, denied ordering the raid. But there was little doubt that he was behind it. A party worker pointed out: "No officer would take such a step without instructions from the top." That the raid had got Chaudhary's sanction was also underlined by the fact that Takru sent a copy of his report to a secretary of the chief minister.

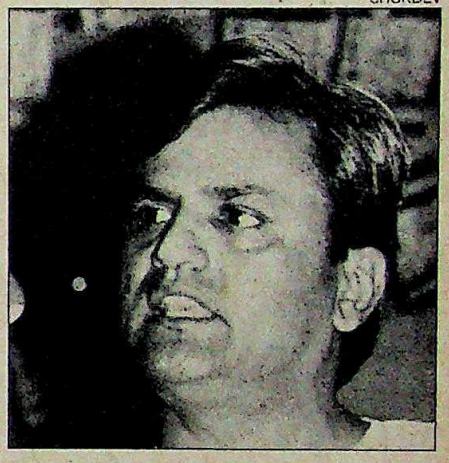
On November 26, soon after the raid, Patel complained to the high command about the damage done to the party. Both Chaudhary and Patel were summoned by Rajiv, who reportedly asked them to sort out their differences.

But it is Sahadev who has been the stumbling block between Chaudhary and Patel for some time now. He was suspended from the party last July when he ignored a PCC(I) directive to accommodate three supporters of veteran leader Jinabhai Darji—Chaudhary's main foe—on the various committees of the Surat District Panchayat of which he is the president. Ever since, the chief minister has been trying to somehow get his supporter's suspension revoked. But Patel has stuck to his guns.

Early last month, Sahadev defied the PCC(I) once again, getting two of his supporters elected as leader and deputy leader of the Congress(I) group in the panchayat. But the party leadership had already recognised Govind Vasava, a Darji aide, as the group's leader. And Vasava had, in fact, been elected at a party meeting, boycotted by Sahadev and his supporters. This left Patel with no option but to expel him.

BHAWAN SINGH

SHUKDEV



(Clockwise from above) Patel; Sahadev; and Amarsinh Chaudhary

However, Sahadev's expulsion was preceded by a series of official manoeuvres. The chief minister knew well enough that action against Sahadev had become inevitable. So he camped in New Delhi for two days, and with the support of Union Minister of State for Agriculture Yogendra Makwana, he apparently convinced party General Secretary Ram Rattan Ram that Sahadev's suspension was not justified. Ram promptly called Sahadev to New Delhi on November 19 and handed him a letter saying that his suspension had been revoked.

Meanwhile, Patel who had got wind of Chaudhary's moves, sought the prime minister's clearance on the expulsion order. Once he succeeded, he returned to Ahmedabad and on November 20, announced Sahadev's expulsion. But on the same day in Surat, Sahadev released Ram's letter to the press.

This threw the party machinery into confusion. It was only when senior party General Secretary G.K. Moopanar stepped in, that the mist was cleared. Said Moopanar: "Sahadev's expulsion is valid." Clearly, it was Ram who had bungled. While revoking the suspension, he had conveniently ignored Patel. Said a veteran party leader: "How can one expect our party to be united when the general secretaries themselves sow seeds of discontent? If the outgoing general secretary R.L. Bhatia had given the impression of having a pro-Patel leaning, Ram seems to have thrown his lot with Chaudhary."

In Gujarat, the ruling party is divided into two groups. While Chaudhary banks on the support of Makwana, Patel is backed by Darji, and former chief minister Madhavsinh Solanki. The fallout of this is that the Congress(I) was badly mauled in the recent elections to the civic bodies of Bardoli and Vyara, the home town of both Chaudhary and Darji.

But now, with Rajiv's intervention, a temporary truce seems to have been declared between Patel and Chaudhary. The PCC(I) president has offered to withdraw Sahadev's expulsion order on the condition that he abides by party directives. As a reciprocal gesture, Chaudhary has reportedly urged his ally to tone down his activities. But it will take more than hasty interventions from New Delhi to set things in order.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

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THE OPPOSITION

Unlikely Allies

New partners but old problems

WHAT is common between Opposition leaders like Arif Mohammed Khan and Syed Shahabuddin, or Chandra Shekhar and Subramaniam Swamy, or, for that matter, between Ram Dhan and Chandra Shekhar? Nothing very much, except for the fact that they have all been involved in a vicious and long-drawn-out villification campaign against each other.

That was, till the other day. Now politics has once again proven that it makes strange bedfellows. Last fortnight, all these fractious personalities came together with their party leaders to form a 'new' four-party front comprising the Janata Party, the V.P. Singh-led Jan Morcha, the truncated Congress(S) and the Lok Dal(A) led by former prime minister Charan Singh's son Ajit Singh.

And in their attempts to paper over their ideological and personal differences, the heads of all the four parties—Chandra Shekhar (Janata), Ram Dhan (Jan Morcha), Sarat Chandra Sinha (Congress-S) and Ajit Singh (Lok Dal-A)—issued a lengthy statement rich in familiar slogans. Said the statement: "Having discussed the critical situation prevailing in the country, we recognise the urgent need for consolidating the national, secular and democratic forces." The statement listed the front's 14-point programme, including economic welfare for the weaker sections, remunerative prices for the farmers, better treatment for the minorities and women, basic electoral reforms to eliminate the influence of business over politics, and curbs on multi-national companies. That was hardly likely to set either the Ganga or the Cauvery on fire.

Nevertheless, compelling political forces had brought about the very ungrand alliance. Chandra Shekhar had failed in his attempt to forge a merger of his Janata with the Lok Dal(B). The talks between the two parties, which had been going on for four months, broke down over naming the new party and choosing electoral partners. And the Janata chief began his search for new partners who would provide a "credible alternative to the Congress".

He and other political leaders like Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao participated in numerous conclaves with parties from across the political spectrum; but opposition unity and a national alternative remained a mirage. While the two communist parties refused to sit in on any dialogue where the BJP was participating, the BJP (perhaps in a case of sour grapes) also declined to join any political alliance with the communists as partners.

That left the Janata with no alternative but to rope in other smaller parties which were individually political non-entities. The participation of the V.P. Singh group gave the new front a semblance of credibility, but barely. Singh himself decided to go along with the Janata only after agonising about the left and the BJP for over four months. Though he had been criticised earlier by Chandra Shekhar, the two decided to "forget" the past in the interest of unity.

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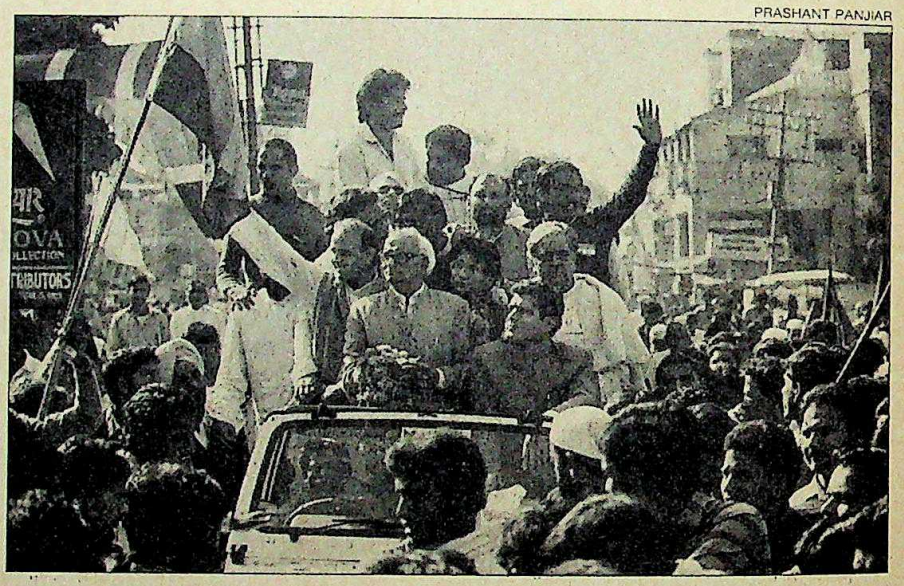

Front rally in Saharanpur: unity moves

Jan Morcha sources said the decision to join the Janata front was aimed at toppling the Uttar Pradesh Government and at launching a massive campaign against the Congress(I) in the state. Left to himself, Singh and his group did not have the numerical strength to dislodge a Congress government. With the help of the Janata and the Lok Dal(A), they might stand a slightly better chance. At least, that is the hope.

Inevitably, the leaders of the new group realise its weaknesses. So, soon after forging the front, both Singh and Chandra Shekhar tried to persuade Devi Lal to join them. But Devi Lal and Bihar Lok Dal strongman Karpoori Thakur refused to participate in any alliance in which the rival Lok Dal was a partner. Also, neither was willing to desert the BJP, which is Devi Lal's ally in Haryana.

Nevertheless, all hope has not been lost. Said Madhu Dandavate, leader of the Janata Party in the Lok Sabha: "This is not the end of the front. It is expandable and everyone can join us on issues. None of the parties has any differences on the issues we are fighting for." Dandavate cited the example of the Nagpur kisan rally, in which the BJP and the communist parties shared the same platform. The rally was organised by the Sharad Joshi-led Shetkari Sanghatana.

The communists, however, see in the front a determined move to isolate the BJP in the north and the CPI(M) welcomed it. The BJP had its reservations. Said BJP President L.K. Advani: "We feel that the front is an attempt to bring together all like-minded parties and former Congressmen. So long as they keep the communists out of it, we don't see any problem. We will welcome the emergence of a third force led by the front."

But the BJP leaders and some of the Janata leaders are also sceptical about the success of the new experiment. According to them, the new front will collapse under its own weight. For example, the front will face a serious problem when both Khan and Shahabuddin are called upon to speak on Muslim issues. Unnikrishnan of the Congress(S) and Swamy will not agree on the American role in Indian politics. But a senior member of the front argued that these were issues to be sorted out in the future. Nevertheless, both credibility and political momentum seemed to elude the front last fortnight.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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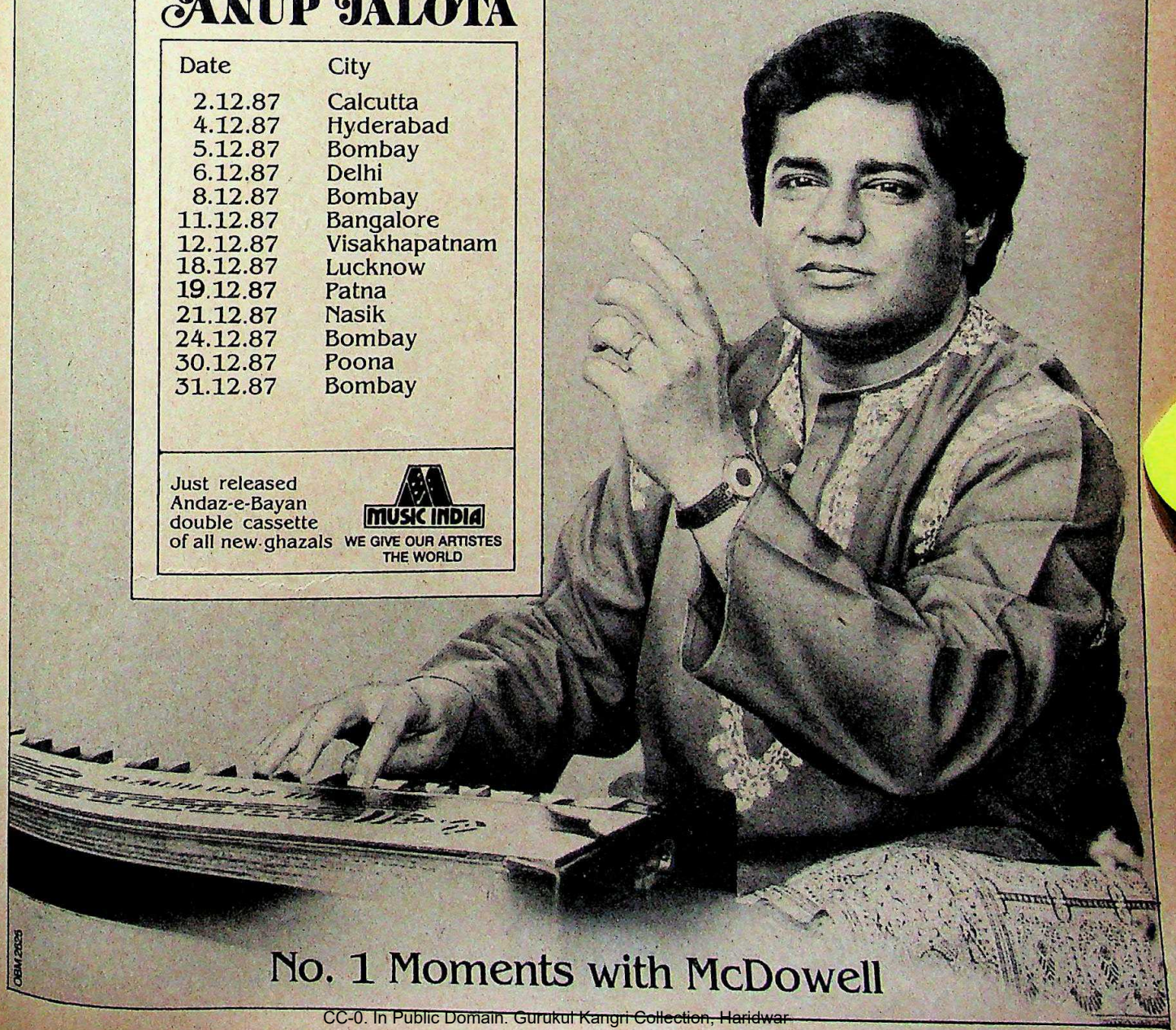

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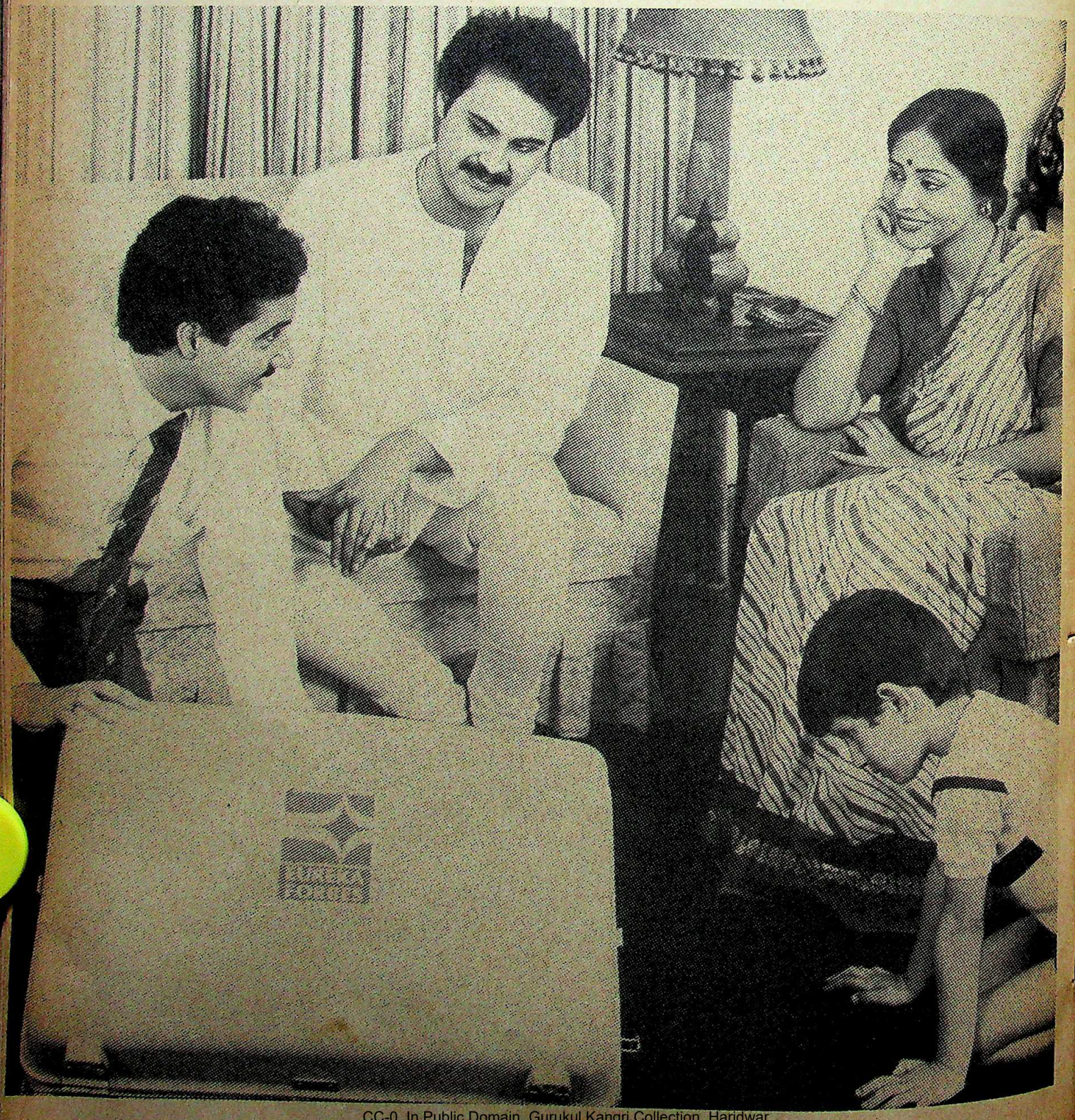

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AHMEDABAD
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* 15. Farah Commercial Complex, 68, J.C. Road. Tel: 224453/225673.
* 16. 4305, High Point-4, 3rd Floor, 45, Palace Road.

BARODA
* 17. Deep Jyoti, 75, Suvarna Puri Society, Chickoowadi. Tel: 322289/322681.

BHUBANESWAR
18. 16/8, Behind Bhubaneswar Hotel, (Cuttack Road).

CHANDIGARH
* 19. Sector 7-C, S.C.O. No. 14, 2nd Floor, Madhya Marg. Tel: 26735.

COCHIN
* 20. No. XXXV/1448-2, Nandanam, Church Landing Road. Tel: 352736.

COIMBATORE
* 21. No. 61, West, T.V. Swamy Road, R.S. Puram.

FARIDABAD
22. House No. 328, Sector 16-A. Tel: 22645.

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23. 204, B. New Gandhi Nagar.

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* 24. 403, Kala Mansion, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad. Tel: 824128.

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* 25. C-39, Lajpat Marg, Bhagwan Das Road. Tel: 70205.

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26. C/o. Hotel Gagandeep, G.T. Road, Near Narinder Theatre.

JAMMU
27. 39 A/C, Ground Floor, Gandhi Nagar.

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29. 39, Bakhat Sagar Colony, Nehru Park.

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36. 37, Saradha College Road.

SURAT
* 37. 9, Seventh-Day Adventists Extension Bldg., Athwa Lines.
* 38. 31, Vijay Nagar, Near R.T.O., Majura Gate. Tel: 39200/34224.

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39. 29 A, North Bandyman Street, Woriyur.

TRIVANDRUM
* 40. T.C. No. 42/88, Pankaja Bhavan, Kalipankulam Road, Manacaud. Tel: 79570.

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* 41. 29-12-3, Venkatratnam Street, Suryaraopet. Tel: 76873.

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* 42. 50-50-46, Balaya Sastri Layout, Seethamadhara West, Opp. Maria Red Convent.

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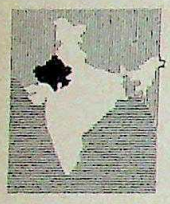
RAJASTHAN

Landmark Judgement

Anti-sati law extended to all temples

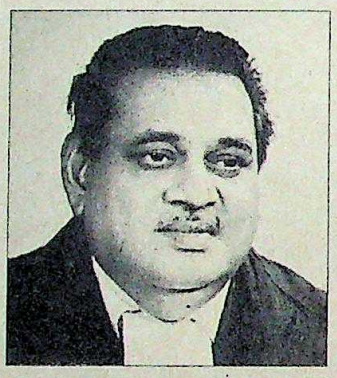


IT was a divine and solacing experience to visit the Shri Rani Satiji Temple. The management here is laudable. I wish for the progress of this historical and cultural pilgrimage.

—Guman Mal Lodha, December 3, 1982

THESE lines were written by the present acting chief justice of the Rajasthan High Court in the visitors' register at Jhunjhunu's Rani Sati Temple. But ironically, it was Lodha, along with Justice Pana Chand Jain, who delivered a judgement on December 1 which is the most serious attempt so far to end the practice of sati.

The two-member bench struck down Section 19 of the Rajasthan Sati (Prevention) Act, that banned all glorification of sati but exempted existing temples from the purview of the law. But last fortnight's judgement alters the October 1 ordinance—which became the Rajasthan Sati (Prevention) Act after being passed by the Assembly—considerably. The new law now applies to all temples glorifying widow burning. Moreover, the law now clearly defines what would amount to "glorification" of sati. This includes any ceremony, procession, collection of funds or construction of a temple with a view to honouring a sati.



Lodha's judgement represents the most serious attempt so far to put an end to the pernicious practice and glorification of sati.

The state Government's October 1 ordinance—that came in the wake of the public uproar over 18-year-old Roop Kanwar's sati in Deorala village—while angering supporters of sati, had not really satisfied the anti-sati lobby either. While the proponents of sati filed six writ petitions challenging the fiat, Aruna Asaf Ali, freedom fighter and patron of the National Federation of Indian Women, and Manik Chand Surana, Janata Party legislator, went to court against the section. And it was the latter who finally won the legal battle.

With public opinion so sharply divided, the judges faced a difficult task. But finally the 200-page judgement was delivered. Section 19 was declared unconstitutional for being "discriminatory and derogatory to women".

While the verdict was progressive on one hand, the judges were cautious as well: they made a distinction in the definition of sati, thereby creating a loophole in the law which could be exploited by sati temples. It was held that only those temples which glorify widow burning came under the Act. Others, where the word sati is used to define pious women, were not affected.

Although the court verdict was widely welcomed, the state Government was not so jubilant. Caught between informed public opinion on one hand and rising fundamentalism on the other, the Government has chosen to drag its feet. The state Devasthan Department—which looks after all the temples—is still trying to understand the implications of the judgement. And the Home Department is yet to instruct the districts to implement the new law. Said Chief Minister Harideo Joshi: "Our Law Department is studying the implications of the judgement and it will take some time." Said Aruna Asaf Ali: "Now that the contradictions in the Act have been removed, the Government must take firm steps."

With the new law coming into effect, the fate of the 150-odd sati temples in the state hangs by a slender thread. Despite having a large following, most sati temples are run by local residents. Only two, the Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu and the Narayani Temple in Alwar, are run by trusts. And the Jhunjhunu temple—run by the Marwari community—has enjoyed considerable official patronage till now. According to last year's accounts, it has assets worth Rs 77.6 lakh and an annual income of Rs 18.6 lakh. Sprawling across 30 acres, the temple complex has more than 350 rooms for visitors and a Kendriya Vidyalaya. The temple trust, headquartered in Calcutta, has assets worth crores. It finances a government-aided senior secondary school, a primary school, a library, a homoeopathic dispensary and a guest-house. And the trust has more than Rs 40 lakh in fixed deposits.

The temple's wealth seems to in-

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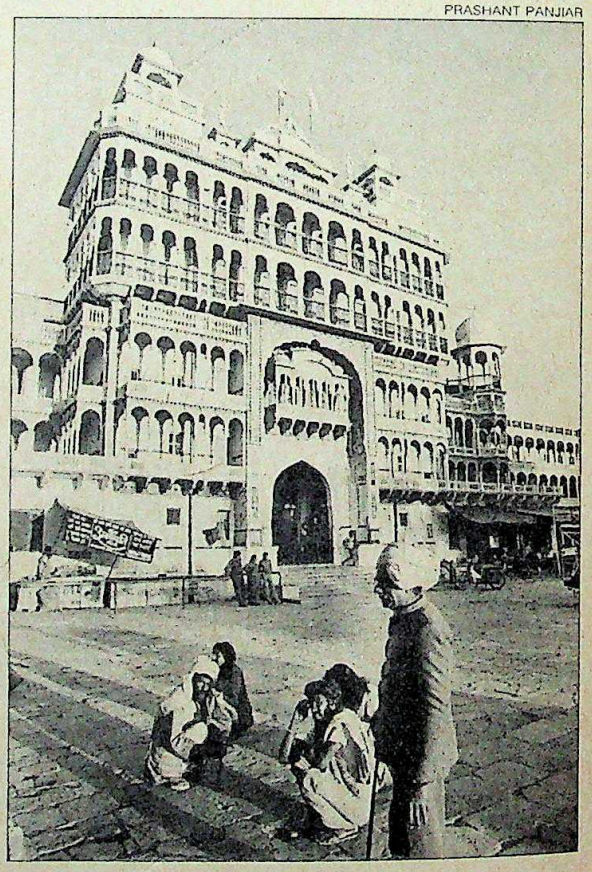

Rani Sati Temple at Jhunjhunu

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and work
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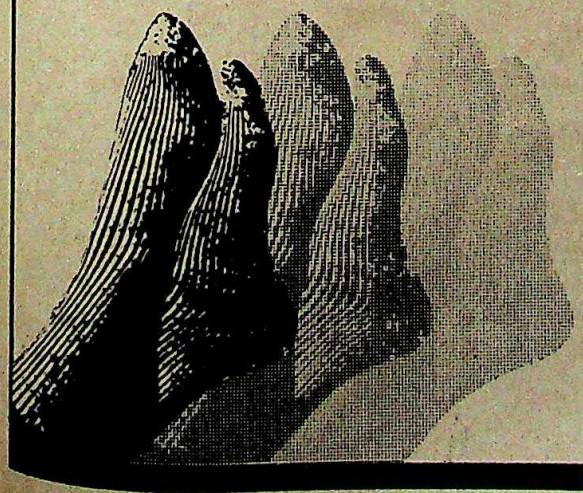

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crease each year. For instance, in the past one year, the assets have shown a growth of Rs 13.7 lakh while the income has increased by Rs 3.6 lakh. Moreover, many of Jhunjhunu's 1.5 lakh people are involved in activities centred around the temple. The main sati fair, held in August, draws two lakh to four lakh people and generates considerable income for the town. The entire administrative machinery makes preparations for the fair, and a holiday is declared in local schools and government departments.

Similarly, the Narayani Temple in Alwar also hosts a huge sati mela in the month of April. Though not as big or prosperous as the Jhunjhunu temple, it has about 48-odd rooms, used to house the regular flow of visitors. Surprisingly, the head priest, Galluram, is blissfully ignorant of the court judgement and its possible fall-out on his temple: "They have made some mistake in Deorala. Everything is running fine here."

But the management of Jhunjhunu temple is clearly on the defensive. The trust's President Sawal Ram Jhunjhunwala maintains that they are not promoting sati but worshipping their family deity in the form of Goddess Durga. "There have been a number of widow remarriages in our family. We are educated people and do not believe in burning our women," he said.

However, the literature published by the Rani Satiji Mandir Trust belies all such claims. A thick pamphlet, published last year, highlighted the story of Narayani Devi who became sati 700 years ago. It also mentions 13 other satis, for whom separate temples have been built within the Jhunjhunu complex. The trust also helps interested individuals erect temples in the name of sati. Elaborate details about this are given in the literature. Likewise, a visit to the Alwar temple clearly shows that widow burning is being projected as a sublime act. The walls are painted with various imaginary episodes in the life of Karneti, the sati. And one of them shows her sitting on the funeral pyre with her husband Gangesh's head in her lap.

Meanwhile, the Dharam Raksha Samiti (DRS)—spearheading the pro-sati stir—has received a shot in the arm following the release of 17 of its leaders. Ironically, the same judgement that struck down Section 19, also dropped criminal proceedings against leaders of the DRS. Soon after their release, they converged in Delhi last fortnight to chalk out their future plan of action. Aside from challenging the law in the Supreme Court, the DRS also plans to oppose the anti-sati march to Deorala, being led by Swami Agnivesh. In a clever move, Roop Kanwar's brother, Gopal Singh Rathor, has been appointed vice-president of the youth wing. Rathor said that their campaign will take the form of statewide road-blocks and bandhs.

The DRS may get support from an unexpected quarter—the state Government which is in no mood to invite the wrath of the powerful pro-sati lobby. Speculation is rife about the Government challenging the verdict in the Supreme Court or introducing another ordinance. Said Joshi: "We can go to the Supreme Court if the need arises." And they might succeed in their plans as the Opposition is divided on the issue. The BJP for one is not likely to protest too strongly. One of its leaders pointed out that as the state Government had given an assurance that existing temples would remain unaffected, it was not likely to implement the new law too firmly.

Even so, the state Government will have to tread carefully, as the Centre is keeping a close watch on its handling of the tricky situation. But even the Centre does not have an entirely clean slate on the issue, as a number of prominent leaders have openly patronised the Jhunjhunu temple. In December 1985, for instance, the Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar and the Minister of State for External Affairs K. Natwar Singh went to the temple and left their signatures in the visitors' register. While Jakhar found it an occasion for "merging the soul with the almighty", Natwar Singh termed it a "great occasion to come to the sacred temple and get the blessings of the deities". And industrialist K.K. Birla, also a Congress(I) MP, was the chief guest in a religious function organised by the Jhunjhunu temple trust in Delhi last year. Such are the contradictions of today's politics. But the ultimate irony lies in the fact that former Rajasthan governor, Vasantrao Patil, who put his seal on the anti-sati ordinance, had been the chief guest at last year's sati mela in Jhunjhunu.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI in Jaipur and Jhunjhunu

"We demand that the Government take firm steps."

ARUNA ASAF ALI,
patron, National Federation of Women

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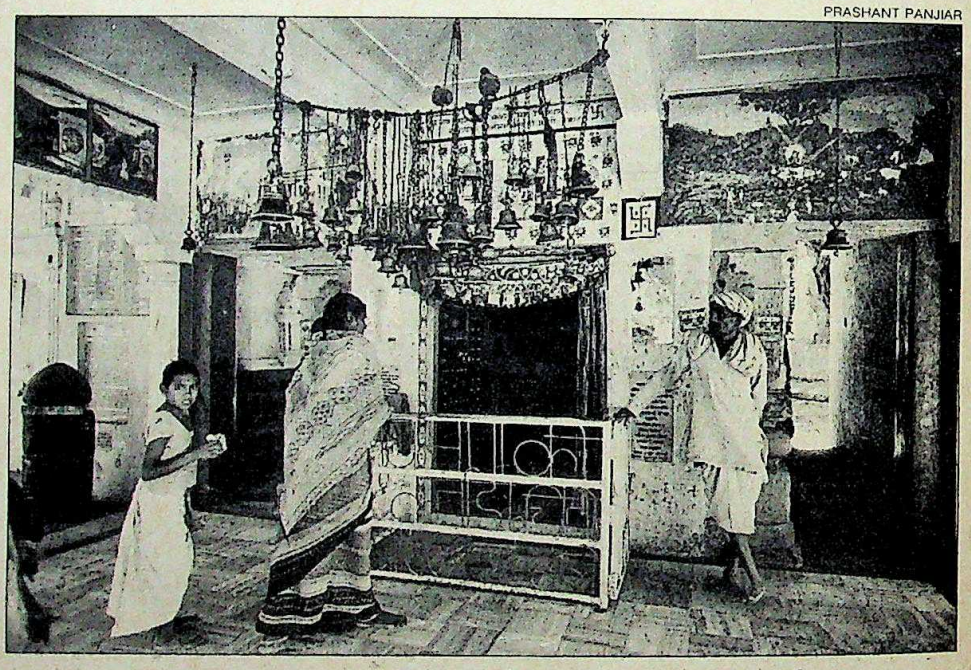

Narayani Sati Temple in Alwar

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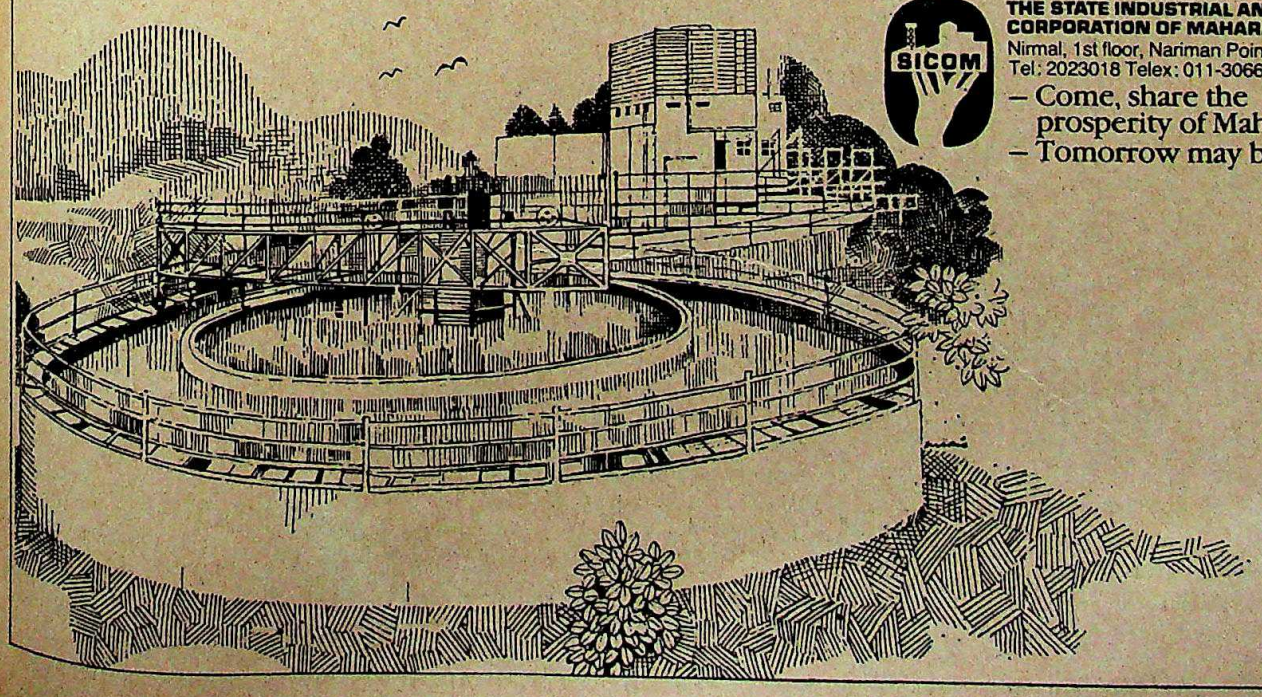

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Poll Punch

Telugu Desam loses ground

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's political fortunes continue to fluctuate. With the Telugu Desam losing to the Congress(I) in the election for the chairman of the Guntur Zilla Parishad last fortnight, a campaign mounted on the scale of a general election ended in a whimper. The loss was all the more demoralising as the local bodies election had been projected as a matter of great prestige.

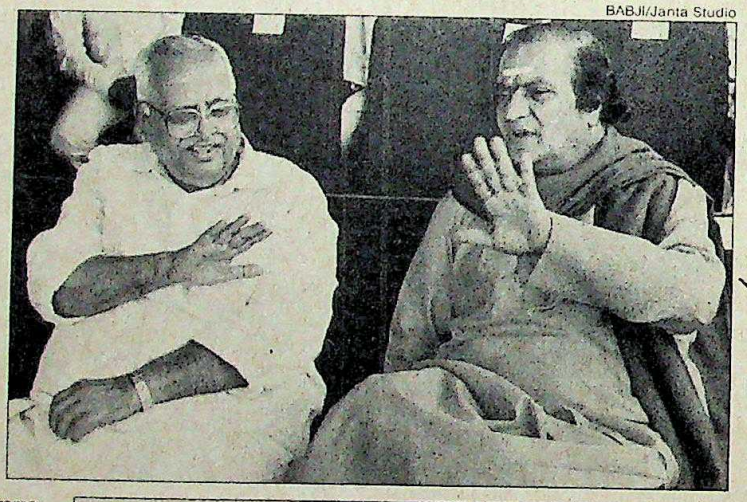
The campaigning had been fierce. Anxious to prove that the growing dissension and corruption charges levelled against the chief minister and his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu had not affected the party, Rama Rao despatched 12 ministers to woo the voters. He followed this with a three-day barnstorming of the district in his Chaitanya Ratham. Not to be outdone, the Congress(I) sent four Union ministers.

But as it happened, the Congress(I) retained the seat it had won in the March 1986 election. Dr Rayapati Srinivas defeated the Telugu Desam's Sakkurthi Ramaiah by a margin of 23,774 votes. The ruling party's only consolation was that it had polled 1.8 per cent more votes on December 3 as compared to the previous election.

For the Telugu Desam it was an unexpected set-back. The party picked Ramaiah for his resourcefulness and willingness to spend on elections, even though he had only recently switched loyalties from the Congress(I). The decision was ironic as Rama Rao has been consistently campaigning against "the use of money power in elections". The Congress(I) also left little to chance. Srinivas is the brother of Rayapati Sambasiva Rao, a Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member and tobacco exporter.

The election was not the only disappointment for the chief minister. Attempting to restore both his and the Telugu Desam's tarnished image, Rama Rao ordered a three-man commission to probe complaints of corruption and abuse of authority by those in high positions since 1956 referred to it by the state. This is to include the charges against his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu and former revenue minister N. Srinivasulu Reddi who was dismissed last month. The announcement was followed up the next day with a clarification that private complaints would also be investigated by the commission.

Vengala Rao with the chief minister (right): keen rivalry



BABJI/Janta Studio

The Telugu Desam suffered a demoralising loss in the local poll despite its campaign mounted on a general election scale.

And typical of Rama Rao's dramatic style of functioning, he proclaimed on the third day that "though some of my ministers are weeping" the probe will also include charges against the chief minister. Clearly, it was intended to woo the electorate but the Congress(I) legislator and lawyer D.K. Samarasimha Reddy immediately took the issue to the high court. A division bench stayed the inquiry as Reddy challenged the constitutional validity of the commission which he said was not looking into any definite matter of public importance.

Rama Rao had decided on an omnibus inquiry to cover up the delay in appointing a commission to look into the charges against his son-in-law announced on the floor of the Legislative Assembly by Reddi in August. The former revenue minister claimed that Naidu had taken Rs 6 lakh for hastening the release of the Rs 88-lakh compensation made by the Government to villagers in Adilabad district whose land had been acquired for the Sriramsagar project. In a blistering editorial, *The Times of India* commented that this omnibus inquiry "was another instance of politicians resorting to judicial probe in order to take care of issues and problems essentially political". The state BJP General Secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu added: "There is no other way Rama Rao can enter his name in the *Guinness Book of World Records*."

For obvious electoral considerations, the chief minister had also delayed till after polling the suspension from the party of P. Penchalaiah, a Harijan MP, for joining hands with Reddi.

And in a flurry of activity before the election, the Housing Minister G. Rajesham Goud announced that the Government had cleared a Rs 10.25-crore scheme for building 336 houses for MLAs and MPs in Hyderabad. Rama Rao also told party legislators that they were free to meet him at his official residence in the state capital, while Naidu would spend three to four hours every morning in the party's city office for legislators' convenience. Said one Telugu Desam MLA: "Now we get respect when we go to the chief minister's house. We are asked to sit and even offered tea."

But none of this made much difference to the Telugu Desam's electoral fortunes. On the other hand, buoyed by their victory and a new-found unity amongst the different factions, the Congress(I) has decided to continue its assault on the state Government. The party will conduct its own investigations into electoral irregularities, frame fresh charges, and present it to the Centre. Exultant after his party's victory, Vengala Rao said: "It is a historic win. It signals the downfall of the Rama Rao Ministry and end of misrule in the state." With the chief minister already under siege, the Guntur defeat will obviously spur his political opponents into accelerating their assault.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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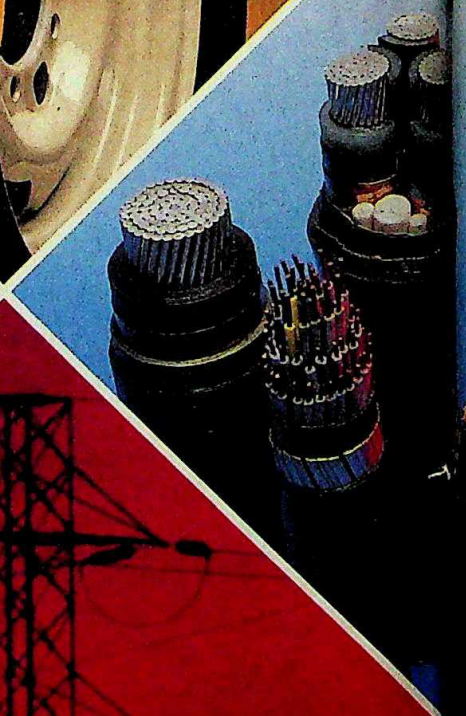

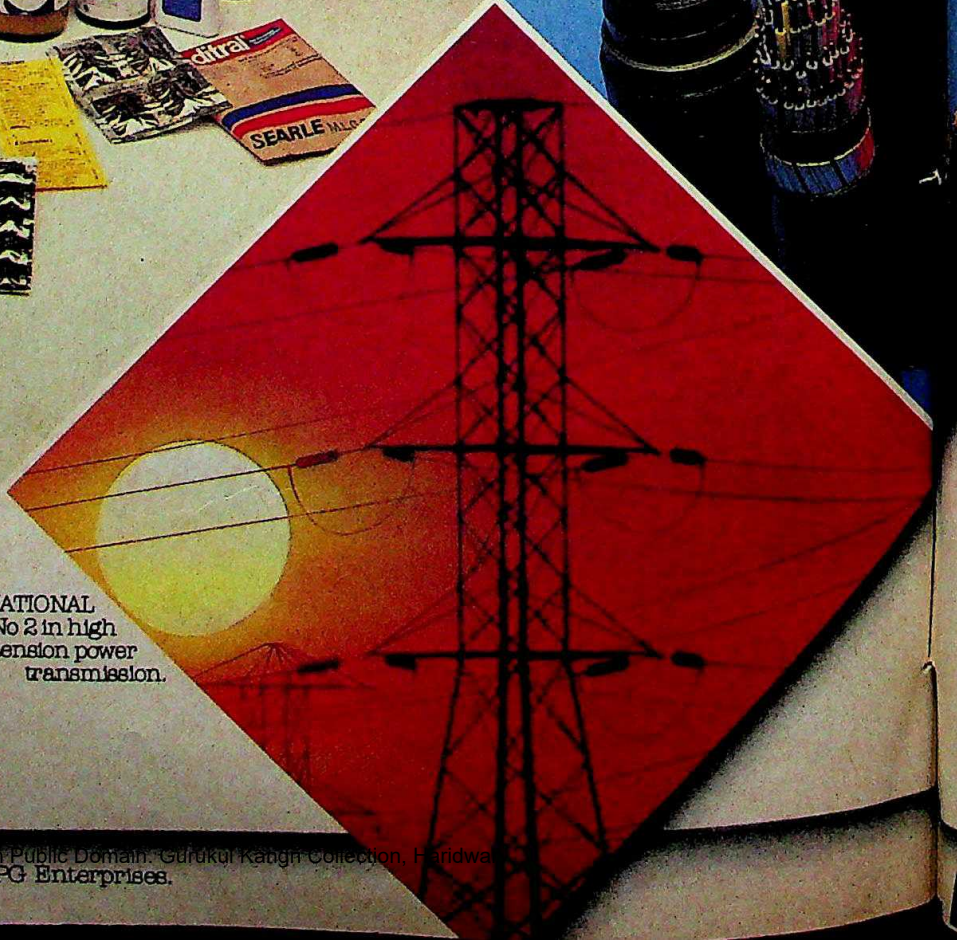

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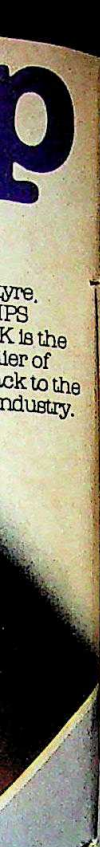

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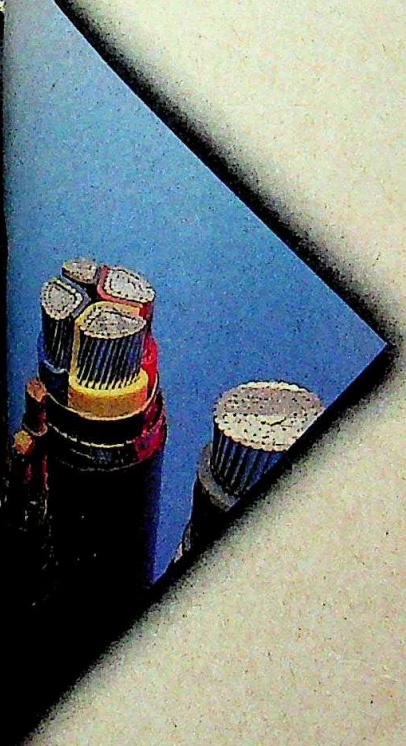

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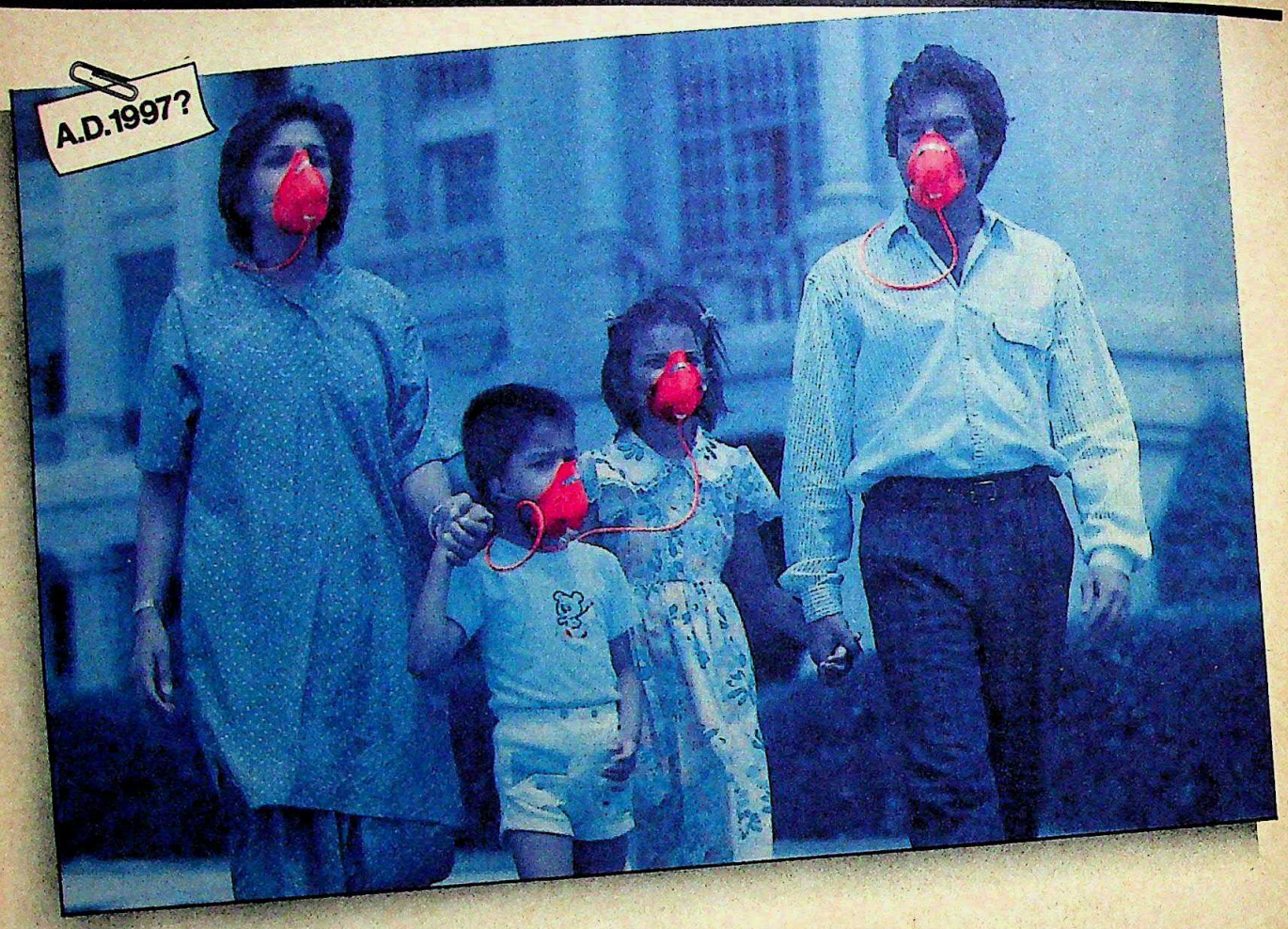

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Calcutta: Dec. 18—23, '87

Petrol Vehicles:
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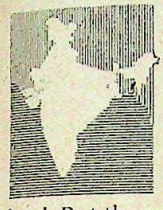
TRIPURA

Bitter Battle

Electioneering turns violent



WITH assembly elections due in Tripura late next month, the Congress(I) has pulled out all the stops in trying to repeat its signal electoral success in Nagaland. But the ruling CPI(M) is out in the streets as well, using the power of the word, be it said, printed or even drawn.

Cartoonists with leftist sympathies have been virtually painting the capital town of Agartala red—ridiculing Rajiv for his disastrous accords, the Bofors scandal and loan mela politics.

But the electioneering has also been bloody. In the last three months, 25 political murders have rocked the north-eastern state (pop: 23.61 lakh)—15 Congress(I) and 10 CPI(M) activists have been killed. Political clashes between the two parties resulted in 860 injury, 14 assault and 50 arson cases. And as if this were not enough, the outlawed Tribal Nationalist Volunteers (TNV) murdered 36 Bengalis, heightening tension.

The election promises to be a straight contest between the CPI(M) and the Congress(I), though Amra Bengali, an Ananda Marg front which is rabble-rousing among the Bengalis, is contesting 58 of the 60 seats. The Congress (I) is contesting 46 seats and the remaining 14 have been given to the Tripura Upjati Juba Samiti (TUJS), its electoral ally.

The Left Front criticised alliance because the youth wing of TUJS has been hobnobbing with the TNV. But Rajiv defended it as an effort to bring tribals into the mainstream.

The Left Front manifesto is mainly a charter of demands to the Centre. It asks for more money and power, "right to work" as a fundamental right, Central subsidy for all essential commodities, right of franchise at 18 years, removal of "black laws" like the NSA, more air services and railway lines. It has promised 100 days of work annually to landless labourers, housing for unorganised labour, abolition of contract labour and increase in minimum wages.

The Congress(I)'s main election plank is the deteriorating law and order situation, despite the presence of adequate security forces. (There are about 1,400 security personnel to tackle 250 TNV extremists). But Chief Minister Nripen Chakraborty says thousands of security forces were withdrawn for duties on the country's borders.

Rajiv at election gathering (left); Chakraborty (top); and CPI(M)'s cartoons

But conversations in Tripura invariably veer around to how the Congress(I) will use the weapon that brought victory in Nagaland. The CPI(M) estimates that its rival will spend Rs 15 crore on the election. State Congress(I) President Sudhir Ranjan Mazumdar refuses to comment. But the Congress(I)'s intentions are clear: use of money and Rajiv power.

During last fortnight's visit, Rajiv announced the poll gifts: a gas-based fertiliser plant, subsidised air travel from Agartala to Calcutta, a fisheries training college, an industrial growth centre for each of the three districts, a hike in the state's seventh plan allocation from Rs 440 crore to Rs 600 crore and a rail line up to Agartala. The nearest railhead is at Dharmanagar, 92 km away.

The CPI(M) pooh-poohs this, pointing out that the Centre took eight years to build a railway line of 25 km—at that rate, it would reach Agartala in another 30 years. Chakraborty also says that all Rajiv's grants had been demanded by the CPI(M) for many years.

The state Congress(I) also asked the Centre to organise a loan mela to distribute loans of Rs 5,000 each to three lakh beneficiaries. But on October 23, when forms for the loans were to be distributed, five people were killed and over 300 injured in clashes between the Congress(I) and the CPI(M), which is determined to block the mela.

Decrying this, Rajiv said: "In Tripura the CPI(M) has a vested interest in poverty while the Congress(I) has a vested interest in progress." But maintains Chakraborty: "We will let Rajiv give as much money as he wants only after the elections."

But more than anything else, the Congress(I) is handicapped by infighting. Two months ago, Mazumdar was assaulted by party workers at a press conference. Last fortnight, he asked for police protection, fearing attacks by those who were refused party tickets.

The Congress(I)'s problem is that it has no leader to project as a future chief minister. It is, therefore, banking heavily on Rajiv. He is scheduled to make at least two more trips to the state. Rajiv did draw crowds during last fortnight's visit, but the key question is whether they will be translated into votes.

—RAMESH MENON in Agartala

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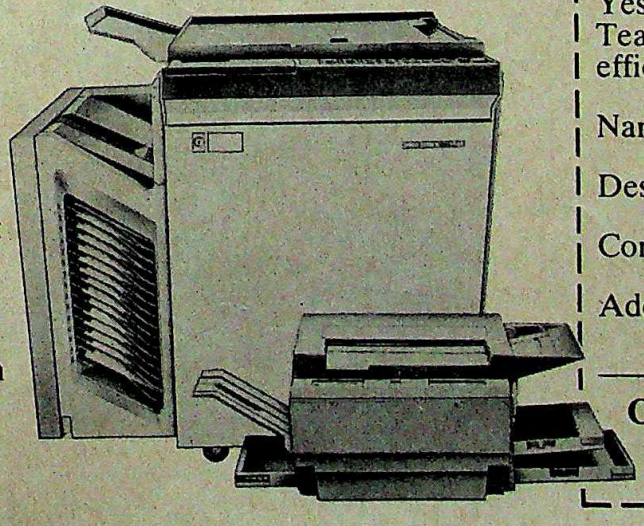

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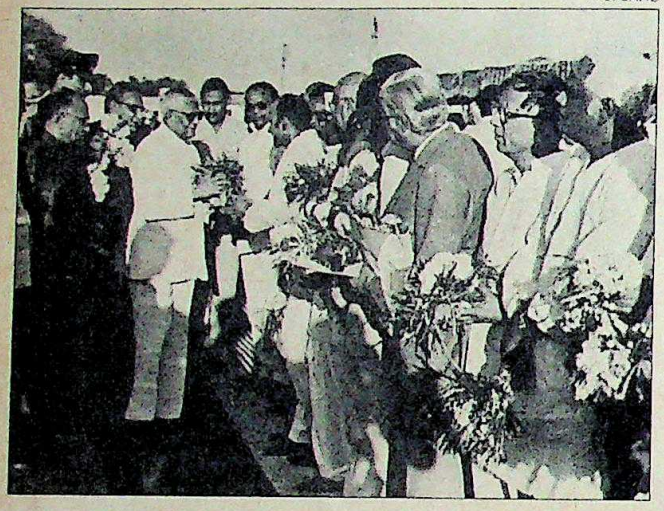
Lavish Displays

THE recent Madhya Pradesh visit of President R. Venkataraman caused some anxious moments in the Public Works Department, and was a drain on the state exchequer. Bhopal's Raj Bhavan—where he stayed—was given a total face-lift. All the roads on the VVIP's

R.C. SAHU



Venkataraman being received in Bhopal: warm welcome

route were repaired, and government buildings whitewashed. And on the day of his visit, the entire town was adorned with 52 welcome arches. In fact, the state Government issued directives to all corporations and department heads to send Rs 5,000 each to the Bhopal Municipal Corporation for erecting the arches, on which Rs 2.5 lakh was spent.

A similar performance was repeated a fortnight later, on November 27, when Vice-President Shankar Dayal Sharma visited Bhopal—his home town—for the first time since assuming office. Bhopal was decked up again and Sharma was honoured with as many as 61 welcome arches. Despite the drought, the state Government seems to be in no mood to take any 'austerity measures'. On the contrary—along with lavish preparations for VIP visits—huge sums are also being spent on a series of cultural festivals.

Catching a Gangster

ABDUL Latif Shaikh—the most-feared don of Ahmedabad's underworld—has been behind bars for the past few months. But last fortnight—after Latif decided to close his bootlegging business—the city's police finally relaxed. After raiding Latif's hide-outs over the last four months, liquor worth over Rs 20 lakh was seized. It was a major victory for the police, which had vowed to catch Latif.

In fact, during the city's communal riots, Latif had assumed the role of sole defender of Ahmedabad's Muslims. And early this year, he won the election to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation from five constituencies by capitalising on the deep Hindu-Muslim divide. This partly legitimised his liquor trade and at one stage, as the biggest wholesale dealer of Indian-made foreign liquor in Gujarat, he netted a daily profit of Rs 50,000. But after he was charged with killing a sub-inspector, the police launched 'Operation Latif', under Police Commissioner S.N. Sinha, and succeeded in jailing the don. Now, with 10 cases against him, including one for prosecution under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, the path to freedom will be a long one for Latif.

Abdul Latif

Birth-date Bungle

HAS the Andhra Pradesh High Court Chief Justice Kattali Bhaskaran lied about his age to continue in office? Hyderabad businessman Anand Kumar, 50, thinks he has, and has filed a petition in the high court questioning Bhaskaran's right to continue in office after September 4, 1985. In fact, Bhaskaran has three dates of birth—September 5, 1923 in the birth registry, and February 10, 1925 and February 2, 1926 in school records at Tellicherry. Referring to the first, Kumar argues that Bhaskaran should have retired on turning 62 in 1985. But Justice Quadri of the high court dismissed the petition under Article 217(3), stating that questions on a judge's age will be decided only by the President. Kumar then filed a writ appeal against this decision before a division bench. But the concerned judges have said they will give a verdict after hearing whether the matter has been referred to the President. Till that happens, Justice Bhaskaran's age will remain a mystery.

Snaps India

K. Bhaskaran

Interesting Interlude

RUSSIANS seem to have a sense of humour after all. And with their amusing tactics, all three shows—part of the Festival of USSR—in Lucknow were sell-outs. On November 27, after the inauguration, an attractive Russian girl stepped forward to plant what appeared to be a kiss on Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh's cheek. Whether this

PRADEEP SHAH

Singh (right) opening the Russian show: red-faced

incident caught the politician—known for his discomfort in female company—unawares, it certainly came as a humorous diversion. As most of the audience missed the interlude, speculation about Singh's reaction was rife. An official known to be close to him defended: "She never kissed him. She only whispered her good wishes to him." But another senior official said: "Why are you issuing what sounds like an official denial? The kiss might well have fulfilled the dream of a lifetime."

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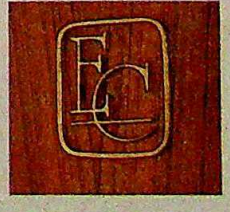

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COMPUTERS A QUIET

One day I received a computerised letter beginning with:

Dear Dr Mr

I had lost my identity but I was still getting my mail.

Is this my future?

Is it yours?

—Jacques Vallee, *The Network Revolution*

AMIDST stacks of files tied with red tape, the computer looks alien in his office. Yet in the past six months, it has become indispensable to Union Steel Secretary Rajinder Khosla. He pushes a button. Instantly, domestic steel production figures for the past two years flash onto the screen. Output is up. Another tap reveals that his joint secretaries and deputies have 20 files pending with them. Khosla takes a print-out and writes a memo putting them on the mat. "I used to be drowned with paper work," says the steel secretary. "But now the computer has reduced my dependence on my staff and I can take decisions quickly. Besides, it's good fun too."

However for S.S. Bhattacharya, a Guwahati-based engineer in the public sector CMC, it wasn't as much fun. He was asked to install a computer in a school in Arunachal Pradesh's Tezu for a central government programme. He caught a train to Tinsukia, 600 km away, crossed six rivers by ferry, bounced his way over two dry river beds and reached Tezu. There he discovered that Tezu had electricity only at night. He installed the computer anyway, wondering how the school would be able to use it. On the way back, his car got stuck in a ditch.

Is the country headed towards the future that Khosla symbolises? Or will computers in India end up in the ditch, as Bhattacharya did?

Maybe it's too early to ask such questions—or too late. Ready or not, the computer revolution has already overtaken the country. And even though the numbers may be comparatively insignifi-

(Clockwise from right) Computer graphics; students at a computer class; and the new railway booking office: widespread growth

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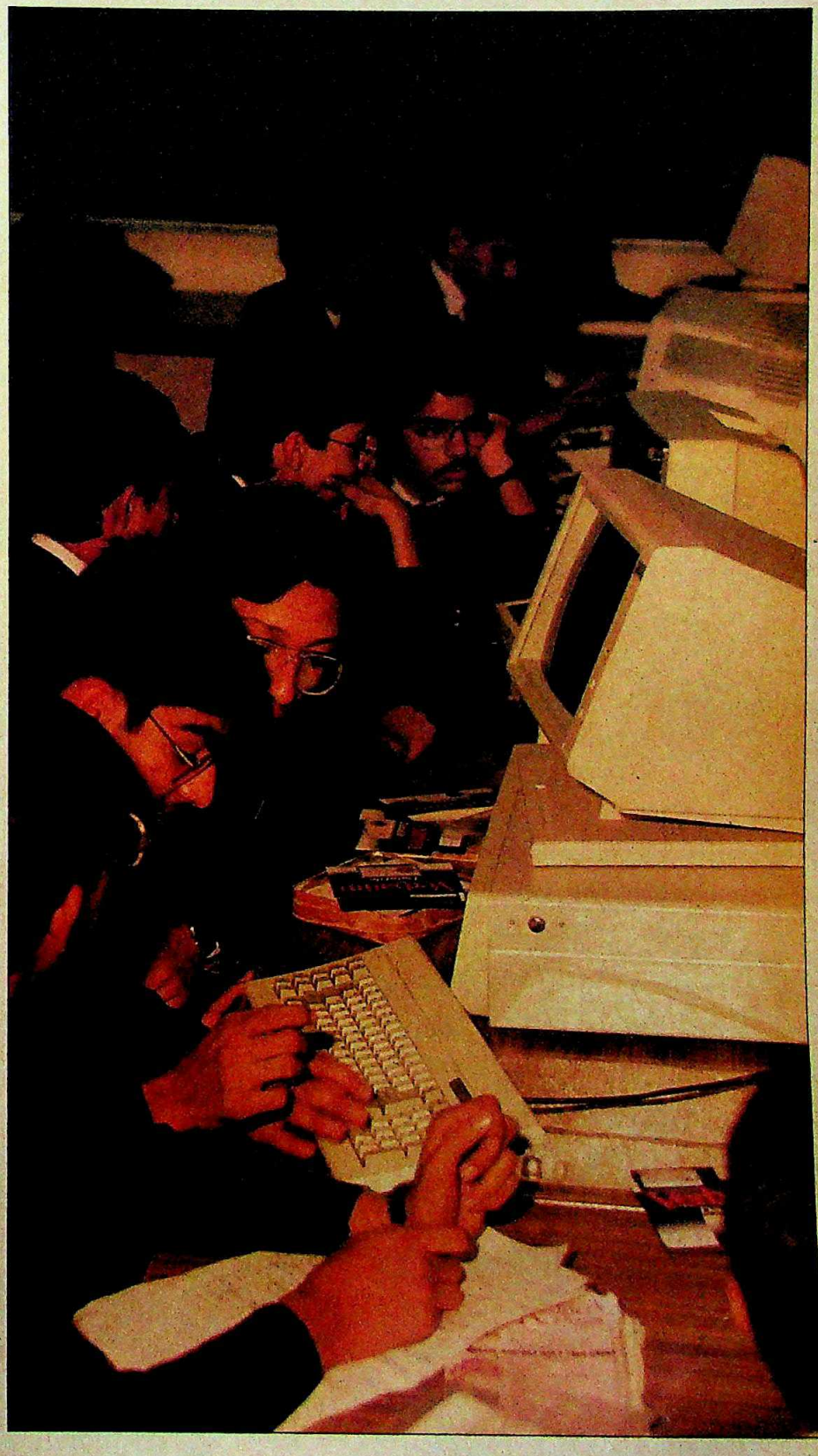
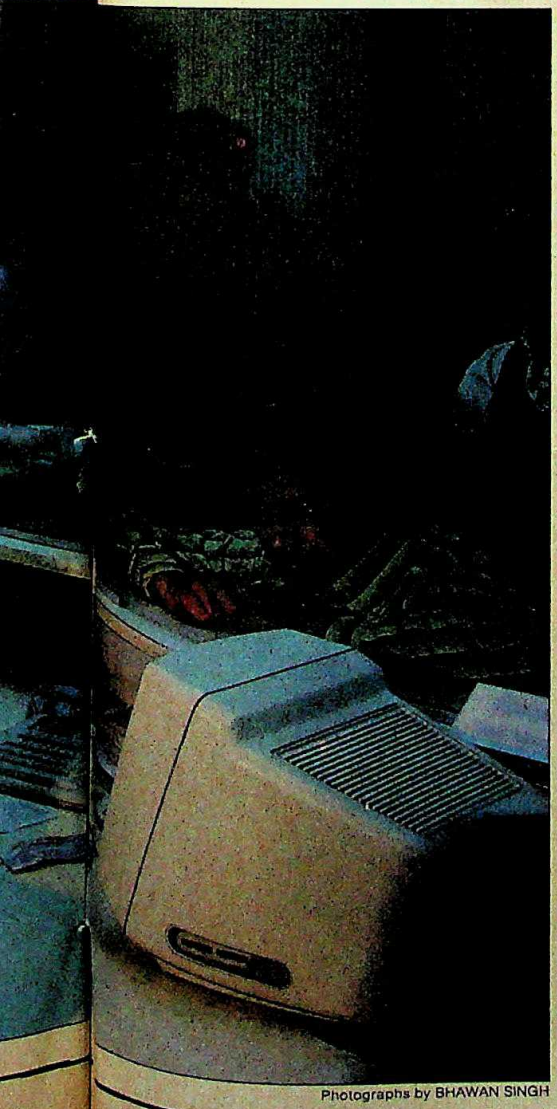
REVOLUTION





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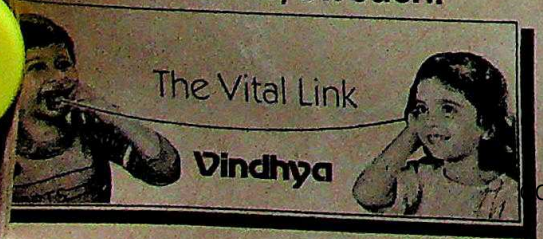
ariably the monsoons upset the ecommunication network in India. For, nwater seepage has always proved a nace to telephone cables that are laid derground. Now, Vindhya jelly filled ephone cables are here to change the ture.

The jelly filled cables by Vindhya can not only resist the water seepage but also act as moisture barrier. Often the telephone cables are laid alongside the power cables. Here again, Vindhya telephone cables perform an important task of preventing electrical interference from outside.

And therefore, Vindhya jelly filled telephone cables is an obvious choice of the telecommunication industry.

anufactured in collaboration with lcsson Cables AB, Sweden.



Vindhya

JELLY FILLED TELEPHONE CABLES

VINDHYA TELELINKS LIMITED
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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

For R.P. Khosla, Union steel secretary, computers have reduced his dependence on his staff. He can now even monitor how rapidly officers dispose off their files.

cant (there are one lakh computers in all), it forms the spearhead of an invisible army that is changing the Indian way of life—and work.

In the last two years alone, nearly 75,000 of those one lakh computers have invaded offices and factories, homes and classrooms, all over the country. The follow-the-leader syndrome has ensured its appearance in several government offices, companies and in utility services, where it has made the most visible impact. And despite the country's heat and dust, power-cuts and erratic phones, excess labour and obstructive bureaucracy—things that would send any computer on the blink—the little genie's spread has been breathtaking.

Bombay diamond merchant N.D. Mehta picked up a computer last May because it was priced at Rs 25,000, "cheaper than a car", as he puts it. Although he still doesn't know how to use his new tool, he predicts: "It will soon be as indispensable as my pocket calculator." Advertising executive Raji Anand has two of them: one to manage his office and the other to test his chess skills at home. In Madras, cameraman Peter Anthony bought one to simulate special effects on his video, and veteran music producer Ilayaraja uses one to compose music. In New Delhi, apiarist Satwant Singh manages his 250 bee colonies with it. And 14-year-old Anurag Bajaj got his papa to buy one so that he could play computer cricket in his drawing-room.

Indeed, the computer bug has bit far and wide. Amidst the loud clatter of ancient typewriters and the tangle of red tape, in as many as 59 Central government departments in the capital, computers are now keeping track of files, maintaining vital statistics and reviewing the achievement of targets. They are also whirring softly in many large private and public sector industries, helping to control inventories and chalk out sales strategies. At the mere push of a button, several state police forces can pull out a list of the known criminals and their modus operandi, making crime detection far more organised.

IT is chipping into people's daily lives too. The stuffy, overcrowded air and rail reservation offices in most cities are fast being replaced by air-conditioned ones that have neat rows of booking clerks behind terminals punching out tickets rapidly. In most metropolises, bills for water, electricity and the telephone, usually illegibly written and months late, now come to homes neatly typed out on computer print-outs.

In 3,500 bank branches across the country, dog-eared ledgers are being replaced by beeping machines that have speeded up transactions. Over one lakh schoolchildren are being taught about the wonders of the chip. And in a truly Indian phenomenon, computers are being used to plot kundlis (horoscopes), find marriage partners, maintain temple accounts and even by the Congress(I) to monitor its MPs' performance.

"I for one think that the computer revolution will come faster into this country than in the West," says Ashok Soota, the suave president of Wipro Information Technology, the Bangalore-based computer company. Soota points out that India is just right to absorb the small computer boom sweeping the rest of the world. Says he: "The computer industry has grown at a rate of 70 per cent in the past two years. And, as in the West, there is a large shift towards small computers."

The West is already won: with over 30 million of its kind buzzing away, the computer is proving to be as revolutionary as the wheel. It is now put to such myriad uses as sending electronic mail, forecasting weather, scrutinising tax returns, guiding spacecraft and missiles, designing buildings, drawing money from automatic teller machines, regulating production in factories—in short, it has whirred its way into every aspect of daily life, resulting in an incredible saving of time and increasing efficiency.

In India, much of the chip's spread has come after the Government liberalised its import policy in 1984, allowing foreign tie-ups and cutting the duty on vital components. The result: computer prices crashed and sales trebled. Small computers that were selling for as much as Rs 1.2 lakh went down to less than Rs 40,000 and then dropped to Rs 25,000—opening out the market for a whole new segment of buyers.

And as the computer blinks its way into many more lives it begins to revolutionise their life-styles as well. On Bombay's teeming Dalal Street stockbroker Arun Sheth has a client on the line asking for advice on investments. Sheth just presses a few commands on his personal computer and, presto, he has the low-down not only on the company's growth but also on labour strikes and production glitches. In fact,

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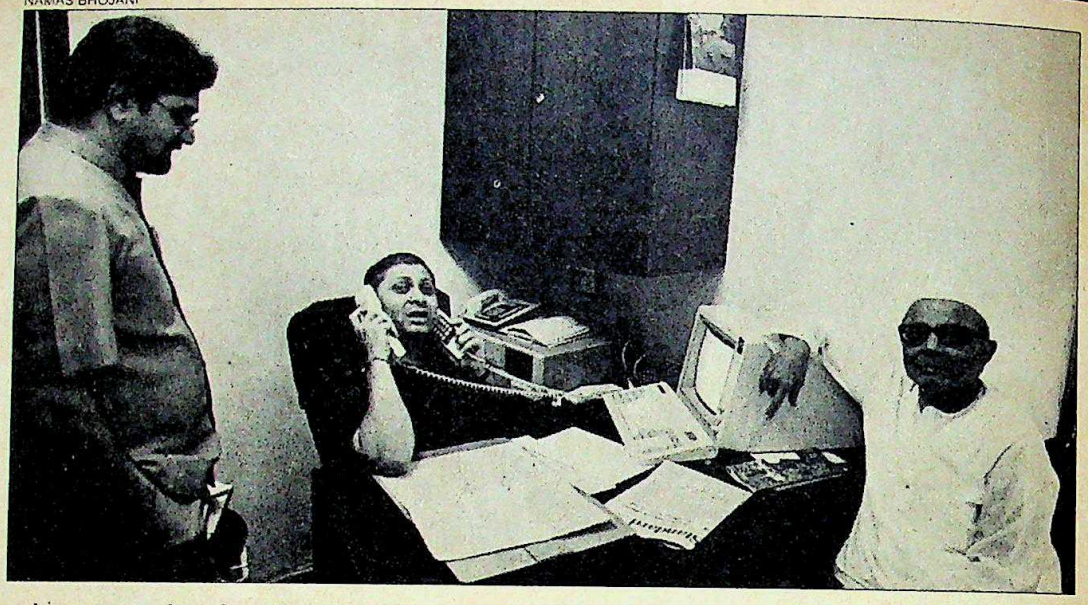
NAMAS BHOJANI



Computers have taken over stock-broker Arun Sheth's firm. They handle share transfers, customer payments and 1,200 client queries. Result: turnover has trebled.

the computer has already taken over Sheth's business: right from share transfers, cheque print-outs to over 1,200 client queries. Says his brother Dhiren: "Before, our staff worked till late in the night. Now they are off by 7.30 p.m. and Sundays are holidays." What is more, quick disposal of client demands has trebled their turnover.

In Madras, tyre dealer Loon Chand Chordia, 38, can be found staring at a tiny black screen flashing information that keeps him glued to it for hours. Looking up for a moment, Chordia says: "My computer helps me in my inventory control, sales data and invoicing." High-sounding words, but how does the chip help him? Chordia takes a print-out of his tyre sales. "Dunlop tyres accounts for 23.2 per cent of my business. If it crosses 25 per cent, other manufacturers would blacklist me. So it tells me to push others' products." With the computer's help, he trimmed his inventory from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 45 lakh—a Rs 5-lakh saving. The cost of his computer: Rs 80,000.

As the chip's popularity spread, companies began to find diverse uses for it. Madura Coats, the Bangalore-based yarn manufacturer, now uses it to create unique colours for fabrics. Their computer projects on its monitor over a 100 different combinations of the basic colours and O.P. Yadav, group computing manager, says: "We are getting colour combinations that our dyemaster never thought of."

Motor Industries Company (MICO), the motor-parts manufacturer, replaced its 20-year clock-punching system, erratically logging attendance of its 4,800 hourly rated workers, with a computer. It now tells them which employee is coming late, how long he took over lunch, how many days he was absent. At the end of the month it works out their salary, after cutting the hours or days lost and sends them the cheques. Errors so far: 0.001.

It isn't just business houses which are discovering the wonders of the chip. In Bombay, architect Ajit Bhuta, 37, is up at 4 a.m. to design his dream buildings on the bedside computer that he had picked up last year. Its special graphics help him to view his handiwork three-dimensionally and even work out individual room plans. As yet his buildings remain fantasies. But he has been able to sell his programmes to other architects.

NEW Delhi apiarist Satwant Singh gets his computer to tell him which queen bee is the most productive, when to regulate feedings, take preventive measures against pests and the optimum period to extract the honey. Honey production has gone up—by as much as six times. In Madras, sexologist Narayana Reddy, even while he is listening to his patients' problems, is busy tapping their details into his computer. Says he: "Before, my cupboards were bursting at the seams with case histories. Now my room is clean and I can retrieve patients' data without much search."

Among the young as well, the computer's following is becoming legion. In most schools, computer classes have become a status symbol. The more affluent schools charge as much as Rs 400 a year for such classes. Madras' Padma Seshadri School now starts its students on computers from class III. The children first play computer games before graduating to learning computer languages and finally evolve their own programmes.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

And when the computer moves into the home it becomes, as Anurag Bajaj says, "my best friend". Initially Anurag, a 10th standard student, headed to the computer even before he brushed his teeth. He now claims to hold the world record for pole vaulting: his computer has a special Olympics programme that simulates sports and tests his judgement. Parthasarathy Madhusudhan, 14, computerises horoscopes on his home computer. Now leading astrologers flock to him to work out the *nakshetras* (stars) of their clients.

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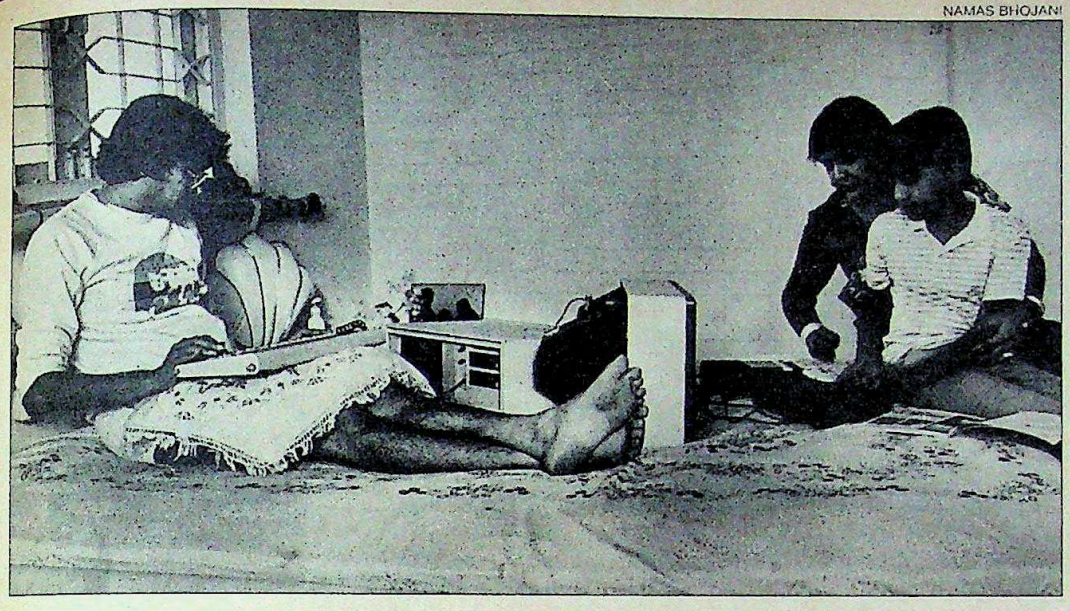
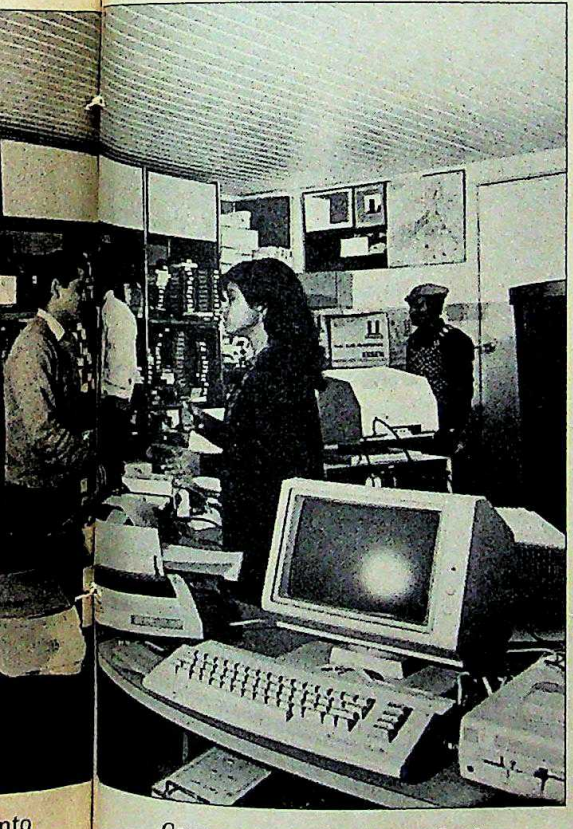

NAMAS BHOJANI

Architect Ajit Bhuta designs his dream buildings on his home computer. Its special graphic effects help him view his handiwork three-dimensionally and work out individual room plans.


Computer retail outlet: sales boom

Meanwhile, the public is getting a feel of the computer's worth in a different way. In railway booking offices in the four metropolitan cities, for instance, passengers can barely believe it when they go to book a ticket. In the new computerised booking offices, waiting time is down from the usual four-hour ordeal to less than half an hour. And even railway employees welcome the change. Says Surinder Nath, chief of the Northern Railways computers division: "Before, clerks spent several hours reconciling sales at the end of the day. Now the computer does the work and they are off within five minutes."

But before the reservation system got on-line the railways had to spend two years evolving a system that took care of seven classes of travel, 30 fare concessions, 75 different types of coaches, and over 100 special reservation quotas—enough to make any programmer dizzy.

WITH typical Indian ingenuity, however, the touts crowding the booking offices still beat the system. During peak season, they just buy off seats in various trains using false names and ages and sell them to passengers for a premium ranging from Rs 50 to Rs 100.

Meanwhile, as the great chip rush surged ahead, computer companies sprouted overnight, touting cheaper and varied products, largely based on screwdriver technology. As in the West, expensive software programmes, without which all computers are junk, were imported by many companies and soon pirated and sold by all and sundry. While in 1984, 100-odd companies sold hardly 3,000 computers, there are now over 250 companies, small and big, with sales estimated to be more than 45,000 machines this year. With competition becoming cut-throat "things have begun to resemble a *sabzi mandi*", says Kanu Sheth, managing director, Minicomp.

Many of the companies now resort to ingenious tactics to win orders. Sheth himself remembers with pride how he clinched an order from a Pune industrialist. Apart from explaining to the industrialist about how computers could help his business, on his birthday, Sheth and his staff sneaked into the businessmen's office early that morning. As soon as he entered, a series of computers beeped "Happy birthday to you" and simultaneously printed out birthday greetings. Impressed, the industrialist ordered all his companies to buy Sheth's computers.

Manufacturers were also confronted with some typical Indian needs. In New Delhi, computer consultant Arun Mehta, after lecturing small businessman on computers, was asked only one question: "How can we store our number two accounts so they don't fall into the income tax officer's hands?" Simple, Mehta told them: keep two sets of floppy disks, one for the income tax officer and the other with a secret password locked up at home.

Meanwhile, a host of computer magazines have come out, bookshops now keep a separate counter for computer books and exclusive retail shops selling computers have sprouted. For many of the buyers, however, a computer has also brought headaches, as Navin Shah, a Bombay fan and lamp spare parts dealer, realises. Shah bought a computer this May for Rs 40,000, hoping to bring about a more accurate inventory of the 800-odd nuts, bolts and blades that he deals in. But six months later, he still hasn't found time to cue in the details of his business. Says he: "It takes so much time and none of the programmes is designed for small businessmen like me." While he struggles to get his computer going, his nephews play war games on it.

And as the computer culture spreads, its entry isn't as smooth as its whirring memory disks. It isn't, as many people believe, going to be the panacea for the country's sloth-like growth. Despite its prodigious ability to store, sort out and

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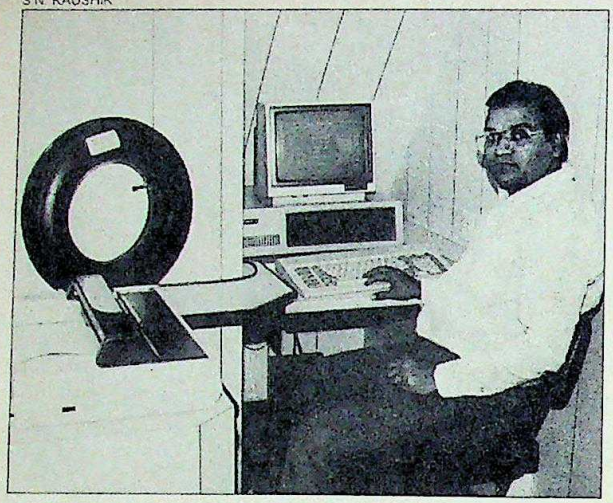
Tyre dealer Loon Chand Chordia's computer gives him sales data, controls inventory and does his invoicing. With its help, he trimmed his inventory and saved Rs 5 lakh.

S.N. KAUSHIK



retrieve information, the computer can do only what it is programmed to do.

The country's police force discovered that when they wanted to computerise criminal records. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), formed two years ago to coordinate the programme with the state police, found a common problem: none of the forces had an organised system to send crime details to the records section. Explains NCRB Director S.K. Sharma: "At the thana level, we found that the investigating officer had to make out three sets of reports: one for the charge-sheet, one for the courts and finally, if he found the time, another for the records section." The result was that the criminal records were woefully out of date and initial computerisation efforts were ineffective.

The NCRB has now got the states to agree on a common format which ensures that the investigating officer has to file only one report and a copy of that can be sent to the records section. And, in at least 10 states, there is now a more systematic crime records bureau. For instance, if a police officer knows that a thief has a finger missing he can get the computer to give him a list of criminals with similar deformities. Still, as Sharma says: "The system is as good as the information you feed into it. If you haven't fed in the details of a criminal, it won't give the information to you."

But in a country still largely dominated by spinning-wheels and bullock-carts, it is the pyschological block against the computer that will be the most difficult to overcome. The computer commands a certain discipline among users and brings in an impersonal culture as well. And in a nation that thrives on personal contact, culture conflicts are bound to arise.

For instance, when the Department of Electronics (DOE) began computerising Central government offices, it could sense fear among employees when the computers were installed. The establishment staff were unhappy about feeding the computer with key government statistics. Reason: till then, they had given that information to senior officers and if it was

MORADABAD

A New Culture

THE Moradabad Municipal Committee (MMC) faced a serious problem. Of the 44,000 residents assessed for house tax, bills could be sent to only 10 per cent of them. And over the years, revenue dues from house tax had mounted to a phenomenal Rs 1.3 crore.

So when MMC chief Kunwar Vijay Singh was approached by Compudigits, a newly-established computer firm, with a neat proposal to help him out, he jumped at the offer.

The firm spent just two months feeding in the data in their computers. And this September, for the first time, all the residents of Moradabad were surprised to receive a computerised house tax bill. It may not have got residents to cough up the money, but as Singh says: "Now we know how much the arrears are and also who the biggest tax defaulters are."

For Compudigits, this was another example of their growing success in introducing computers in the dusty and congested Uttar Pradesh town. When they first moved to their office in a winding unmotorable lane in Goyal Nagar, there was no electricity most of the day.

Undeterred, the three partners—Rahul Deshpande, Anil Burjwal and Mukul Shyam—all in their mid-20s, shifted their three personal computers to their flat, where the power situation was better. Initially, they had wanted to start computer classes for students, but only 23 out of the expected 100 students turned up. "We had to survive and we looked around for job-work," says Rahul.

They agreed to take up work for the Nainital Bank, which was bogged down with manual accounting and had a backlog of two years on squaring up some of its transactions. Then, two schools asked them to organise computer classes for their students.

Compudigits next set their eyes on Moradabad's Rs 100-crore brassware export industry. Most of the firms were run traditionally, operated in secrecy and had an infinite number of products to keep track of. While many were reluctant to take to computers, Mohammad Akram and brother, Iqbal, of Paramount Trading Corporation, the largest export house (turnover: Rs 10 crore) took the plunge. They bought two computers and asked Compudigits to develop the software to deal with the 30,000-different export items. Now Akram reports: "Efficiency has certainly gone up. Details about transactions which took

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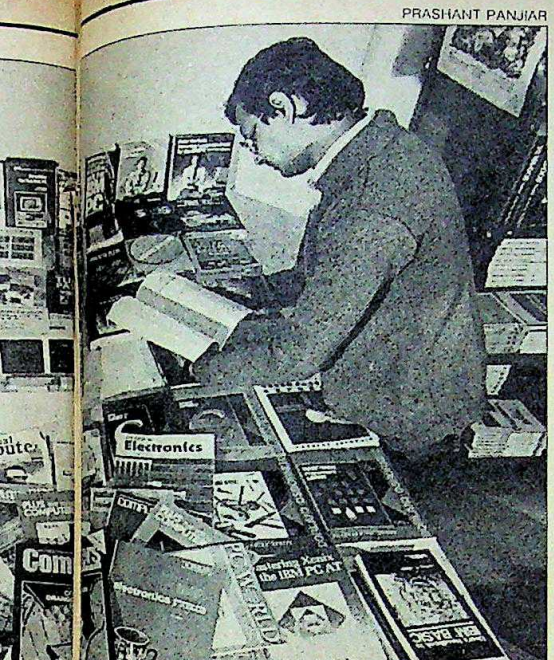
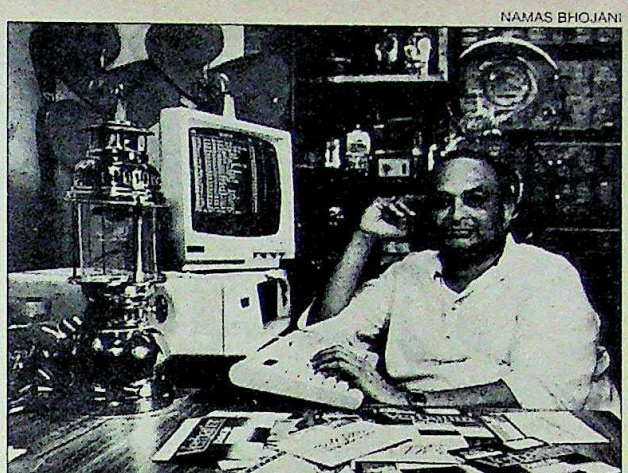
PRASHANT PANJIAR



Host of new magazines and books on sale: information explosion

NAMAS BHOJANI



Navin Shah got a computer to keep track of the 800 fan spare part items he deals in. Six months later, he's still struggling and finds the programmes unsuitable.

readily available it would cut that contact and reduce their importance.

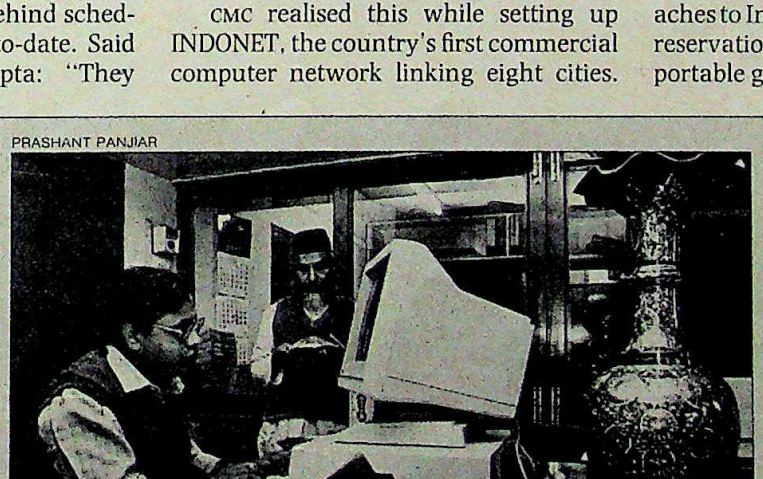
The analysts soon got wise. To convince the staff, they got their payrolls and provident fund accounts computerised. For the first time, employees received salary slips and their provident fund accounts, usually two years behind schedule, were also brought up-to-date. Said systems analyst V.K. Gupta: "They realised how useful the computer could be and their resistance broke down."

But two of the most essential requirements for computers (fault-free telephone lines and consistent power supply) could prove to be the weakest links in the country's efforts at computerisation. Telephone lines are crucial for networking computers so that they can actually "talk" over long distances. By using a machine called a modem, computer signals, which are basically blips of current saying 'off' and 'on', can be converted to the telephone's voice signals—enabling transmission of information. But if the telephone lines are even slightly faulty, the information gets garbled.

CMC realised this while setting up INDONET, the country's first commercial computer network linking eight cities. Firstly, they could not even get a phone line in their Bombay office—necessary to link subscribers to their computers—even for the "king's crown", as Dipak Basu, INDONET's corporate manager, puts it. And then, in other offices, their phone lines were constantly breaking down. They solved that by hiring ex-telecommunication staff who had contacts at the telephone exchange and could get faults rectified immediately. But as more networks come up, the country's poor telecommunication system will come under increasing criticism.

Joining them will be the various electricity boards. It is erratic power supply that has been causing unending headaches to Indian Airlines for its instant seat reservation service. It was forced to buy portable generator sets for most of the 22

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Akram on computer: getting his money's worth

hours of search in files are now available immediately and I don't have to tour too much."

But others in the brass business were still hesitant to follow Paramount's example. "I can't trust anyone else with my accounts," says Arun Khanna of Sunbeam Export House. He adds: "And I do not know the language of computers so I would not like to go into it." But with the pressure to computerise mounting, Iqbal predicts: "The old methods will be soon phased out. People will realise the need for computers."

For computers to move into Moradabad there were other problems as well. As MMC chief Singh points out: "My district has an illiteracy rate of 59 per cent. Do you expect these people to read the computerised bills, which are in English?" And then there was the other dilemma: "On the one hand, the Government has given instructions to work in Hindi, and on the other we do need computers to increase efficiency."

But for Poonam, 22, a systems operator in Compudigits, language is hardly a problem. She did her schooling in a Hindi medium school but was able to pass her computer course, which was taught in English. As she says matter of factly: "Language? It's no problem. I know three of them. Basic, Cobol and dBase." Computers have obviously not only reached Moradabad but are there to stay.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI in Moradabad

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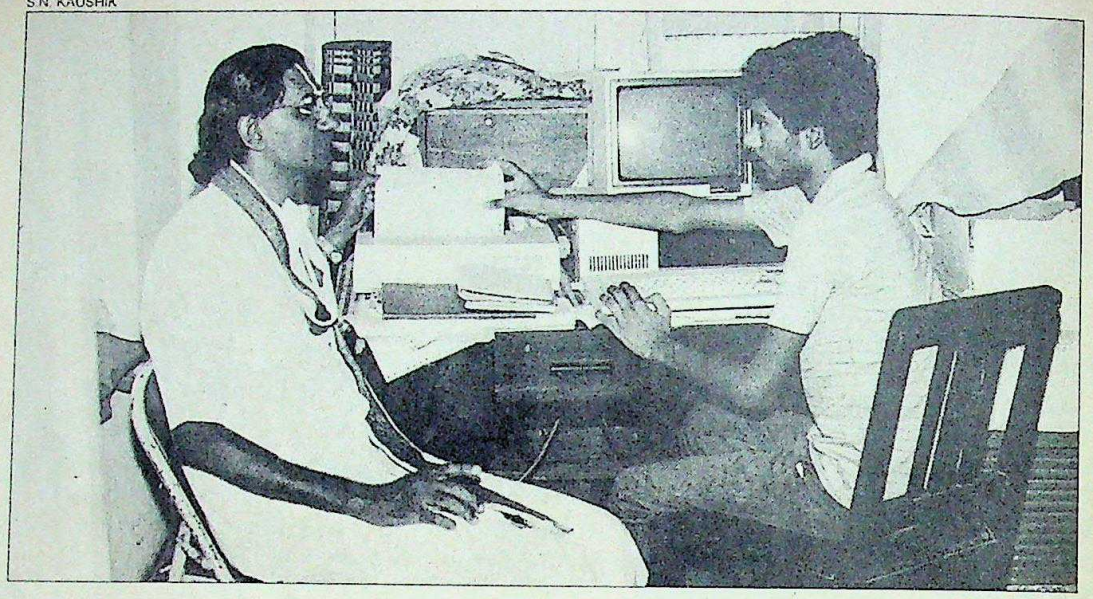


Parthasarathy Madhusudhan, 14, computerises horoscopes on his home computer. This is so popular that leading astrologers now flock to him to work out their clients' *kundlis*.

booking offices all over the country that are connected by computer. The result was that whenever the power failed in these stations, airline staff had to run out and pull the generators to life. Most stations tell the customers blandly: "Power down. Computers down."

But the longest battles will be waged once the computer begins to pose a threat to the country's burgeoning labour force, when the question of man versus machine becomes important.

That problem cropped up when the Union Government wanted banks to mechanise their operations. In 1984, the RBI chalked out an ambitious proposal to install Advanced Ledger Posting Machines (ALPMS) to replace the painful manual ledger system in 8,500 branches by 1989. Fearing that computers would result in lay-offs, the bank workers' unions this March forced the managements to scale down their plans to include just 5,700 bank branches. Now, despite 3,500 branches having ALPMS, a parallel manual ledger is kept in a third of them—'to test the validity of the machines'.

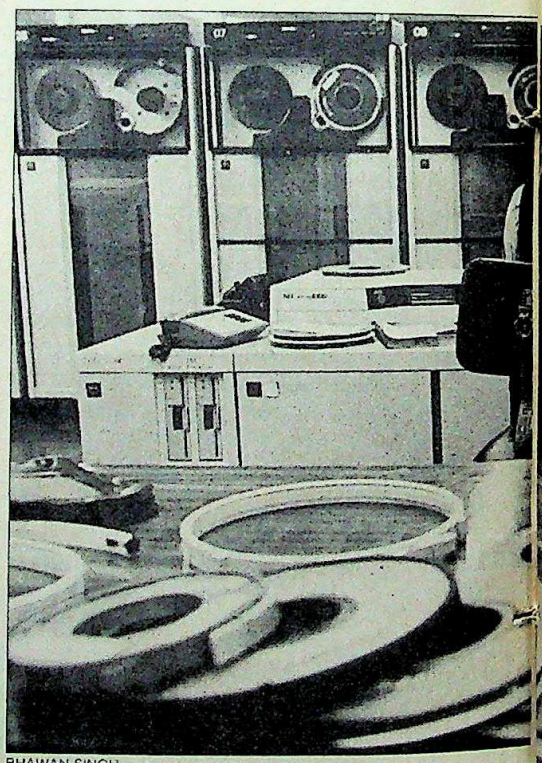
However, in those branches that have gone "live", the machines seem to be working well. Now, when a customer presents a cheque to the clerk, he just feeds in his account number and in seconds has the balance flashed on his screen. A cheque is passed in just five minutes. And it has made life much easier for the ledger clerk, who earlier had to spend several hours reconciling the day's transactions. Now the computer does the totalling and he just does the checking. Predicts T.N.A. Iyer, RBI's executive director: "It took time for them to accept the machines but now we are well on the road to take-off."

In the private sector too there were signs of resistance. In Delhi, when a leading private manufacturer tried to computerise its inventory and production on the shop floor, the army of clerks supervising the "bin-card" information were up in arms. Fearing that the computer would replace them, they started feeding wrong data into the system and sabotaged its working. Only after the management assured them that they would not be laid off did the computer programme get under way.

IMPORTANTLY, in both the public and private sectors, the degree of computerisation still remains largely at basic levels. As J. Krishnan, executive vice-president of Computer Point, says: "Computers are still mainly used in only the fundamental areas of inventory management, accounting and pay-roll." Very few companies and offices have begun using the data generated by computers to chalk out sales strategies, regulate production and plan growth.

But with their rapid entry, the most serious problem the country faces is getting trained manpower to handle the gadgets. Although computer institutes have sprouted in most cities, they are able to train hardly 20,000 people a year. At the moment there are less than 50,000 trained computer hands. Rajendra Pawar, managing director, National Institute of Information Technology, which runs popular computer courses, says: "By 1990, we will be short of something like two lakh people to handle computers. This is where the real crunch will come."

The Human Resources Development Ministry thought it would make a dent in that figure by introducing computers in schools. Three years ago, it set up, with much fanfare, a Computer Literacy for School Studies Programme (CLASS), which now encompasses over 1,250 schools in the country. The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was to coordinate the project along with the DOE and state education departments. The idea was to supply the 1,250 schools selected with computers and get students to learn computer basics apart from providing them with "hands on" experience.



BHAWAN SINGH

Things began to go haywire right from the beginning. In the selection of schools, considerations like room space and power were pushed aside to make way for issues

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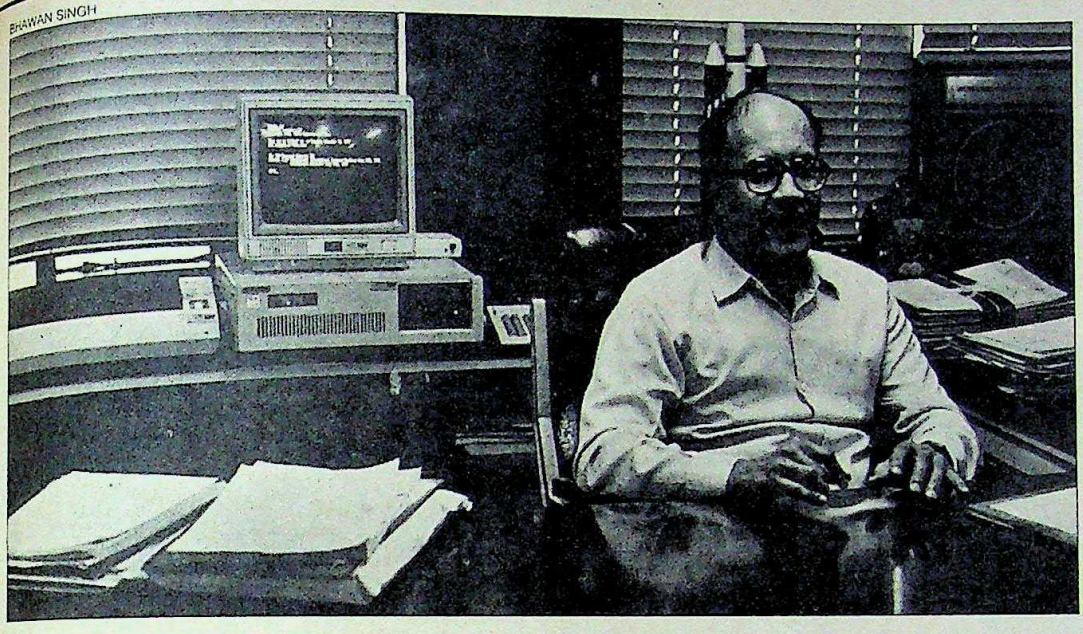
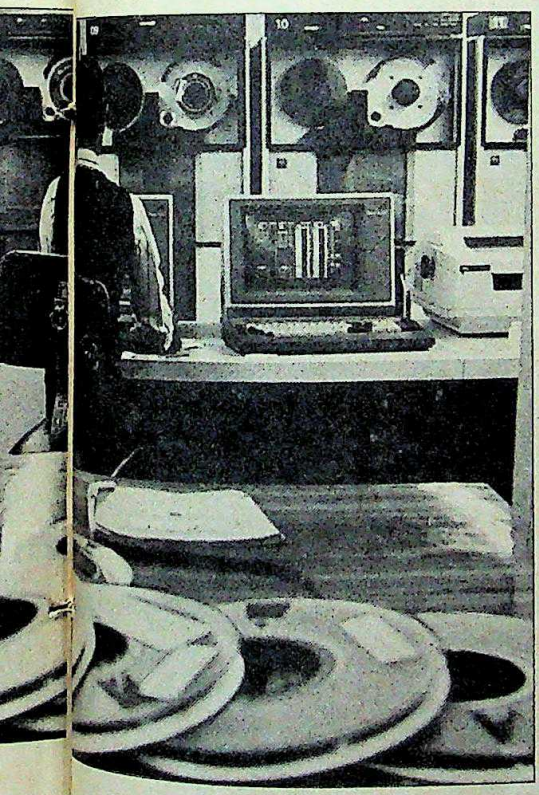
BHAWAN SINGH



An information network, NICNET, is aimed at spreading the gospel of computers to the hinterlands. N. Seshagiri, the network's chief, says it will usher in an information revolution.



Main Central Government computer: cutting red tape

like backward districts quota and political pressures. The Government held training courses for teachers a year before the computers were installed. And by the time the courses began, the teachers had forgotten most of the curriculum. There were further snags. Since most of the computer programmes were in English, schools that taught in the local language faced problems. Now Professor A.K. Jalaluddin, joint director, NCERT, admits: "We estimate that in half the schools, the programme has run well. And we are now trying to rectify our mistakes in the other half."

Despite the glitches, India can hardly afford to miss the computer bus. Computer professionals look upon many of these problems as transitory—caused by a nation coming to grips with a new culture. "We are at the start of a learning curve and we are at a phase when one wonders whether we are doing right or wrong," says Shankar Kumar, general manager, DCM Data Products. He adds: "As they say, you have to break an egg to make an omelette."

THE head chef of all that egg-breaking is Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with his 21st century buzzword. He has put the DOE in charge of the Union Government's most ambitious computer programme: a nation-wide information network called NICNET which, by using computers, will link every district with state capitals and New Delhi. The idea: to review development programmes by the push of a button. The price-tag: Rs 140 crore.

NICNET's mother earth station, a giant-size dish antenna to receive and transmit information, was to be inaugurated in Delhi by July. But it was delayed for the most mundane of reasons: the junior engineers of the PWD went on strike for several months. But by end-1988, barring strikes and other man-made disasters, as many as 439 districts will have their hardware up, ready for transmission. And N. Seshagiri, DOE's exuberant additional secretary, predicts: "We would have introduced an information revolution that even the Government hadn't dreamed of."

Once NICNET starts ticking, for the first time the country will have spread the gospel of computers to the hinterland. With it looms the tremendous possibility of monitoring the nation's development plans more systematically. Already there is a mind-boggling information backlog. Most vital statistics on agriculture, health, education and industry under the present system of collection are at best guesstimates or projections. The ground-level truth usually comes out five years too late. With the national network, all that could change dramatically, giving the Government up-to-date information on development work.

Elsewhere in the world too, given the size of the information explosion, the computer is becoming indispensable. In the US itself, for instance, as many as 7,000 technical and scientific articles are written every day; in the past five years alone, the volume of information generated has increased sevenfold. But with the advent of the computer, the mass of data generated is organised and available at the push of a button for people to make use of. And it is beginning to transform industrialised nations into information-based societies.

Most futurists think that developing countries could use computers to leap-frog to prosperity. NICNET opens out such a possibility for India. There are bound to be snafus on the way. But if and when NICNET, INDONET, CLASS and all the other programmes succeed, the computer revolution sweeping the country would then truly come of age. Judging from the present computer mania, that day doesn't seem too far away. And sooner rather than later you are going to get a letter one day saying 'Dear Dr Mr'.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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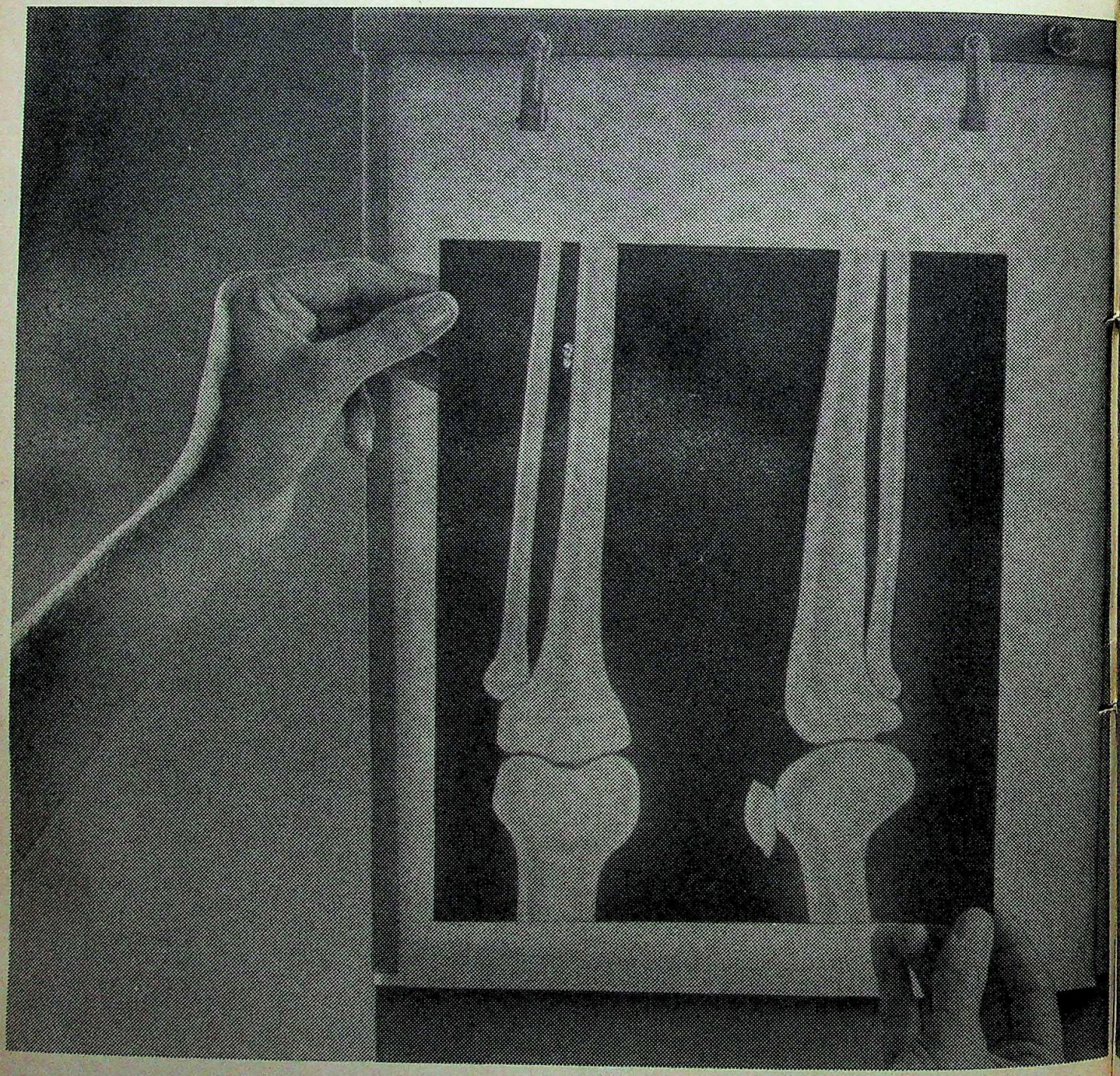

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INDO-US RELATIONS

The Pakistan Equation

Diplomatic coup for Pakistan at India's cost

As Americans themselves would put it, it was a case of mixing apples and oranges. But when those guilty of illogical mixing are American senators, the consequences are not likely to be funny. Especially when New Delhi is at the receiving end. Last fortnight, as the Senate went through crazy gyrations on the US South Asia policy only two things were clear: Pakistan was going to get its $4.02 billion aid package and the new warmth in Indo-US relations after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's October visit to Washington was in the process of vapourising. Even after the Senate reversed its earlier decision to completely equate India and Pakistan on the nuclear issue, the deliberations amounted to a Pakistani diplomatic coup and Indian policy-makers were left nursing a nasty political black eye.

Simply put, if the Senate had not softened its stand the new amendments could result in a practically unconditional release of the $4.02 billion aid to Pakistan while more or less accepting the Pakistani argument that its nuclear programme is merely the logical response to India's. Thus it puts the onus on India to stop the nuclear race in the subcontinent despite opposition from the committed anti-proliferation Senator John Glenn that after demonstrating its ability to make the bomb in 1974 India had "creditably" refrained from manufacturing nuclear weapons.

The problem is, most senators appear to have confused the basic facts and ignored the obvious: that unlike India, Pakistan's nuclear programme is acknowledged to be purely weapons-oriented, fuelled by clandestine deals and blatant world-wide smuggling. What makes the folly even more ironic is that the Senate action coincided with the commencement of the trial of Arshad Pervez, an alleged Pakistani agent accused of smuggling materials from the US for use in the Pakistani nuclear bomb. For India, the decision was humiliating. And though the Senate later made symbolic concessions to India while retaining its soft stance on Pakistan, New Delhi had got the message.

Predictably, an angry Indian Parliament sought retaliation as indignation cut across party lines. Though Minister of State for External Affairs K. Natwar Singh made the point that the amendments were yet to go through the American legislative process, he had a hard time keeping tempers down.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador John Gunther Dean shuttled between South Block and the US Embassy carrying messages, while in Washington Indian Ambassador P.K. Kaul delivered a letter from Rajiv Gandhi to President Reagan. Sources in the Ministry of External Affairs say the prime minister has reminded Reagan of his indirect commitment, made just two months ago, that the US would not equate India with Pakistan in framing its South Asia policy. But the White House was much too preoccupied with the superpower summit. In fact, even the Senate gyrations were influenced by the summit. The US law-makers wanted to firmly tell the Russians that they were not about to ease the pressure in Afghanistan exerted through Pakistan. The Pakistanis pushed their case successfully through Neale and Company, a highly successful lobbying firm that they employ.

The most shocking part is that the usually well-informed US senators have been misled by lobbyists to adopt a policy so flawed it will defeat the very cause it seeks to buttress. With this the US—which considers itself the greatest champion of non-proliferation—would be providing justification for the whole world going nuclear. Following the logic that 'you could seek the bomb because your neighbour has it', India would be perfectly justified in going nuclear to match China. "It is very troubling; it stands our whole policy on its head," says the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment's Leonard Spector, one of the most respected commentators on proliferation. "Now what is to stop not just India but also Taiwan, Syria, Argentina and Brazil from going nuclear?"

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Indian hopes are now pinned on Democratic Congressman Stephen Solarz's open determination to push through Congress his bill linking aid to Pakistan with the assurance that General Zia's scientists are not enriching uranium beyond the 5 per cent limit. This conflicts with the Senate's latest stand that the aid can continue on the basis of an annual certificate that Pakistan does not have the bomb, even if it were just two screwdriver turns away from getting it. Under the American system, when the Senate and the House are divided on such an issue, they hold a joint meeting to try and reach a compromise. If there is still no consensus, the two houses jointly put the issue to vote. The future American South Asia policy now seems headed for that grand finale. And the winner could well be the one that hired the better lobbyist.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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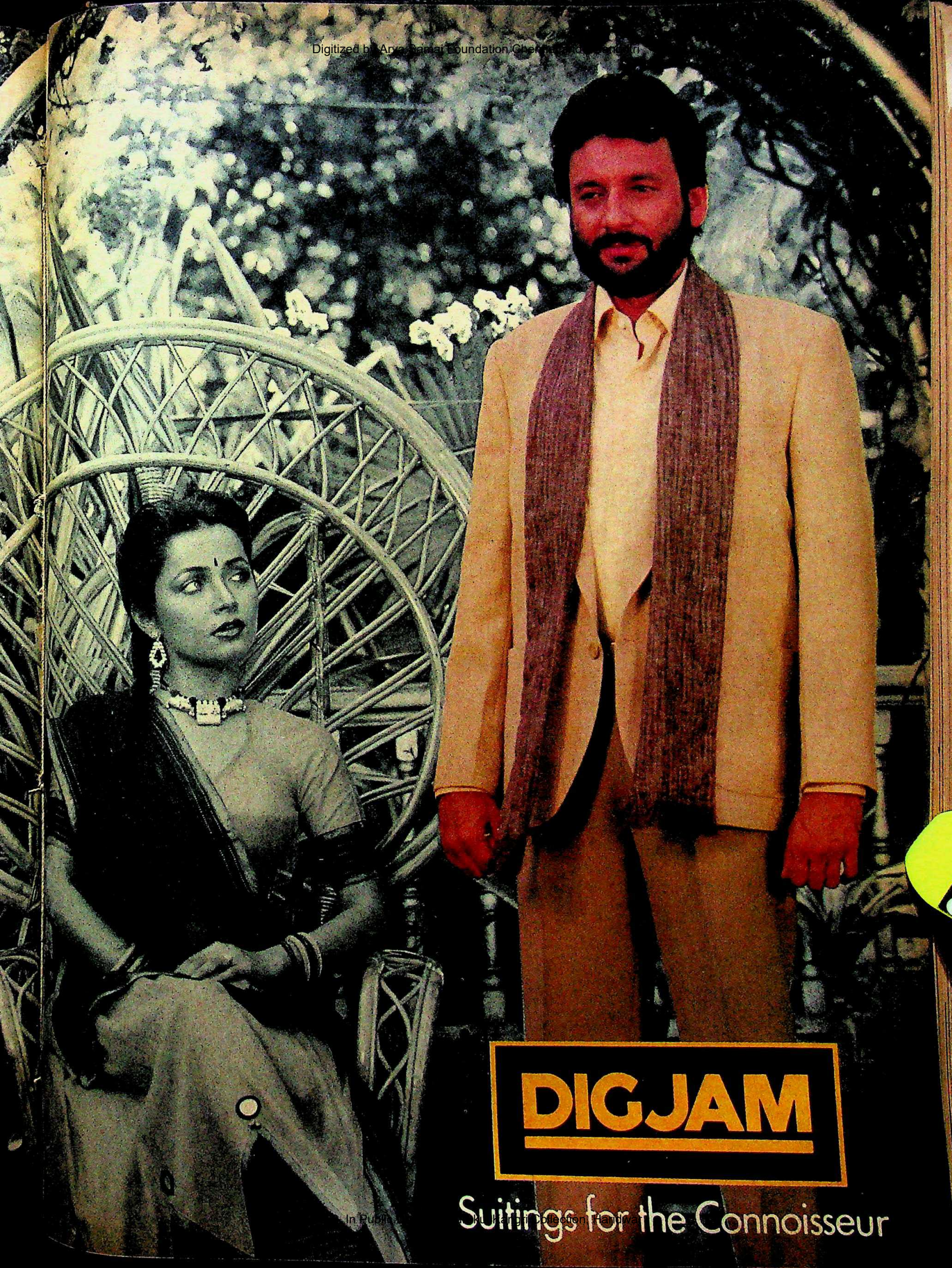

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Rush hour. In

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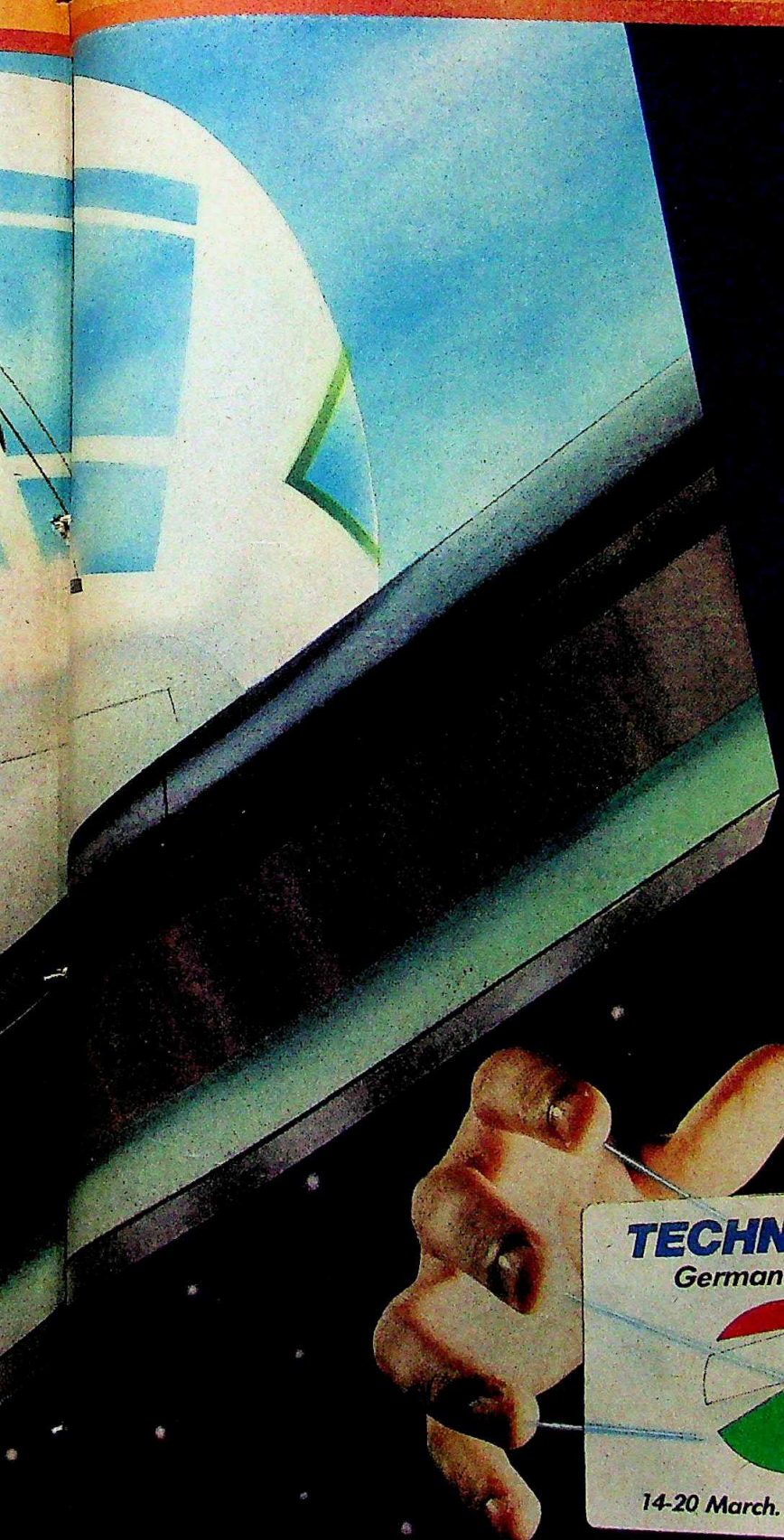

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UNITED KINGDOM

The Missing Rifles

Television documentary resurrects shadowy deal

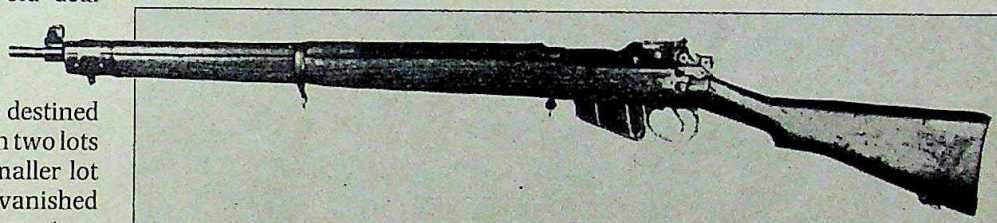
BRITAIN's television audience sat riveted before a fascinating real-life documentary on Channel 4 last fortnight, starring arms dealer Frank Turner whose blighted adventures ruined his business. Faced with penury and litigation, Turner blew the whistle—an arms dealer's ultimate recourse—and what better medium to choose than a dramatic televised documentary.

His gripping account exposed several shadowy deals that caused acute embarrassment to the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the CIA. In the process, Turner resurrected an old deal involving the purchase of 72,000 Lee Enfield rifles in India four years ago. The guns, bought in Jabalpur and destined for Britain, were to be shipped in two lots of 12,000 and 60,000. The smaller lot reached Britain. The 60,000 vanished without a trace. Since 1984, questions have been posed and theories offered as to where these guns—of World War II vintage—might have been sold.

Turner's Q.E.D. Design and Development Company negotiated the deal in 1983. The Indian Government didn't object as Turner had a licence from the British MOD and the guns were destined for Britain. On November 15, 1983, a Danish ship, *Ardua*, sailed from Bombay with the consignment ostensibly for Britain. It disappeared on the high seas.

It is unclear whether officials in New Delhi knew that Turner had already negotiated the resale of these guns to Sherwood International Export Company in the US, whose president was the controversial US arms dealer Mike Kokin. But in an interview with INDIA TODAY, Turner revealed how the deal was clinched in India. His partner at Q.E.D., Gordon Harold, had negotiated through the Delhi-based firm Uranus Agencies run by Salig Ram Parwanda and Dinesh Parwanda. When Turner had met the Parwandas' earlier in London they offered to help with deals from India which included ammunition for small arms, a "large quantity" of bayonets and 300 tons of small arm spares for which Uranus was paid a commission. When Q.E.D. became aware of the availability of the 72,000 rifles, it tendered for the deal and won the contract.

Turner and Harold met officials in South Block when the deal was being negotiated. They especially dealt with Joint Secretary K.C. Sodhia whom Turner describes as "very correct and proper". Turner also revealed the precise nature of the payments, which were not outlined in the TV documentary. Of the 72,000 Lee Enfield rifles, 5,075 were described as in "good working order", and were sold for $30 (about Rs 390) each. The remaining 66,925 were "repairable"—they might have had a minor screw missing—and were sold for $19 (Rs 250) each.



The disappearance of 60,000 Lee Enfield guns bought in India has embarrassed the British Defence Ministry and the CIA.

Turner says that when his partner Harold returned from Bombay, he said that Kokin had travelled with him to Jabalpur and clinched the deal with Sherwood for a handsome profit. Turner feels Sherwood is a CIA operation. When he confronted Kokin about the bill of lading and date of arrival at an English port, he found him "very evasive". When the shipment didn't arrive even weeks after its departure from Bombay, alarm bells began ringing.

According to Turner, neither Harold nor the Parwandas' knew where the consignment could have gone. Harold was not available for comment, nor were the Parwandas' who have now reportedly left India. Turner alleges there were numerous sinister developments that told him something had gone "very wrong". He didn't get much help from the British MOD. Turner also discovered a telex from Sherwood to his partner enquiring if it were possible to "buy an end user certificate" which was illegal. He photocopied these documents and sent them to the British intelligence.

In 1984, Turner confronted Kokin in New Orleans. When Kokin was told that the British MOD was enquiring into the rifle deal, he asked Turner not to worry and simply mention his name. In May 1984, Turner's partner's wife died when she opened a parcel bomb. But the case was not pursued for lack of evidence.

Last year, Jack Anderson in a *Washington Post* article maintained that 60,000 Lee Enfield rifles had been sent to the Mujaheddin guerrillas in Afghanistan. The shipment had apparently arrived in another Danish ship, *Nicotto*, in Karachi. In their cross-checking, Turner, as also the documentary crew, found the trail had run cold. In Peshawar, the Mujaheddin ridiculed the idea of fighting the Soviets with Enfield rifles. The systematic obfuscation that went on among the British MOD, US officials and Mike Kokin convinced Turner that it was yet another illegal CIA operation where the consignment could have been sent to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua.

The documentary, actively instigated by Turner, reopened numerous unanswered questions about *Ardua*'s cargo. Turner's candid confessions also raised several other controversies including the sale of 12,000 Browning pistols by MOD to Q.E.D. for a pittance and then reneging on the contract, resulting in an expensive out-of-court settlement. Another was the British intelligence order to Q.E.D. to manufacture a weapon to outwit even a James Bond—a submachine-gun fitted in a briefcase.

Two British MPs have stated publicly that they will pursue the matter in Parliament. But at a time when so many delicate questions have been posed to the Tory Government, it remains to be seen if their efforts in the House of Commons will shed any light on the spooky affair of the missing rifles.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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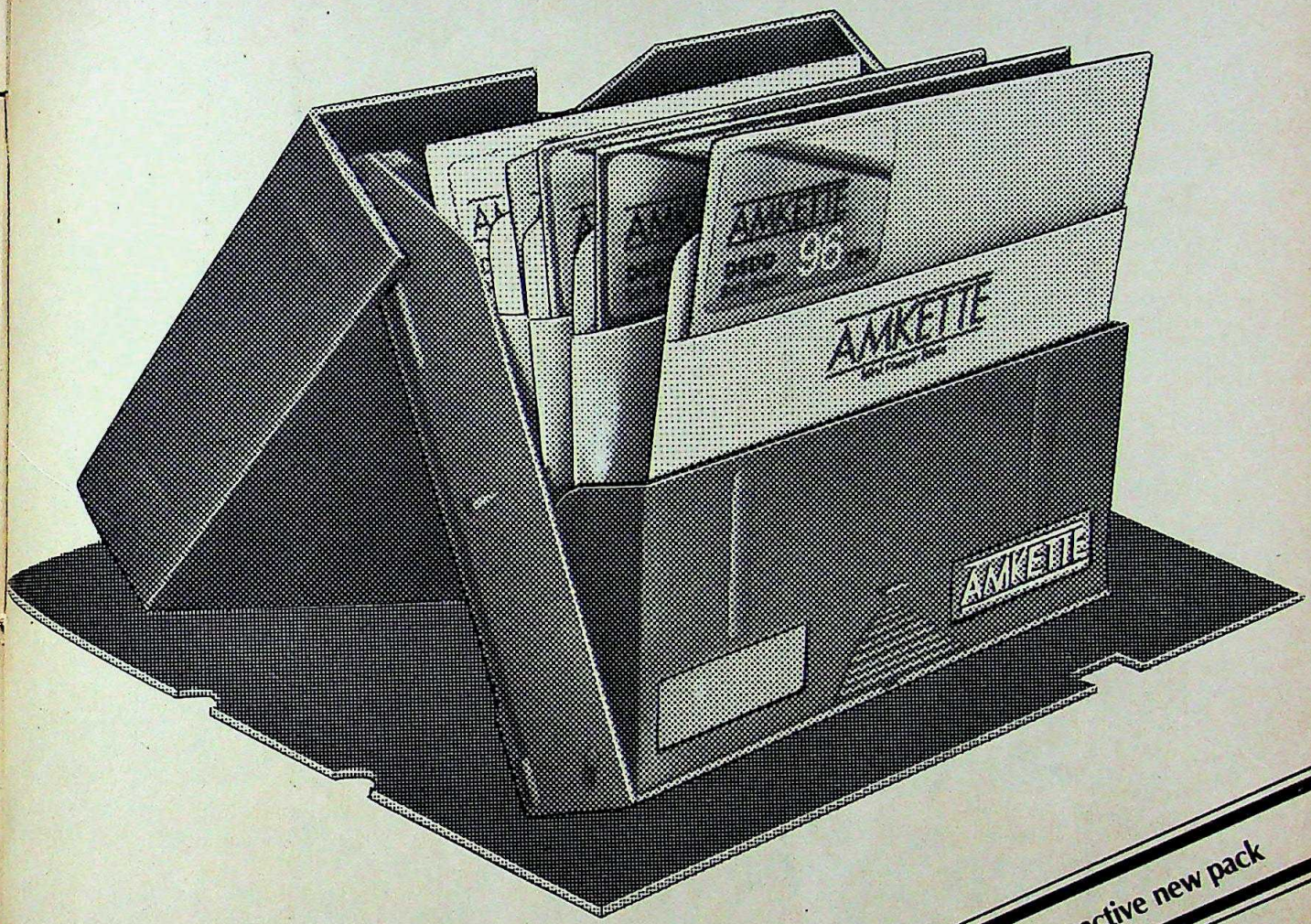

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Still from *Sammy and Rosie*; and below Kureishi: unimpressive attempts

UNITED KINGDOM

Bedroom Farce

Hanif Kureishi's new film is sexual self-indulgence

MULTIRACIAL Britain with its acquisitive, white yuppies, newly-rich legions of grasping Asians nourished on Thatcherism, and activist West Indians battling for political rights, offers a treasure-house for inventive new writers to feed their imagination on. Disappointingly, only a handful have successfully drawn on this lush and fertile landscape of contemporary British society.

Among the notable few is the half-Pakistani, half-British writer, Hanif Kureishi. A former writer of steamy porn pot-boilers-turned-popular script-writer, Kureishi, 33 (INDIA TODAY, March 31, 1986), is currently one of the most fashionable and sought-after writers of Asian themes in this country.

Asian themes yes, but with a difference. A Hanif Kureishi short story, novella or film script would feature Asians and their vicissitudes. But most of his characters resemble sexual deviants. And the thematic interpretation routinely enrages a sizeable section of Britain's Asian community.

Two years ago, Hanif Kureishi and director Stephen Frears (*The Hit, Gumshoe*), collaborated on *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Despite its slender story line and its failure to even fleetingly examine the cross currents and confusions of contemporary Britain's melting pot, *Laundrette* deservedly became a smash hit. It also earned Kureishi an Oscar nomination and ensured him a fat fee for film scripts. But the film was shown more widely in the US and Canada than in Britain where distributors were wary about exhibiting a film depicting scenes of stark prurience between two youths belonging to two different races. It raised the hackles of the more orthodox Pakistanis in Britain who accused Kureishi of pandering to the white liberal establishment.

The second Kureishi-Frears film, eagerly awaited here, was first screened in Britain last fortnight, at the closure of the London Film Festival. The unexpurgated title, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, itself suggests unspartan dollops of carnality and concupiscence. Sex and sexual mores have once again engaged Kureishi in this film. With violence on the British streets as the backdrop, Kureishi attempts to weave the story of a Pakistani businessman, returning to Britain nostalgic for hot-buttered toast and his erstwhile lady love. Instead, he encounters riot-torn streets and battalions of riot helmeted policemen battling angry young men on the streets.

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For its American avatar, the film's title was simply *Sammy and Rosie*. In Canada, its rightful title was restored. The reviews in North America were decidedly mixed. Some American critics refused to accept the film's view of Thatcherite Britain with bloody race-riots and anarchy on the streets. They had heard more of the successes of Thatcherism and privatisation, where droves of young stockbrokers were making small fortunes at The City—London's financial nerve centre.

But what they saw here was blood-letting on the streets, layabouts with wolfish passions and nothing else on their minds except mindless sex. Kureishi says he is interested in the "complexity" of people and their lives. But it is precisely on the films' characters that it dissolves into an incoherent mess. Its two most compelling moments are the opening and closing sequences: first the riots in Brixton based on a real-life incident—the accidental police-shooting of a black woman, Cherry Groce, who was paralysed for life and which triggered off a full-scale riot.

The closing set piece shows a hippy commune being bulldozed by real estate developers for a massive business project financed by the Japanese. In these two arresting scenes, the political imagery of Britain's deprived and denuded inner cities, as arresting as today's newspaper headlines, comes starkly alive.

If Kureishi and Frears had concentrated more on the problems confronting the young unemployed, white, black or brown, instead of depicting an elaborate ballet of bed hopping, this film would have stood up to some searching scrutiny. But, for the rest of the film, the characters who mouth farcical or bizarre lines, struggle to attain plausibility.

The pivotal character Rafi Rahman (an obese Shashi Kapoor, one of the three actors who makes a valiant effort to salvage the film), is a Pakistani businessman who arrives in England to visit his son Sammy and daughter-in-law Rosie. The street where the couple live resembles a war zone. Sammy (a wooden and vapid Ayub Khan Din), has an ambivalent attitude towards his father—resentful that he was abandoned when his parents were divorced but still lured by his father's promise of a fat cheque and consequent upward mobility. The character hardly works.

Barber as Rosie (top); Kapoor (left) and Ayub Khan Din

Rosie (the talented Royal Shakespeare Company actress, Frances Barber, palpably miscast here) is a social worker with a conscience. She wants Sammy to return his father's cheque, more so when she discovers Rafi's dark and sinister background as a political torturer. Father and daughter-in-law clash publicly which is the cue for more obtuse flapdoodle about social conscience and the rationale of democracy. Rafi hardly offers any penetrating insight into why he succumbed to torturing his political opponents.

Rafi attempts to renew his friendship with Alice (acted with fine dignity by Claire Bloom). But after an initial efflorescence, the relationship wilts. For Rafi, England becomes increasingly unfamiliar, torn by violence, punctuated by gallows humour. Personal tragedy is not far off. He is shocked that Sammy and Rosie are such a free-wheeling couple. They pick up and drop lovers like so many packets of crisps. Rosie finds Danny (Roland Gift), a young black temporarily adopted by Rafi, and Sammy finds a lubricious American photographer Anna (played by Wendy Gazelle). Amidst this sensual dissipation there is a quite ridiculous lesbian couple, an Indian social worker Rani (Meera Syal) and a black girl, Vivia (Suzette Llewellyn), who are periodically found in lusty embraces and passionate soul kissing for the obligatory bout of homosexuality that will undoubtedly trigger off controversy in Bradford or Southall. Little wonder Rafi hangs himself. But what the film seems to suggest is that the ghosts of Rafi's forbidding past have finally caught up with him.

If the film were examining the dichotomy of conflicting cultures, the hypocrisy of Asian moneyed classes and the bleak existence in an inner city jungle like Brixton through the eyes of a profligate like Rafi Rahman, *Sammy and Rosie* may have made some sense. Instead, it is this wallowing in debauchery that takes precedence. A pity since the hard-earned reputation of the makers of *Laundrette* takes some hard knocks.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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J.R. JAYEWARDENE

"India is not our enemy"

SRI Lanka's 81-year-old President, J.R. Jayewardene, has come up the hard way, rising from the post of a municipal corporator to the head of state. Not surprisingly then, he is adept at converting political adversities to his advantage. Till six months ago, Jayewardene was the target of attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an aggressive opposition and even his own ministers. And when he signed the Indo-Sri Lanka accord on July 29, 1987, he was accused of surrendering Sri Lanka's sovereignty to India.

But the shrewd politician is nobody's fool. He has got the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to do what the Sri Lankan Army could not accomplish in four years—crush the LTTE. As one prominent minister put it: "JRJ has silenced his critics by involving Rajiv Gandhi in his fight against the terrorists. We have saved money and manpower."

Jayewardene does not try to hide his satisfaction at having got India to do his work for him. At a meeting last fortnight he said: "But for the IPKF we would have had to fight this war and that would have cost in monetary terms." He pointed out that in the last four years, the Sri Lankan Army had lost an average of one soldier a day, but since the IPKF took over, "not a Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim soldier has died. Their place has been taken by the Indians. I want to stop that also."

But some controversial statements made by few Indian Army generals—where they hint at a permanent stay in Sri Lanka—have troubled Jayewardene. As a result of this, he has now adopted a defiant stance on the implementation of the accord, and has started promoting an Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Treaty, with which he hopes to limit India's influence over Sri Lanka. In his first exclusive interview after the commencement of the IPKF operations, Jayewardene spoke to Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA at his residence. Excerpts:

Q. *You have been invited as chief guest to India's Republic Day parade. But a section of the Opposition in India has opposed it. How do you react to this?*

A. Rajiv has invited me. Now it seems he will be in difficulty if I come. I will be the last one to embarrass him by coming there. Probably some of them are trying to work out their feelings because I criticised M.G. Ramachandran (Tamil Nadu chief minister) in my press conference in New Delhi. I did not say any untruth.

Q. *Do you have the same opinion about MGR after the IPKF operations?*

A. Now Rajiv has told me that MGR is working with him in the implementation of the accord. If he is working with us and not helping the terrorists, I admire him and I am also grateful to him. My main criticism against MGR was that he was entertaining a self-confessed murderer, Pirabhakaran, who is the LTTE chief. Pirabhakaran openly admitted that he killed the mayor of Jaffna. But I meant only what MGR did in the past.

Q. *Do you think that the Indo-Sri Lanka accord is being implemented successfully?*

A. As far as we are concerned, we have done everything mentioned in the accord. The only thing left is the election in the provinces. We will do this also. I have to pass the law. After that I have to hold elections. But I can do that only when there is peace in the north and the east.

Q. *Till the elections take place, will you revive the proposal of an Interim Administrative Council?*

A. Not necessarily. If I can have elected people then where is the need for an interim council?

Q. *But earlier you had promised to appoint an Interim Council.*

A. These chaps (the LTTE) are not allowing us to do so.

Q. *Can't you nominate representatives of other Tamil groups to the council?*

A. Why should I do that if I can hold elections? I am willing to hold provincial elections in January or February. I want to choose people who I can talk with. How can I talk with these fellows? Who do they represent? If they surrender arms, let them come forward and fight elections.

Q. *So you will not talk to them now.*

A. No. Let them get elected. We will also fight elections as a political party.

Q. *Do you think the LTTE will be finished before the elections?*

A. Yes. As a terrorist force they will be liquidated. They are withering away.

Q. *If the accord is working well, then why do you want a new Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Treaty? Are you under pressure to delete some provisions of the accord?*

A. That treaty is in connection with annexures attached with the accord. If India wants us to do certain things, we also want India to reciprocate by doing something for us. I am not under any pressure. I want to make it reciprocal.

Q. *What are the provisions in the annexures?*

A. Letters exchanged between Rajiv and me deal with the foreign trainers, use of Trincomalee port and the Voice of America broadcasts from Sri Lanka. We want India to assure us that she will not do anything against our interests.

Q. *But what do you want from India?*

A. If India wants anything to do with our harbour, broadcasting corporations and training facilities, I also want the same thing from them.

Q. *Foreign trainers, like Keeney Meeney and some Israeli security advisors, have not been sent back yet, though this was part of the understanding.*

A. They won't go even now. Somebody must train our people here or abroad. We never said that they will go. We only promised that we will consider it.

Q. *If LTTE cadres surrender arms, will you grant them amnesty?*

A. I have already announced that all those who surrender arms and join democratic forces will be let off. Even Pirabhakaran.

Q. *Don't you think that India could train the Sri Lankan Army for you?*

A. India can't train both terrorists and the army. I told Rajiv that. But that is not the situation now. We will consider India's offer of training our forces.

Q. *Rajiv wants your assurance that Trincomalee port will not be used in any*

> **"If India wants us to do certain things, we also want India to reciprocate.... We want India to assure us that she will not do anything against our interests."**
>
> **"The IPKF must stay here in Sri Lanka only till the LTTE gives up. They will not be required after that.... They are here for restoring peace."**

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way against India's security interests. What do you want from Rajiv?

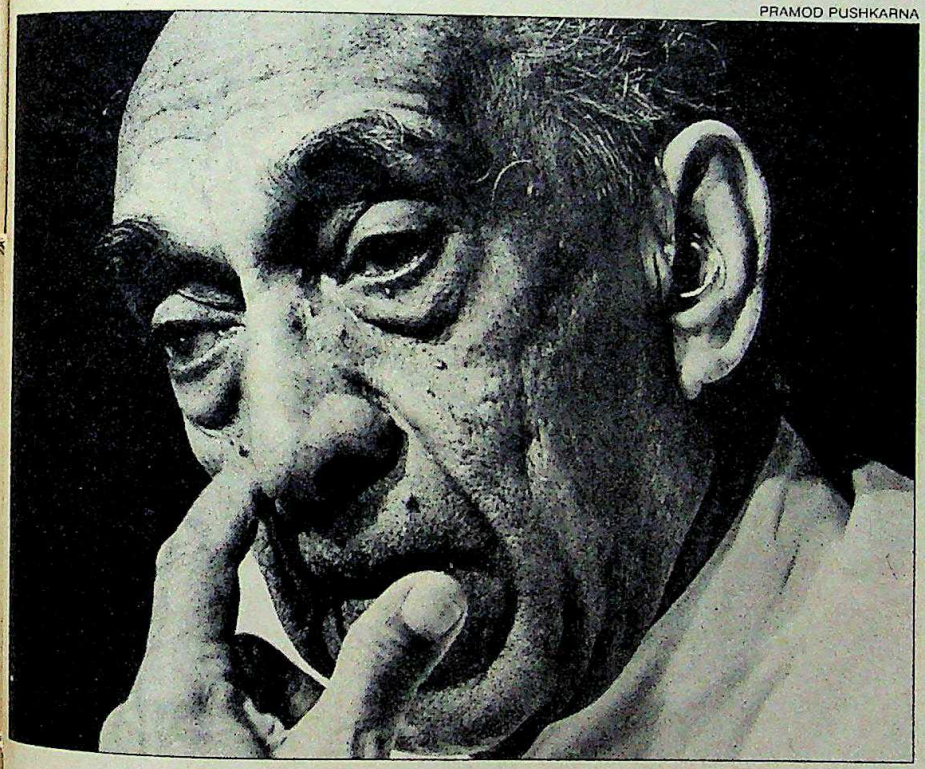
A. We want him to ensure that no harbour in India is used against Sri Lanka. Why should our ports be used against India? She is not our enemy.

Q. *Are you saying that foreign trainers and other irritants to India will remain in Sri Lanka till a reciprocal arrangement is worked out?*

A. Yes, certainly. We have started discussions and are preparing a draft treaty.

Q. *Rajiv Gandhi and the* IPKF *have paid a heavy price in implementing the accord. How do you propose to reciprocate this?*

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



A. We will fulfil our part of the accord totally. That is the only way.

Q. *Don't you think that Rajiv Gandhi has suffered a lot in the process?*

A. So have our people. Look at the refugees in Trincomalee. There were none earlier. There are a few thousand now.

Q. *Have they become refugees after the* IPKF *operations?*

A. Yes. They are blaming the Indian troops. They are saying that IPKF personnel are the ones who harass them.

Q. *Do you believe that?*

A. That is another matter. But they are saying that they left their homes due to the Indians only.

Q. *Do you also believe the rumours that the* IPKF *will stay for a longer period than you had in mind?*

A. Statements of some of the Indian Army officials have been quoted in Parliament. But they have been refuted. The IPKF must stay here only till the LTTE gives up.

Q. *Once the* LTTE *is eliminated and peace is restored, will you ask the* IPKF *to pack up?*

A. Yes, they will not be required after that.

Q. *But under the accord, the* IPKF *has to stay on to ensure implementation of other clauses like holding the elections.*

A. No. They are here for restoring peace. There are different conditions for holding elections.

Q. *Will you ask India to help you crush Janata Vimukthi Peramuna's (*JVP*) terrorism in the south?*

A. No. We are capable of handling them. They will be finished in a month.

Q. *But they accuse the Government of not withdrawing the Prevention of Terrorism Act and arresting innocent people who raise a voice of dissent.*

A. I will withdraw the Act after the violence is over. They are killing elected people. People who take up arms are not entitled to normal laws in any democracy.

Q. *Has the opposition from within your Government made it difficult for you to handle serious problems decisively?*

A. There is no opposition to me. The party has fully supported the accord. It is due to this that I have been able to implement our side of the accord. Only two members of Parliament opposed it and they have been expelled. Now the prime minister has moved legislation for conducting the elections.

Q. *Under the accord, you were supposed to release all Tamils in Sri Lankan jails.*

A. I released 3,000 to 4,000 of them and they went and joined the terrorists.

Q. *Now that the* IPKF *has been forced to fight the* LTTE, *where do you think things went wrong?*

A. Nothing went wrong except that they trusted the LTTE too much. The IPKF thought the LTTE cadres would give in. Instead of putting the blame on others, they should completely eliminate those fellows (the LTTE). Because of them, innocent people are dying.

Q. *Rajiv Gandhi is being accused of doing your dirty work for you.*

A. We are just implementing an accord and nothing else.

Q. *Why have some clauses like the return of Tamil refugees from Tamil Nadu not been implemented?*

A. I have not stopped any one. They are not returning because they are frightened. Jaffna is in turmoil now. There is also a problem of sending both Sinhalese and Muslim refugees back to the north and the east. They don't trust some members of the IPKF.

Q. *What exactly do you want from the* IPKF*?*

A. They should complete their part of the deal. They have not yet taken away arms from the terrorists. They have to disarm the terrorists.

Q. *The* IPKF *is killing them instead of disarming them.*

A. But they are not finished yet. Their primary job is to liquidate the terrorists in the north and the east.

Q. *Do you perceive any role for the* IPKF *in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Sri Lanka?*

A. We are capable of doing that ourselves. They can offer us grants.

Q. *Is the* IPKF *working under your directions?*

A. Yes, they have to work under my charge. But I don't go into the details of their operations on a daily basis. That is left to their commanders.

Q. *Do you subscribe to the Opposition belief that the* IPKF*'s presence in Sri Lanka is largely determined by India's designs in the region and that Rajiv Gandhi will not withdraw the* IPKF *in a hurry?*

A. No. I asked them to come here and I will ask them to go as well.

Q. *Do you foresee them refusing to leave your country in the near future?*

A. I can't dream of this. I have full trust in Rajiv Gandhi and our ability to look after ourselves.

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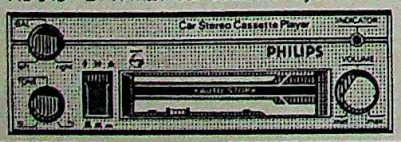

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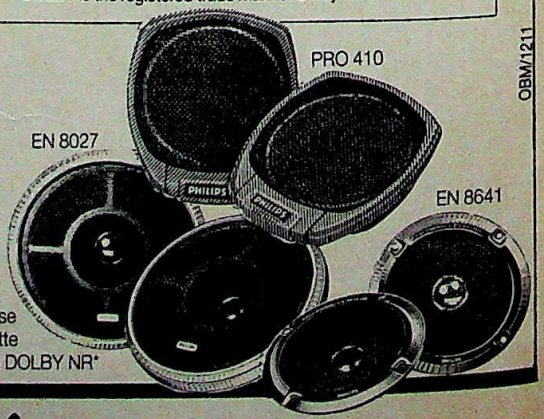

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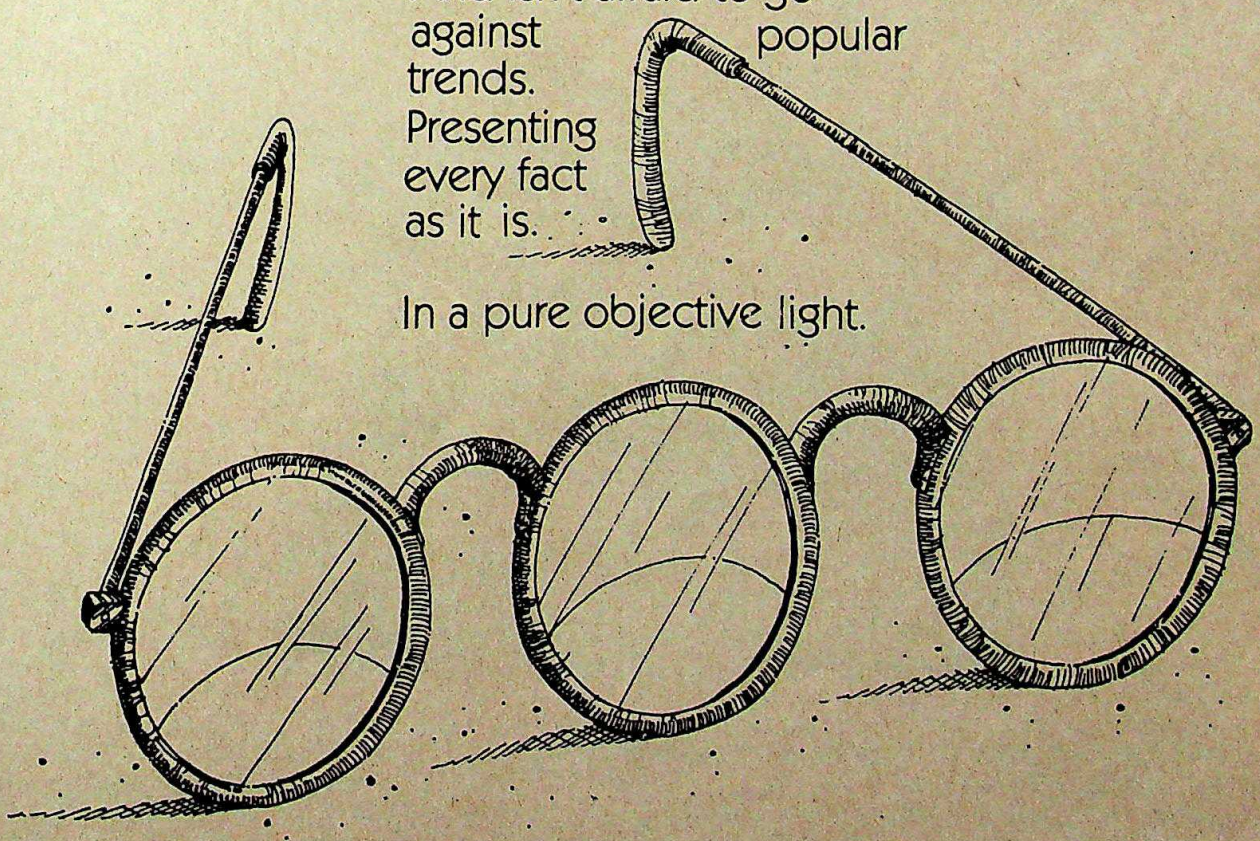

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SCIENCE

Energy From Space

An engineer's invention excites interest

IN a tiny room in a Bombay suburb, an electrical engineer works on a machine that seems to have been conceived in a Sci-Fi book—a generator which can ostensibly produce electricity from nothing. But the machine's creator, Paramahamsa Tewari, 51, is not an eccentric inventor from one of Sukumar Ray's fantastic tales. He is a senior engineer with the Department of Atomic Energy's Nuclear Power Corporation (NPC).

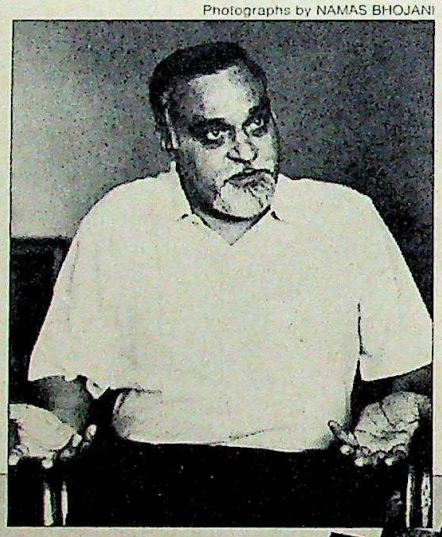
Tewari created a minor sensation 10 years ago when he propounded the theory that space is filled with a dynamic medium whose swirling motion is the source of all matter and energy. He called it the Space Vortex Theory (SVT) which postulated that at the heart of the electron was a void whose high speed rotation within a vacuum could produce energy from space.

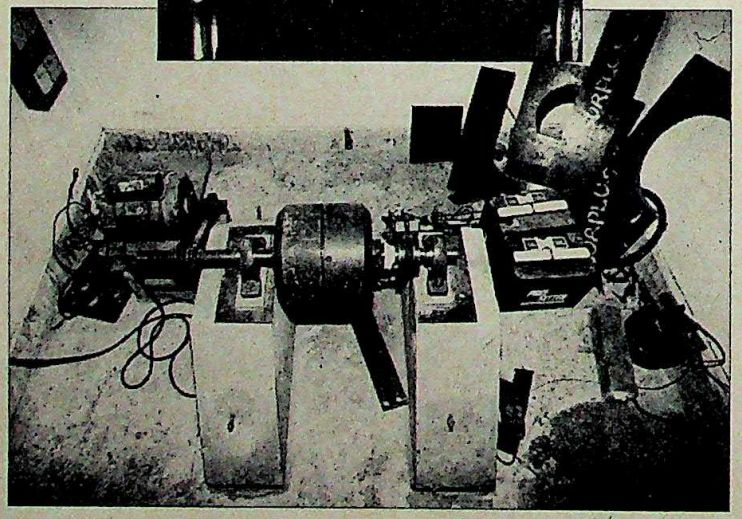
Interestingly, it was the Theosophical Society which had first published Tewari's theory by arranging a special lecture in 1977 at Adyar in Madras. The theosophists were excited by Tewari's ideas since they were remarkably close to observations about the electron put forward by Annie Besant's associate, the clairvoyant Charles W. Leadbeater, in the book *Occult Chemistry*.

However, the first indication that Tewari's ideas about the structure of space were more than just a mystic vision came earlier this year at a conference in Hanover organised by the German Association of Gravity Field Energy. The Space Power Generator (SPG) invented by Tewari won the first prize of Rs 25,000 from among 25 similar machines presented at the conference by scientists from all over.

Tewari's generator is actually a simple machine, consisting basically of a magnetised cylinder rotating at high speed with the help of a motor. Power from this device is extracted by connecting a wire between the surface of the cylinder and its axis. According to the engineer-inventor, the SPG produces two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half times more power than it consumes, defying the basic physical law of conservation of energy which says that the output of energy cannot be more than the input. Tewari says the excess power comes from the inter-atomic space of the rotating cylinder—it is the movement of the "voids" in the spinning cylinder which creates additional energy out of the space between the machine's axis and the magnet.

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI





Paramahamsa Tewari (top) and the generator: futuristic fantasy

Tewari readily admits that his theory sounds incredible taking into account the existing laws and that he would never have developed it had he been trained as a physicist and not an engineer, since it is so divergent from conventional physics. But, he says, it would have been difficult for him to go on with work on the SVT and the generator were it not for encouragement from two US physicists, John A. Wheeler, director of the Centre for Theoretical Physics at the University of Texas, Austin, and Bruce DePalma, formerly a lecturer in physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "But for DePalma, I wouldn't have been able to tie up my theory," says Tewari. "He was working on similar ideas and kept sending his results to me."

Though Tewari, who is slated for transfer to the NPC's Kaiga Project in Karnataka as chief project engineer, has pursued his interest in physics in his spare time, he has received infrastructural support from the NPC for putting together his extraordinary new machine. The SPG was built under Tewari's supervision at the Tarapur Atomic Plant. "Tewari's prototype SPG can be considered a major breakthrough," says S.L. Kati, managing director of NPC.

Before leaving for Hanover, Tewari addressed a meeting of scientists and engineers at the Bhaba Atomic Research Centre on his theory. But most physicists remained sceptical about his findings. Undaunted, he is experimenting with a new model of the SPG since his return, which he feels will be an improvement. He eventually hopes to create a prototype for a generator which could deliver 50 kw to 100 kw of electricity. "The encouragement I received abroad has been a great help, and hopefully within a year, I will be able to build an experimental model which could ultimately prove commercially viable," he says.

Tewari, of course, is not the only engineer hoping to build the ultimate power generation machine—one which will run perpetually since it will extract energy from space—as the Hanover conference demonstrated. In fact, DePalma, the first inventor to create such a machine, is presently conducting experiments in California in anticipation of a breakthrough which could lead to commercial production. Their work promises to create ultimately a machine which appears to come straight out of a futuristic fantasy.

—M. RAHMAN

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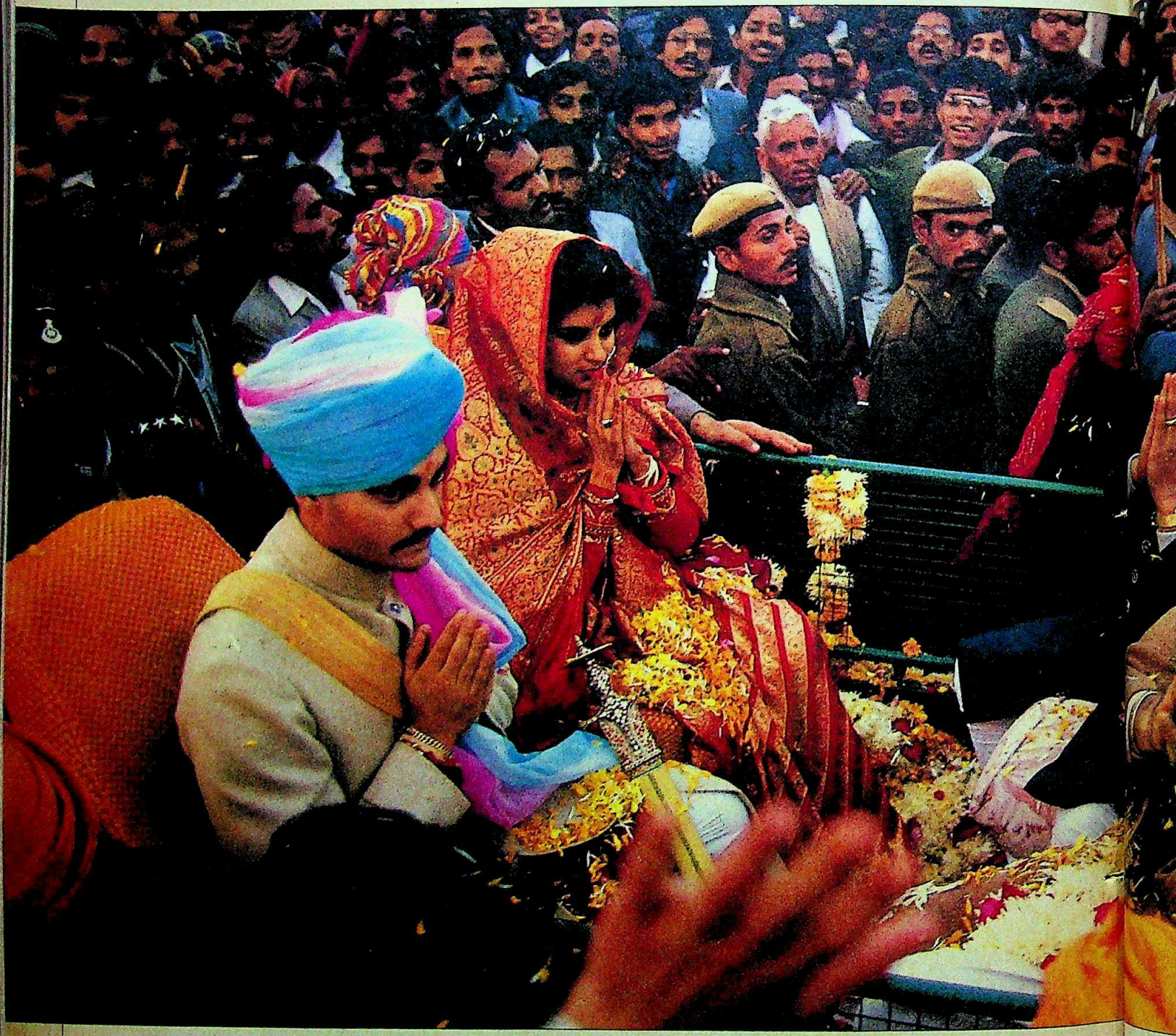

GWALIOR WEDDING

A PRINCELY AFFAIR

History came to life in resplendent glory as bejewelled crowns bowed to bejewelled crowns in Gwalior. And people turned out at the wedding of Chitrangada Raje Scindia and Vikramaditya Singh with the traditional enthusiasm that binds subjects with royalty. Pictures Editor RAGHU RAI and Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR covered the event.

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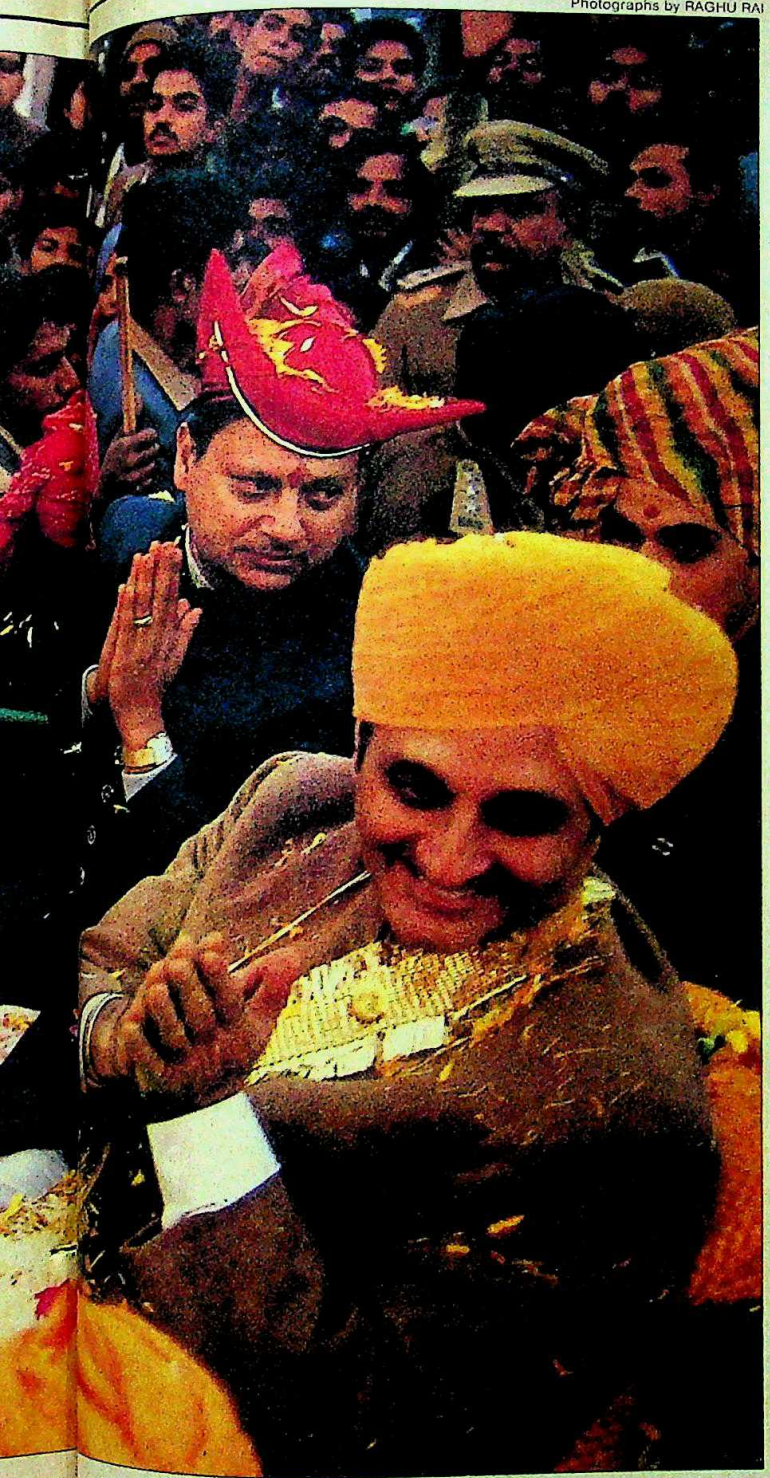

(Top) the married couple, Scindia and Karan Singh; and scenes from the groom's *haldi* ceremony

AT 11.40 a.m.—sharp—on December 11, the Taj Express rumbled to a halt at Gwalior railway station and marked the beginning of a pageant that turned the town upside down for two days. The all-male *baraat* of 113—packed into two reserved carriages—could hardly believe their eyes. Despite the presence of securitymen, the railway platform itself seemed to be moving as thousands of people broke barriers and surrounded the train. Yuvraj Dr Karan Singh, father of the bridegroom, Vikramaditya, and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah looked both ecstatic and disconcerted at the scene.

But even in this ferocious melee of commoners, the lords

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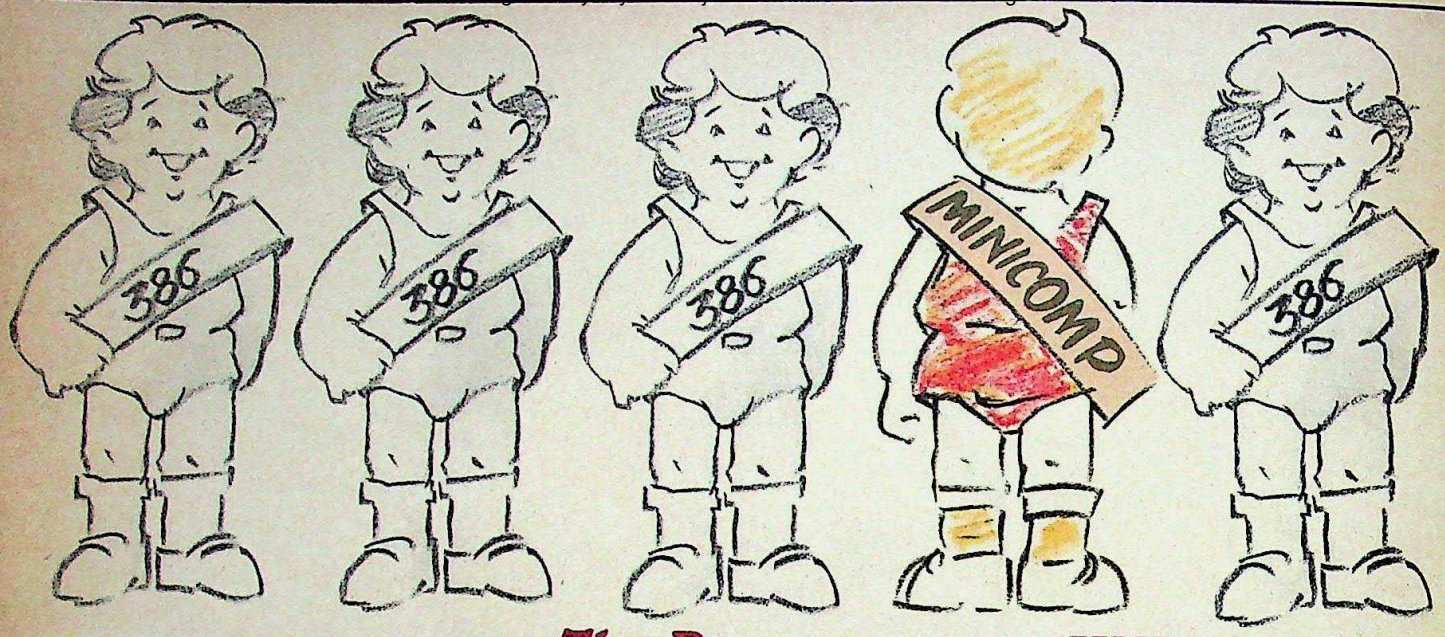

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and kings stood out. The Kashmiris in their brocade *achkans* and yellow turbans. The receiving party—the Scindia family—in their conical Shinde Shahi topis, bedecked with gold *todas* (multi-layered crescents), brocade *dupattas* and *madakhals* (gold brocade epaulettes). Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia, father of the bride, Chitrangada, wore a flowing red *safa*. These clothes are worn only by the highest in the traditional feudal hierarchy. And at the wedding, family members followed tradition to the hilt.

A Border Security Force band struck up *sare jahan se accha, Hindustan hamara*. The crowds cheered, and the groom's party wound its way to a cavalcade of 35 cars that took them to the Usha Kiron Palace Hotel—owned by Scindia—where they were lodged in luxurious suites.

The palace complex resounded to a cacophony of music. A 15-piece brass band and *shehnai* players, dressed in gold *achkans*, played in the archways of buildings and on different hotel lawns. The music never stopped. Not even when Scindia took off in a helicopter to receive King Birendra of Nepal at the airport that afternoon.

Women from the Scindia family—Scindia's wife Madhavi and his sisters—then arrived at the hotel for the groom's *haldi* ceremony. They were dressed in ornate brocade saris, sporting *kardanis* of basra pearls and diamonds on their hips, four-tiered pearl and diamond bracelets and chokers. Accompanying them were the former maharanis of Jhabua, Jaipur and Badwani, among others.

Vikramaditya enters and is seated on resplendent cushions among chanting *purohits*. He is blessed by the princesses who apply dabs of *haldi* with a *paan* leaf to his feet, knees, elbows, shoulders, and face. The Rajmata of Gwalior—estranged from her son—enters, and family members touch her feet.

Outside, it is cloudy and getting dark. The throngs have begun to pour in through the open palace gates. Sarpanches and villagers from all over the state enter in droves. By sunset, more than 50,000 commoners are packed into an enclosure, cordoned off by the police. The canopied *mandap*, designed by Rajiv Sethi, built of clay and adorned with banana leaves, is in open view. Behind it is the brightly lit Jai Vilas Palace. Giant-size papier mache puppets stand like mascots near the *mandap*, on the east and west of which are the VIP areas.

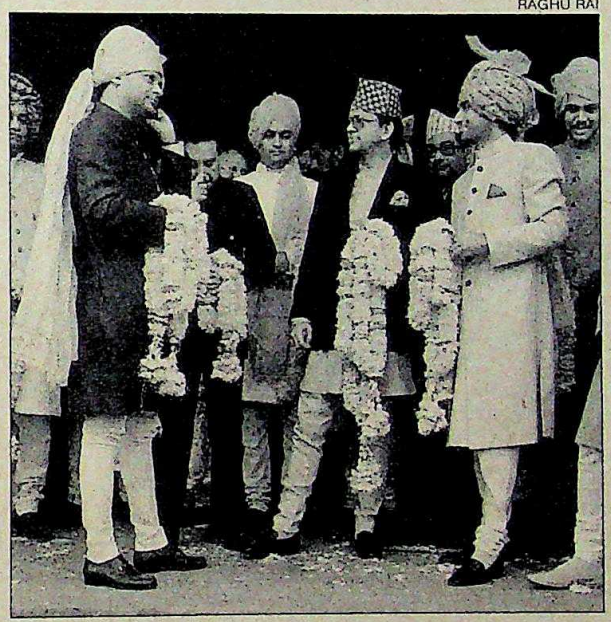
At 6.30 p.m., the *baraat* arrives led by an auspicious elephant painted a deep blue. The groom, his father, the former maharaja of Jaipur, and Farooq Abdullah arrive in two carriages drawn by white horses, while a band plays, *mera mehboob aya hai*. The crowds cheer wildly.

The ceremony is a complex one, performed according to the 300-year-old Maratha tradition. It starts with the singing of the *Mangalashtak*—an eight-stanza verse, sung in *Raag Des, Marwah and Bahiravi*—celebrating the history of the two 21-gun salute royal families now being united in matrimony. As the Vedic chants continue over loudspeakers, the couple sits face to face on low wooden stools separated by a hand-held veil.

Just before the *kanyadaan* ceremony, the veil is dropped. And, as if by an eerie command, the skies respond with rain and a high wind causes the crowd to shiver. The physical barricade between the VIPs and the commoners is suddenly obliterated.

But other reactions had threatened to dampen the proceedings. Allegations had been made in the press that the official machinery was used to facilitate arrangements. Besides, many VIP invitees were lodged in the city, some in specially renovated government rest-houses. But in fact, Madhavrao Scindia had used his own resources to renovate the palace. As Rajiv Sethi said: "All this business of lavish expenditure is nonsense. It is a very simple affair. The work in the palace complex was done by local folk artisans." Scindia also kept up his official duties, working till 1.30 p.m. on files sent from Delhi. And the IAS officials who came to Gwalior to assist him in preparations took leave and came to the city at their own expense.

RAGHU RAI



Scindia (left) and King Birendra (second from right)

Among the 2,500 VIPs who attended the wedding, the only national level politician was Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh. Others included Nusli Wadia and K.K. Birla, Sharmila Tagore and her husband, the Nawab of Pataudi, and royalty from almost all the former princely states. "If you expected to see the international jet set here or a big tamasha, you came to the wrong place. This was intended to be a people's affair," said Scindia.

There had also been criticism that the huge throngs had, in fact, been arranged to witness the ceremony. But the spontaneity of the crowd belied this view. As Ram Vilas, a labourer, said: "I was sitting so far back, I could hardly see the *mandap*. And yet, my being there was worth it as there is a bond between us and this family." Swedish Radio Correspondent Gisela Widmer, who was part of the large foreign press corps present at the occasion, said: "It is amazing how such a large crowd retained its enthusiasm in spite of being confronted with such differences in wealth."

And as the ceremony proceeded, people surged forward, breaking the barriers separating the VIP area. As Janaki Bai from Morena put it: "This is like a wedding in our own family. We will see it from where we like." The crowds' warm reception only reflected its respect for the royal family which has done considerable work for the constituency.

There was no public feasting, and only tea was served to guests. The dinners where champagne flowed were strictly private affairs, attended by close friends and the *baraatis*. "We wanted to keep this a dignified affair. And that's what it was," said Dr Karan Singh.

The next day, the couple awakes to the *raags* sung from a palace pulpit by Sri Madhav Umdekar of the Gwalior gharana. Outside the palace, by 4 p.m., Gwalior is in a frenzy. The entire city is adorned with welcome arches and bright lamps. And five lakh cheering people fill the streets, to bless the couple as they ride in a flower-bedecked open jeep with a 31-car cavalcade along an 8-km route to the Gorki temple to offer pūja. Socialist India appeared to be paying an uncanny tribute to ex-India.

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MADHYA PRADESH

Relief for the Rich

Misuse of chief minister's fund at the expense of the poor

THE Chief Minister's Relief Fund, meant primarily to help the legions of destitute and victims of natural calamities, is being misused in Madhya Pradesh to provide pecuniary benefits to influential politicians, journalists, wealthy industrialists and even ex-princes and jagirdars. The gross abuse of the public fund by successive chief ministers over the past few years has been going on under the aegis of the so-called discretionary nature of the fund. Principal Correspondent N.K. SINGH *reports on the wealthy 'destitutes' of Madhya Pradesh.*

DHANNO BAI, 45, lived in a shanty town just across the chief minister's bungalow. A cancer patient, by the time she went to the local hospital for women she was told it was third-stage cancer of the uterus and advised treatment at a specialised hospital. The nearest cancer hospital is at Indore, 200 km away. Dhanno Bai was among the poorest of the urban poor. She earned her livelihood by working as a cleaning lady.

Jai Prakash Sharma, a social worker of the area, applied to Chief Minister Motilal Vora for monetary help from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Two months later, on February 3 this year, the chief minister's secretariat replied to Dhanno Bai, asking her to furnish more details and another copy of her medical certificate. "We did that immediately," said Sharma. Four months later, Dhanno Bai received another communication, sanctioning her Rs 200.

Accompanied by Sharma, Ramkrishan Prajapati, Dhanno Bai's companion—they shared the same hut though they were not formally married—made five rounds of the Bhopal collector's office. Officials there refused to hand over the money to Prajapati. They said that Dhanno Bai must come personally to collect the money. Said Prajapati: "I informed them that she was bedridden but they wouldn't budge."

Three days after Prajapati and Sharma made their last visit to the collector's office, on July 2, Dhanno Bai died, clutching the bits of papers awarding her Rs 200. Recalled Sharma with bitterness: "We, the slum-dwellers, collected Rs 634 for her last rites."

BHAWAN SINGH

Despite Vora's claims that the fund's recipients are needy people, the money seems to be often given to people with influence.

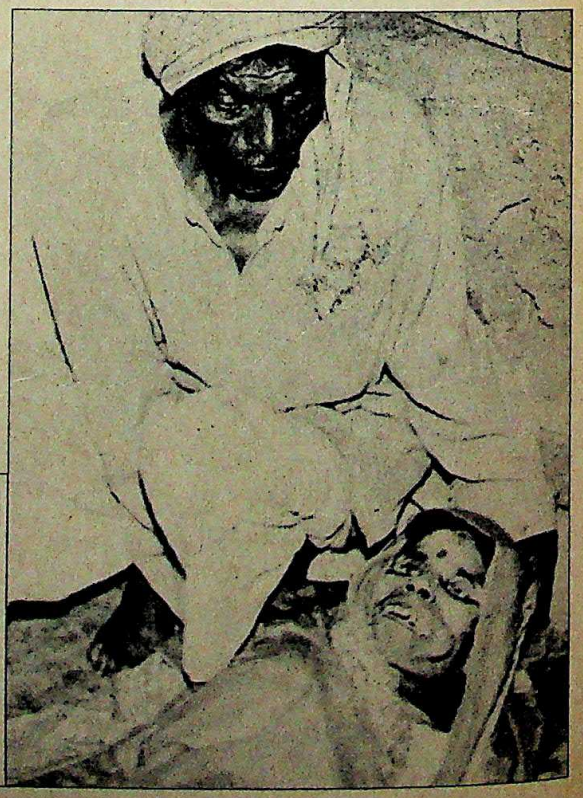
In contrast, Bhopal industrialist Vinod Gupta, 48, is an income tax payer, the owner of a printing press and a type foundry, and possesses a palatial house in an upper-crust locality of Bhopal and two vehicles. Gupta also owns a two-acre plot of land in Bhopal's flourishing industrial area, where he plans to put up a printing press at a cost of Rs 70 lakh.

In addition, Gupta is the owner-cum-chief editor of a weekly, *Hindi Herald*. He admits he started the magazine in November 1982, "to gain status in society" and that he has been bringing it out for the last five years despite heavy losses: "Every year I lose around Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000 on the magazine."

When Gupta suffered a heart attack this summer, he demanded—and received with far greater ease than poor Dhanno Bai—Rs 5,000 from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Gupta is not alone. Princesses, ex-jagirdars, industrialists, former ministers, MPs, MLAs, ruling and opposition politicians and journalists are among the recipients of money from this fund. It was set up in 1972 with the help of public donations and contributions from the state exchequer to help drought-stricken people that year and future victims of such calamities. For the past few years, however, an estimated one-third of the Rs 30 lakh distributed each year seems to have stopped at the top rung of the social ladder.

A complete breakdown of recipients is not available because the chief minister's secretariat, which manages the fund on



Dhanno Bai, a cleaning woman suffering from cancer, died when her companion Ramkrishan failed to get the Rs 200 sanctioned to her.

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behalf of the Government, refuses to provide details of the fund's accounts. Vora's Secretary Nanda Ballabh Lohani, the member-secretary of the trust managing the fund, claimed that it was an absolutely discretionary fund. Declared Lohani: "We do not even submit its accounts to the Vidhan Sabha and we are not bound to disclose details of the fund's activities to the press."

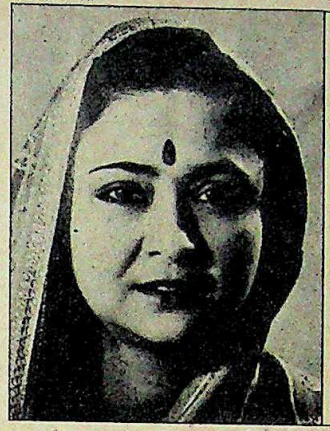
However, point number seven of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund Rule, 1972, does have a provision for the annual audit of the fund's accounts by the examiner of the local fund audit. Commented Narmada Prasad Shrivastava, leader of the Janata Party in the state Assembly: "It is high time that accounts of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund are presented in the Vidhan Sabha. That would keep a tab on its misuse."

Normally, the Public Relations Department releases the names of recipients of money from the relief fund. But as Lohani confessed: "Sometimes we receive requests from people not to publicise their names."

But the names of some of the recipients, collected through various sources, reads like a veritable who's who:

► The late Rani Padmavati, the ex-princess of Khairagarh, a small princely state in Chattisgarh region, was a minister in the Katju government. Her husband, Major Birendra Bahadur Singh, is the vice-chairman of the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation, and spends Rs 1.37 lakh of the public exchequer's money on himself every year. One of her sons is the MP from Rajnandgaon, Shivendra Bahadur Singh, and one of her daughters-in-law an MLA from the same area. Yet, when the ex-princess, who suffered from cancer of the uterus, demanded Rs 20,000 from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for her treatment in 1986, she got the money immediately. Defending his action, Vora said: "What could I do? She came to me and said she had no money. When a person of her stature says something I've no option but to believe it." The rani died recently and now a fierce battle is on in the family to stake claim to her legacy.

H.K. JAIMINI



Former princess Padmavati got Rs 20,000 for cancer treatment. Since her death, her family has been fighting for her legacy.

► Congress(I) MLA Abhay Singh Jhala, 63, is an ex-jagirdar. His family owns about 700 acres of land in Kachnaria area of Ujjain district. They have several cars, jeeps and tractors. He has been an MLA twice and the vice-chairman of the Land Development Bank. When Jhala fell ill this year, Vora sanctioned him Rs 15,000 for treatment. Said Vora: "When I called on him at the Ujjain hospital he said he had no money, so what could I do?"

► Former chief minister Dwarka Prasad Mishra, 86, has a palatial bungalow at Jabalpur, the cost of which figured in the Gulabi Chana judicial inquiry against him. He has been a minister, and vice-chancellor. Yet former chief minister Arjun Singh gave him Rs 50,000 from the government exchequer in 1982 and Vora gave him Rs 15,000 in 1987 from the fund.

► The late Vedram was a man of property. He was sacked from the Arjun Singh cabinet on corruption charges. In a letter to Indira Gandhi in 1983, Vedram had admitted that he had "collected Rs 22 lakh for party funds" when he was a minister. Yet, the Congress(I) leader, who died recently, got Rs 20,000 for his treatment earlier this year.

► Dr Vikram Trivedi runs a private clinic in a swank locality of Bhopal. His is a commercial venture. Yet, early this year, Vora chose to give Trivedi Rs 15,000 for his clinic from the fund.

While the list of wealthy recipients seems to span only the last two or three years, the fact is that cases over six years old are forgotten and the chief minister's secretariat refuses to supply information. Also, according to reliable sources, a time had come during Arjun Singh's tenure when the coffers of the fund became so depleted that Singh started eating into the capital itself. So money was given to important politicians directly from the state exchequer. Among these beneficiaries:

► The late Sreekant Verma, Congress(I) MP and Hindi poet, who owned a couple of houses but was given Rs 3 lakh by Arjun Singh for his medical treatment.

► The late Surendra Nath Khare, a Congress(I) MLA, was sanctioned ex gratia aid of Rs 5.5 lakh in 1983 for treatment of kidney trouble in the US. But the doctors there sent him back to India and he was treated in Bombay.

► In 1983, Congress(I) MLA R.K.

Photographs by R.C. SAHU

Vinod Gupta, who owns a palatial house in an upper crust Bhopal locality, was sanctioned Rs 5,000 when he suffered a heart attack.

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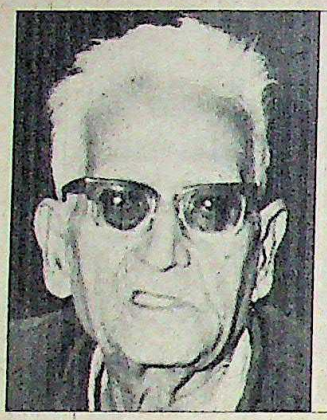
Sharma collected Rs 2.34 lakh for heart surgery at Houston, in the US.

Many of these recipients did not submit accounts to the Government. The accountant general's office is alleged to have raised objections to the practice. The wealthy are now given money from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. That no accounts for the fund have to be submitted is, of course, purely incidental.



As chairman of a government corporation, Dubey gets medical reimbursement. But he prefers to take money from the fund for treatment.

It is not just ruling party members, however, who are allowed to thus draw on the poor's preserves. BJP leader Shitala Sahay, a minister in the Janata government, with a flourishing practice as a lawyer and two houses—one in Bhopal and one in Gwalior—took Rs 20,000 for medical treatment this year from the fund. Lalji Patel, independant MLA from Maihar, was given Rs 20,000 this year for his son's treatment, which was done free at a government hospital.

Journalists too are not exempt from the disease. Padmnabh Telang, 77, editor of *Chetna*, a weekly published from Bhopal owns a huge house, a hotel and a printing press in the town and landed property at Sagar. He is also the local agent of Bennett, Coleman and Company. One of his sons is a doctor, another an engineer and a third is a lawyer. "My monthly family income is over Rs 15,000," boasts Telang. Yet he was twice given help—once in 1986 and once this year—from the fund for medical treatment. He got over Rs 10,000.

The former bureau chief of a news agency, who maintains a car and owns two houses—in New Delhi and Bhopal—collected Rs 17,000 in two instalments for medical treatment in 1986. He was in the august company of Chief Editor of the weekly *Dam Dam Diga Diga*, Anil Shrivastava, who got Rs 5,000 for his wife's treatment this year.

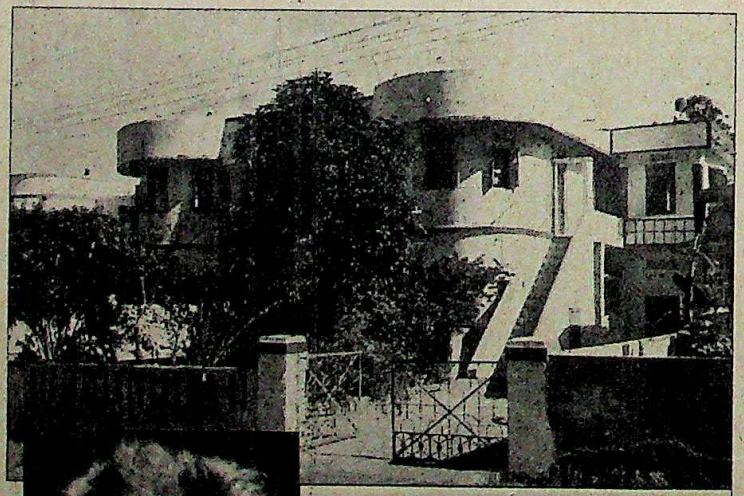
In fact, many people find it easier to draw money from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund simply because no accounts have to be submitted. A glaring example is that of the veteran Congress leader, Mathura Prasad Dubey, 77, chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Energy Development Corporation. As chairman of a government corporation, Dubey is entitled to reimbursement of medical expenditure. But that is a cumbersome procedure. And the corporation would not pay for the travel and taxi bills of expenditure incurred by accompanying relatives. Dubey found it easier to take money from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for his treatment at Bombay recently. Said he: "The chief minister's secretariat is still examining whether the financial burden could be passed on to the corporation."

Similarly, MLAs are allowed free medical treatment in government hospitals. They can also claim reimbursement from the Vidhan Sabha for specialised treatment outside the state. But they seem to be indiscriminately granted money under this head from the 'discretionary' fund.

Vora, however, claims that such cases are few and far between. He says that he normally tries to verify facts from concerned district collectors and most of the recipients of the fund are poor and needy people. "Even the poorest of the poor are now able to get money from the relief fund," he said. He concedes that even rich people sometimes approach him for help. "Mostly they come on medical grounds and if I don't help them I may be called heartless," argued Vora.

As a top-level official in the chief minister's secretariat, who did not want to be identified, admitted, some people have taken money twice and even thrice from the fund. Influential people find it easier to get money while poor people without any connections run from pillar to post. Said Lajja Shanker Herdenia, a Bhopal journalist who recently issued a statement against the practice: "Earlier money was given to only victims of natural calamities and destitutes, that too after verification by collectors of the concerned districts." Raj Bhardwaj, another journalist who was also a signatory to the statement, concurred: "Now money is shamelessly demanded and mindlessly given. No procedure is followed. No criteria are adopted."

Obviously, the fact that the fund is meant expressly for those who have absolutely nothing, is not important. For there to be a single beneficiary other than a destitute man would be highly irregular. This queue of MPs, MLAs, journalists and their ilk is nothing short of scandalous. But it is a matter for the chief minister's discretion, and discretion is obviously the better part of valour.



A rich journalist and a man of property, Telang received over Rs 10,000 for medical treatment.

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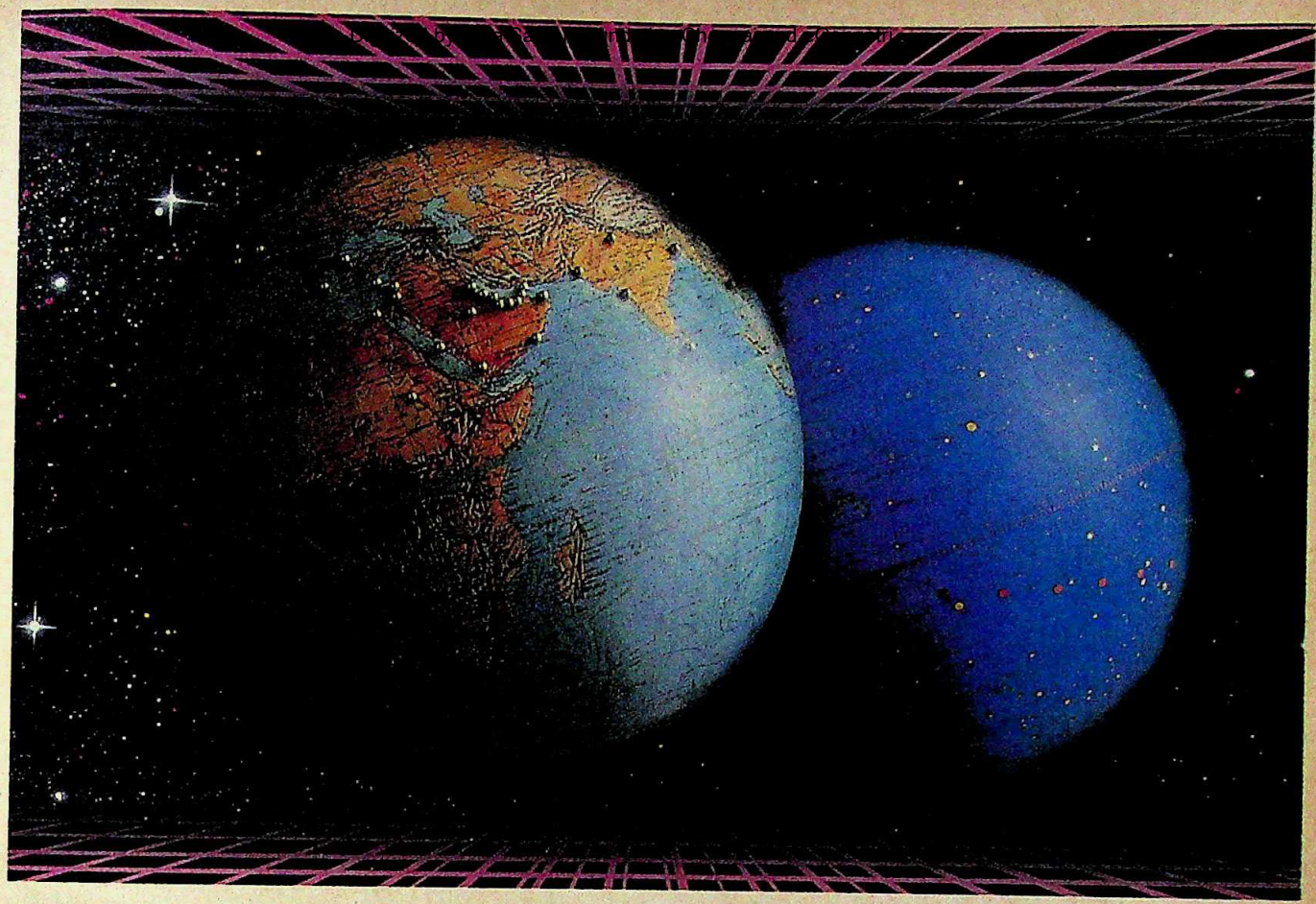

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BANGALORE

Cheering Spirits

Pubs bring a new kind of bonhomie

SEEING their camaraderie, the back-slapping and the belly-laughs, it is difficult to believe that the four college students had met only an hour ago. But cold lager and warm spirits have changed all that. With beer and bonhomie going hand in hand, pub culture—a true British tradition—has taken root in Bangalore.

Indeed, pub culture is bringing bubble and froth to the lives of many in the middle and upper class. Going to a pub is now the 'in' thing: college students zip in and out for a quick mug of beer during free periods and executives who are early for appointments duck in for a quick slug. Irritable husbands restore their spirits with beer while their wives and children go shopping nearby. And cine-goers drop in for a drink before and after showtime.

In the past three years, 46 pubs have sprung up in Bangalore. At a conservative estimate, 35,000 mugs (300 ml each) of draught beer are guzzled daily by the new tribe of 'Pubbees'. During summer, on holidays and week-ends, the quantity doubles. Summing up the quintessence of pub culture, Tariq, a student, says: "Good crowd, good music, good beer."

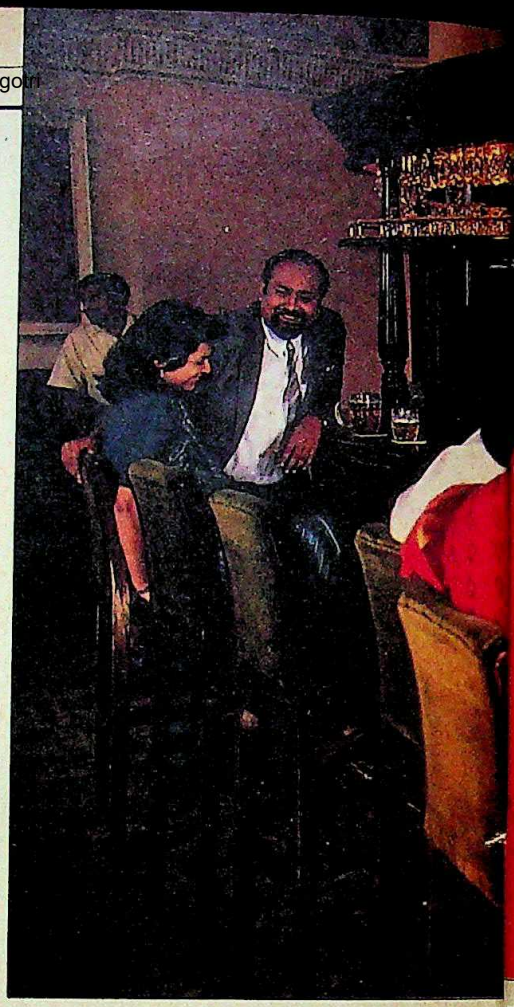
Pub culture revolves around kegs of draught beer, freshly carbonated and chilled. Draught beer is milder, tastier and frothier than bottled beer. And much cheaper. While a bottle of beer (650 ml) costs between Rs 14 and Rs 17, a mug of draught beer costs Rs 5. Says Sharad, a student of the local B.M.S. Engineering College: "Having a coffee or a cola for three bucks is so tame. For just two extra bucks we can get a pint of draught beer."

For various reasons, Bangalore is the only place in India where the pub culture has really caught on. A definite advantage is that this is a brewery town. Draught beer, which is non-pasteurised, turns sour after 72 hours. Ideally, it must be consumed within 24 hours of being despatched in kegs from the brewery.

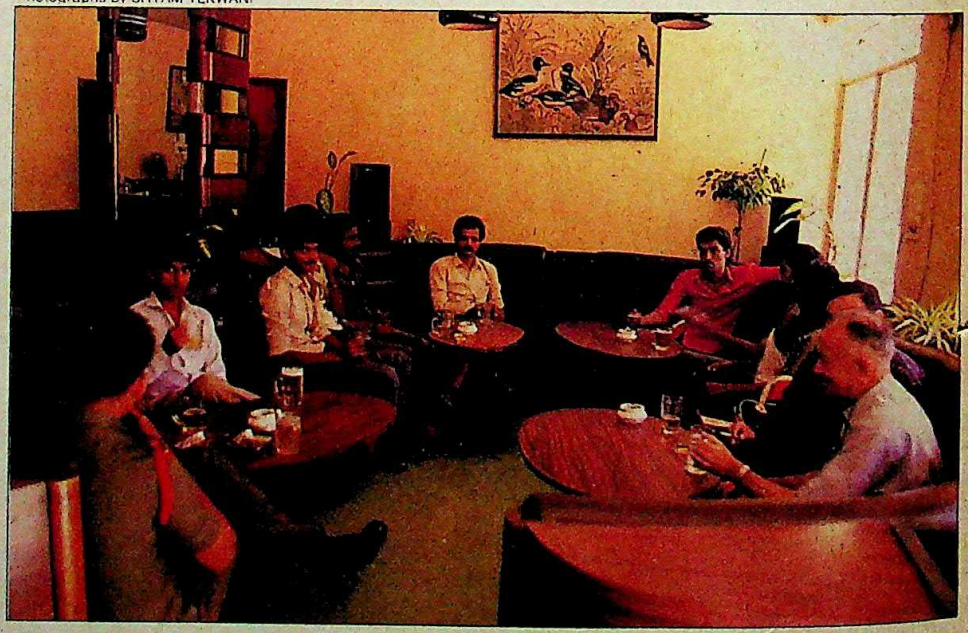
Draught beer has been popular in Bangalore since 1980 when United Breweries began supplying it to the city's Century Club and then to five-star hotels. But it was really Hari Khoday who fathered pub culture when he started Ramda Pub—the city's first—in 1984, making draught beer freely available to the city's middle class.

Pub regulars say that it is the "good atmosphere" that attracts them most. Pubs are informal and cosy, the crowds friendly, unlike in bars, where customers nurse their hard drinks in sombre solitude. The community-seating is designed to create sociability which is what pub culture is all about. Says advertising executive K. Srivatsa: "You make new friends here. Being in a pub is a fun way of knowing what's going on in the city."

Pubs have developed into rendezvous points for the young. At least 80 per cent of the clientele consists of students and young professionals. Businessmen and travellers in the city too are being attracted. Unlike bars which tend to be somewhat sleazy, the better pubs are somewhat rugged in ambience. Says a 29-year-old chartered accountant, working the day's dull routine out of his system:



Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI



"Pubs have pepped up our evenings. This is the best thing to have happened to Bangalore in recent times."

The pub, a typically British institution, is here to stay in the city. The names too run on British lines—The Royal Derby, The Pub, Lava's San Peter Pub and Ramda Pub stand as examples. But only two of Bangalore's new pubs have recreated the atmosphere of the typical British pub. The Royal Derby at the Windsor Manor Hotel is designed as a Regency pub. Everything is British about it: the green-velvet sofas and curtains down to the expensive Axminster carpets. A mug of beer costs Rs 13 here.

Located centrally, The Pub, with its wood-work and arches is very Tudor-style and is the most popular among the youth. A mug of beer is priced at Rs 7 and it sells at least 1,000 mugs a day.

Most of the other pubs are Indian in

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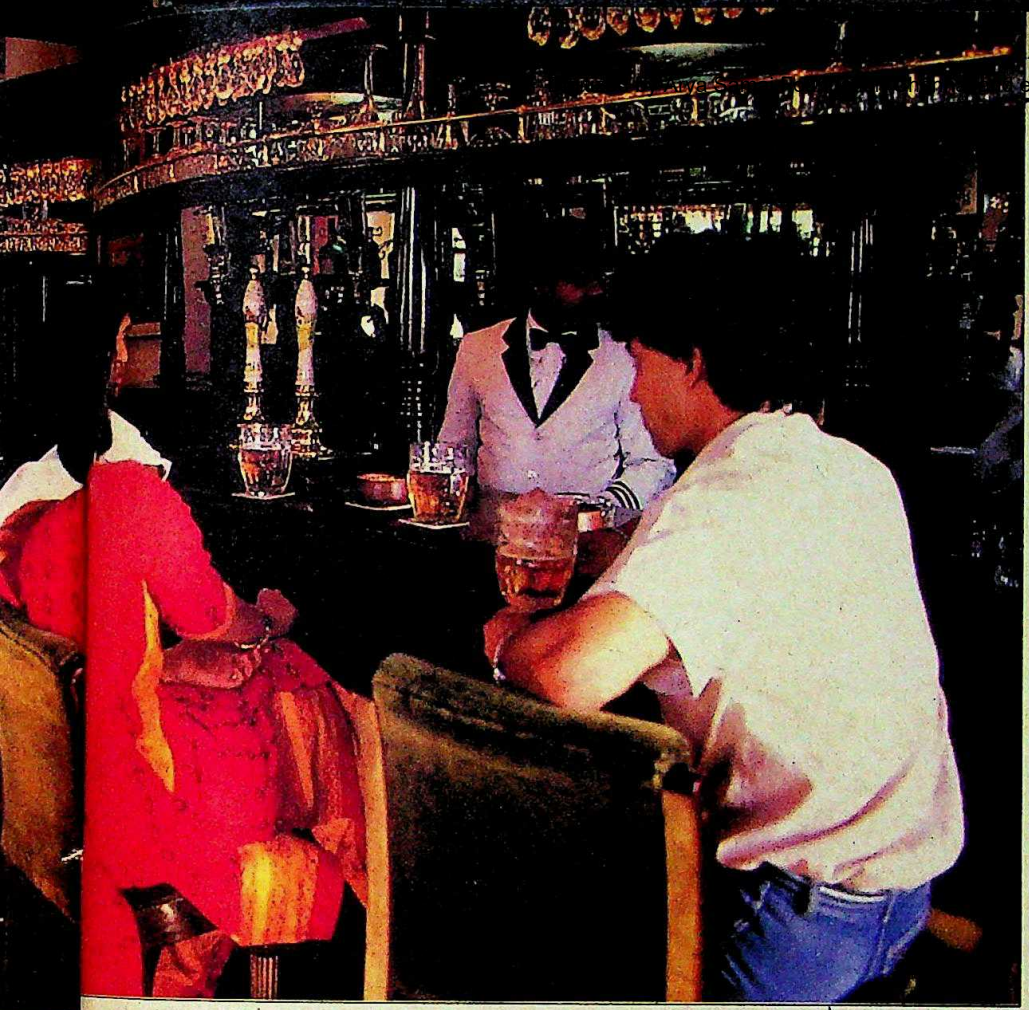

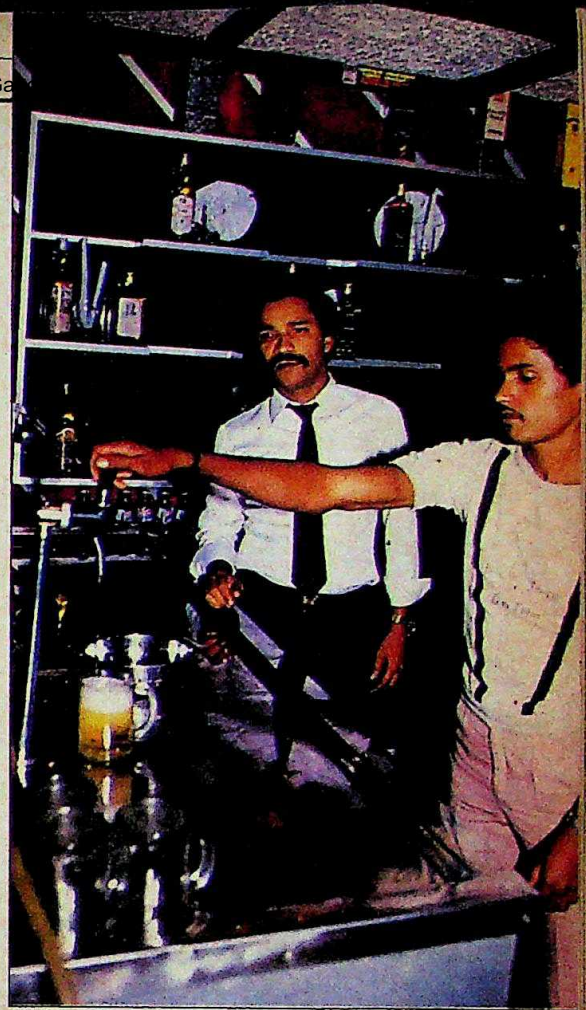

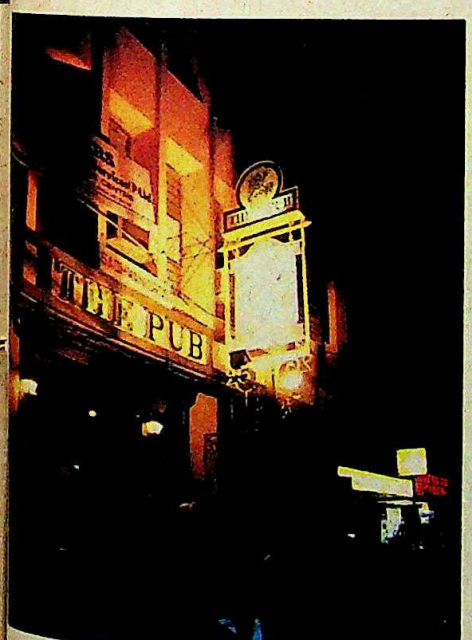

(Clockwise from above) The Royal Derby; Lavas's San Peter Pub 'The Pub' and 'Ramda Pub': frothy fun

decor and ambience. Says Soundarajan Pandian, manager (operations) of Ramda Pubs, owned by the Khodays: "We started on an experimental basis and never thought it would become so popular. But our future pubs will be recreations of typical English pubs." These will probably include English pub games like darts and dominoes, draughts and skittles.

While the customers love the British ambience, their palates don't take to the traditional British fare. Ale and stout are often rejected for lager. Again, there are no takers for roast pheasant or shepherd's pie. Says Ashok Sadhwani, 29, owner of The Pub: "We tried these items initially. It just didn't work. So, we now serve kababs and tandoori items." Even though there are few takers, the Windsor Manor continues to serve British food at its pub. "We don't want to dilute the concept," says Food and Beverages Manager Pradeep De.

Even in conservative Brahmin-dominated residential areas like Basavangudi, pubs have mushroomed. Says Lava's Manager P.T. Jacob: "Brahmin boys seem to have no problems drinking beer. But being vegetarians, they won't have chilli chicken or seekh kababs." Says G.S. Subba Rao, 28, Brahmin company secretary: "I've told my parents I must drink, if I've to move with directors. Or they should expect me to be just a government clerk."

Predictably, pub culture has its votaries and its critics. What worries many is the potential it has for increased alcoholism, particularly among the youth. But pub regulars chorus in protest: "Beer is so mild. Besides, we drink to socialise, not to get drunk." Still, others feel that it may lead them on to hard liquor. Says T.M. Thomas, an architect: "After all, pubs have made it easy for the young to have beer." But Mantej, a medical student retorts: "We drank beer before—in cars and hostel rooms. It's just that now we have a better place to drink in." And as another pub-goer says: "Pub culture is a revolution that is bringing out all the closet drinkers. That's a healthy sign."

With pubs authorised to sell only draught or bottled beer, not hard liquor, licences are pegged at a low Rs 1,200 per annum (a bar licence costs Rs 35,000 as the sale of hard liquor brings in greater profits). Many more pubs are on the anvil, and not just in Bangalore. Khodays plan to open a hundred pubs in south India within five years' time, while United Breweries plans to supply draught beer to 18 new outlets in the city in the next four months. By next year, Bangalore will have as many as 70 pubs.

Though pubs are predominantly habituated by men, the scene is gradually changing. College girls and even pearl-and-chiffon-clad society women are no longer a rarity. Pensioners also seem to be taking to pubs. Already, there are a few early callers at the pubs, who pore over their morning newspaper—not over a cup of tea, but over a tankard of beer.

—ANITA PRATAP

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They also happen to be fire-proof, stain-proof, acid-resistant and dust repellant.
But don't let that sway you.
Allow yourself, instead, to fall hopelessly in love with their looks.
They're available in three sizes: 8×4, 8×8, or 12×12.
And twelve tasteful colours: silver grey, leather, off-white, apple brown, coffee, green, ivory, amber, ochre, pale grey, smoked grey and speckle.
A glamorous alternative to mosaic, granite, marble or stone.
For homes and offices. Hotels and auditoriums.
Whether you follow your head or your heart, you'll agree:
They're the best thing that's happened to floors since the wall-to-wall carpet.

JOHNSON
DESIGNER FLOOR TILES

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STALLING A TAKE-OVER

SUSPICIOUS of a take-over move, the Larsen & Toubro management has decided on a defensive manoeuvre. The company board, led by Chairman N.M. Desai, has approved a proposal to create an employees' trust which will then be issued shares of the company—at par. The share now rules at seven to eight times the face value, and the issuing of a substantial chunk of new shares at par will dramatically increase the share-buying capacity of the employees' trust while making it that much more difficult for any raider to match the trust's shareholding capacity and stake a claim to the management. At the moment, the financial institutions hold about 45 per cent of the shares. The move to form an employees' trust will, however, need clearance from the Company Affairs Department, which has already been investigating into the affairs of the company on some counts. But Desai clearly plans to put up a stiffer fight than Shaw Wallace chairman S.P. Acharya did, should there be a stock-market raid on Larsen & Toubro.

ZIPPER WAR

INDIAN Sewing Machines (the Singer company) is eyeing the buttons and zipper market, and is considering Swiss collaboration. The company sees a great market opportunity because the country currently imports zippers worth Rs 150 crore. Even buttons are imported in large quantities because local products are said to be of poor quality.

There is, however, a hurdle or two in the company's way. Zippers were reserved for the small sector, but the Government dereserved them last year. Small-scale manufacturers got a stay order from court and the Government had to cancel letters of intent that it had already issued to some large companies. Indian Sewing Machines now hopes the stay will soon be vacated, so that it can go ahead with its plans.

NOT FOR SALE

THE Indian Duplicator Company (better known by the Gestetner brand name of its products) is not going to change hands after all. Some well-known corporate raiders had been eyeing the company, which has an accepted brand name, 16 offices across the country and a trained sales force. At least one of the hopeful raiders had planned to use these assets to build a diversified consumer products company. But the company's overseas shareholders—who own 40 per cent of Indian Duplicator's equity—have made it clear that they have no intention to sell their shareholding in the foreseeable future.

BATTLE FOR SUPREMACY

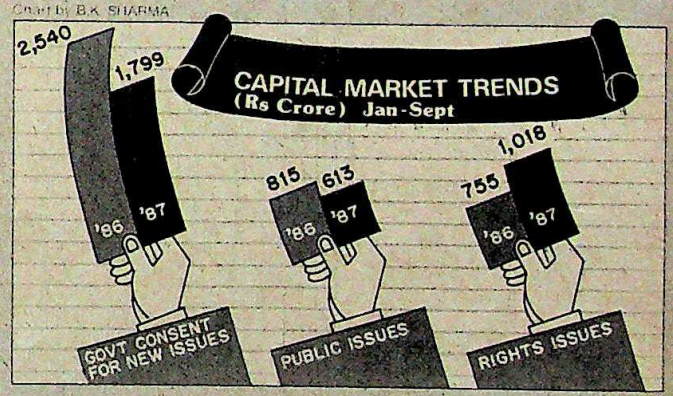
FOLLOWING the shifting of loyalties by some major business groups, from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Assocham), jockeying has begun for primacy between the two rival federations.

So far, FICCI has been representing the Indian side on bilateral joint business councils involving 34 different countries. Now Assocham has staked a claim to represent the Indian business and has in fact got on to two new joint business councils. But pleas to the Government for allowing representation on the old councils too have met with the counter that these are private matters concerning FICCI, and that the Government has nothing to do with them.

DRAMATIC SLOW-DOWN

THE year 1987 has seen a dramatic slow-down in the pace of new investment proposals, as reflected in the stock-market. The Government's consent for new capital issues has dropped to Rs 1,799 crore in January-September 1987, from Rs 2,540 crore in the corresponding months of 1986. Capital actually issued to the public has also dropped, from Rs 815 crore to Rs 613 crore.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



But a new trend is emerging—raising capital through rights issues. Such issues (which are classified separately from public issues) totalled Rs 755 crore in the first nine months of 1986, but shot up to Rs 1,018 crore in the first nine months of 1987. Clearly, companies have realised that it is safer (and cheaper, in terms of promotion and publicity costs) to draw out investors from the existing lists of shareholders and debenture-holders.

DOUBLING PRODUCTION

WHILE several private sector promoters of fertiliser projects have been either backing out or dragging their feet, causing major delays in the implementation of the series of gas-based projects, the Aditya Birla-run Indo-Gulf Fertiliser plans to double its capacity. The first unit, with an investment of Rs 750 crore, is scheduled to start production next year. The proposed second unit is now expected to cost only Rs 500 crore, so that the overall capital cost per unit of production capacity is brought down and the company is placed in a better position in the fertiliser market. The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative is also planning to double its capacity at the Aonla gas-based unit.

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THE MODIS

Fratricidal War

A messy feud breaks out in a leading business family

FOR months the rumour mills had been busy, with talk of the Modis fighting among themselves. There were squabbles in the boardroom, officials were physically beaten up by one member of the family for suspected fealty to another, and disputes took place over the companies' accounts and bills not being passed. Finally the fight—messy and almost putrid—burst into the open. And a giant business group—ranked the fourth largest in the country on the strength of its annual turnover of over Rs 1,100 crore—faced the prospect of a vertical split.

Ranged against each other are group Chairman Kedar Nath Modi and his three sons, and the five sons of the late Gujar Mal Modi, who founded the group (*see family tree*). In the year-long run-up to what is heading for a contentious climax, a series of incidents have betrayed both bitterness and bad blood:

► At a board meeting of Modi Alkali and Chemicals (run by two of K.N. Modi's sons), company Chairman K.K. Modi (the oldest of Gujar Mal's five sons and vice-chairman of the entire group) flatly refused to ratify the last year's accounts.

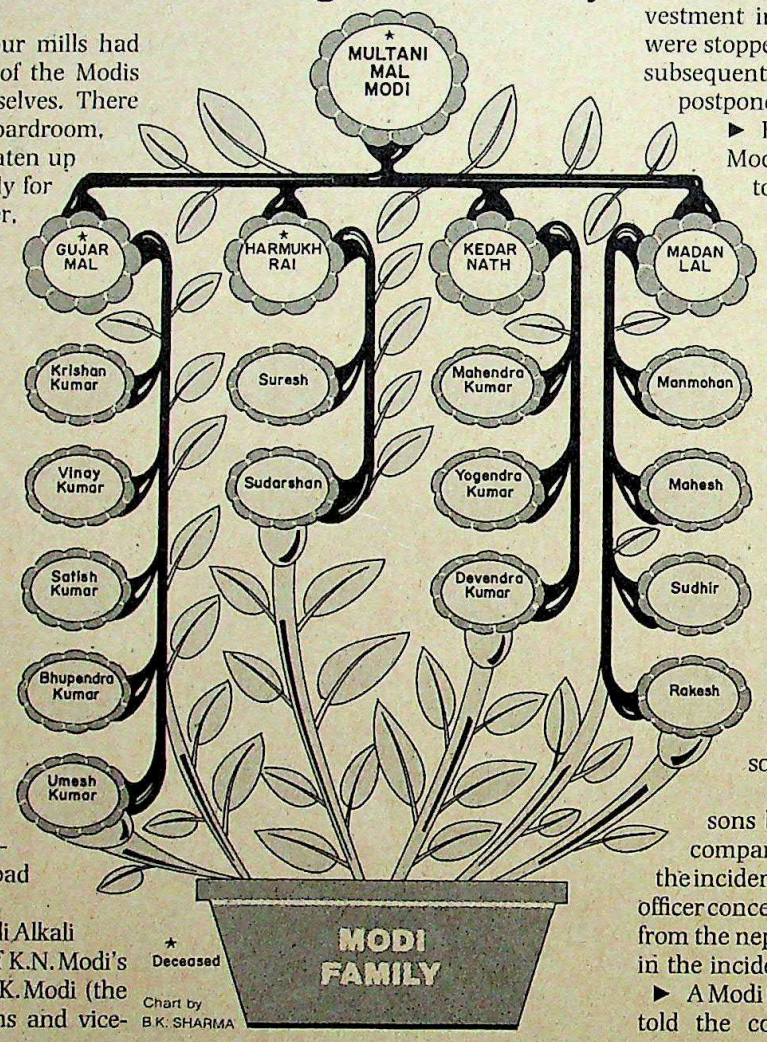
► At a meeting of the board of Modi Rubber, Chairman K.N. Modi refused to sanction investments in new projects to be run by B.K. Modi, his nephew. In retaliation, Modi Rubber's proposed investment in K.N. Modi's son's projects were stopped. With tension mounting, a subsequent board meeting had to be postponed.

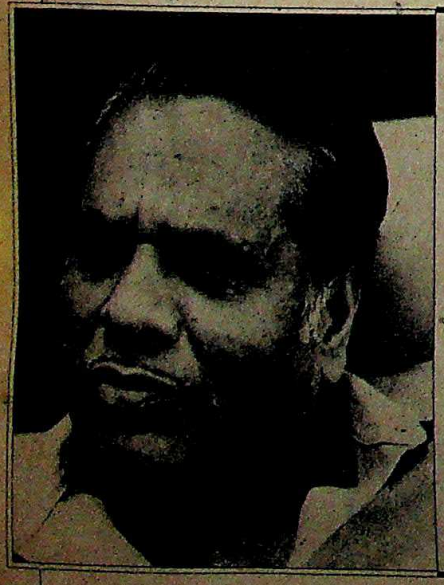
► Representatives from the K.N. Modi branch of the family were told shortly before a board meeting of Modi Carpets that the meeting would not take place. But after they absented themselves, the board met and passed a resolution to replace the two managing directors (one Modi from each branch of the family) with a new management team in which K.N. Modi's son Devendra Kumar would be outnumbered.

► Modi Rubber refused to pay the salaries of doctors appointed by K.N. Modi in connection with the group's charitable hospital project. Some of K.N. Modi's personal bills were also stopped.

► One of Gujar Mal Modi's sons beat up an officer in a Modi company. K.N. Modi, on hearing of the incident, apologised in writing to the officer concerned—but got a sharp riposte from the nephew who had been involved in the incident.

► A Modi from one branch of the family told the commercial manager in his





K.N. Modi and his sons want to separate in order to get a bigger share of the business, and have got the financial institutions to back them.

K.K. Modi and his brothers appealed to Rajiv Gandhi and the finance minister, arguing that the group's business was indivisible.

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company not to show their accounts to his co-managing director from the other branch of the family. Another executive was sacked by one of K.N. Modi's sons for allegedly siding with a Modi from the rival branch of the family. That prompted a counter-order to ignore the sack order.

▶ Some of K.K. Modi's brothers were accused of storming the office of a cousin, and trampling on the photograph of group Chairman K.N. Modi.

▶ At S.K. Modi's daughter's wedding last month, the rival branch of the family made only a token appearance at the main function and stayed away from all the related lunches and dinners.

Each side has its explanations and denials on these and other incidents. No, K.N. Modi's photograph was never trampled upon; the salaries of the doctors appointed by K.N. Modi were stopped because the Industrial Finance Corporation of India had protested at a previous instance; the management committee system was needed in Modi Carpets in order to bring in the active participation of the British collaborator, and the change was subsequently ratified at a meeting chaired by K.N. Modi himself; and that the Modi Rubber board has finally cleared all the pending investment proposals.

Whatever be the case, tension had been building up, and matters finally boiled over when the Government and the financial institutions stepped into the fray. In a desperate move shortly before this, K.N. Modi had taken the issue directly to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. And after the institutions got into the act and advised the group to split in

MRS. DAYAWATI MODI
MODI ENTERPRISES

November 9, 1987

Hon'ble Prime Minister,

Modi Group was founded in 1932 by my late Husband, Rai Bahadur Gujarmal Modi. He came from Patiala and established townships of Modinagar and Modipuram from scra[illegible]. [illegible] should give just ughout support to the maintenance of unity, integrity and growth of Modi Group.

With affectionate and warm regards,

Yours sincerely,
Dayawati Modi
[DAYAWATI MODI]

Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi
Prime Minister of India
NEW DELHI

Minutes of the meeting.

There is a desire of Shri K.N.Modi and his sons for separation. As mutual discussions have not succeeded between Shri K.N.Modi and Shri K.K.Modi, it has accordingly been agreed to take the help of outside mediators as under:

(a) One eminent outside person will be nominated by Shri K.N.Modi.

(b) Another outside eminent person will be nominated by Shri K.K.Modi.

These names will be given by the two within 15 days i.e. by the 18th November 1987.

(c) The two mediators will choose an umpire before they start their work.

(d) The two mediators will be requested to complete the work and give their decision before the 30th December 1987.

(e) The decision of the two mediators if unanimous or the decision of the umpire will be binding on Shri K.K.Modi and his brothers and Shri K.N.Modi and his sons.

(f) All information will be made available to these two mediators by all Modis without any delay. These mediators will have the freedom to meet the bankers, the financial institutions and collaborators of various concerns in the Modi Group, if considered necesssary by them.

Signed this day Tuesday, the 3rd November 1987 at Bombay.

K.K. Modi should that the matter is concluded in this by that S.K. Modi is out of shareholding. K.K. Modi has to obtain consent of the minor by father.

Shri K.N.Modi
Shri K.K.Modi
Shri M.K.Modi
Shri V.K.Modi 3.11.87
Shri Y.K.Modi
Shri S.K.Modi
Shri D.K.Modi
Shri B.K.Modi
Shri U.K.Modi

Dayawati Modis' letter to the prime minister (top); and signed minutes of discussions in Bombay

order to put an end to the friction, Gujar Mal's widow Dayavati and five sons quickly went to Rajiv themselves.

Both groups have also lobbied furiously for Finance Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari's support—it is after all Tiwari who controls the financial institutions—and that of a host of other ministers and Congress(I) politicians. The stakes are high, the feuding is intense, and there are no holds barred.

The institutions are to be feared because they have intervened in other family squabbles before: the Thapar and Mafatlal cases, for instance. And at a meeting in early November, Bank of India Chairman R. Srinivasan told the Modis bluntly that the banks and institutions had a greater investment in the group than the family themselves.

That is certainly true: the institutions and banks have invested Rs 360 crore in the group, either as shares or in the form of loans. Equally important, they have threatened that if the Modis do not sort out their affairs quickly, fresh loans may not be forthcoming for the group's new projects.

Worse, outside auditors might be appointed to keep a watch on the companies' accounts, and more institutional nominees placed on the boards. The Modis are especially vulnerable to such threats because in recent years many of their companies have run into financial trouble, and six of them have fallen behind on the repayment of institutional loans.

The meeting where

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the Modis were given this blunt warning was perhaps unprecedented in nature and scope. Present in the Industrial Development Bank of India's (IDBI) conference room on the 14th floor of Nariman Bhavan in downtown Bombay were the chairmen, managing directors or executive directors of some of the big banks and all the term-lending financial institutions: the IDBI, Industrial Finance Corporation of India, Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India, Life Insurance Corporation, General Insurance Corporation, Unit Trust of India, State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Bank of India and Canara Bank.

With IDBI's down-to-earth Chairman S.S. Nadkarni in the chair, the heads of the institutions first talked to K.N. Modi and his three sons, asking them what they thought was the problem and what they wanted. K.N. Modi said the existing family arrangement for running the group's companies (in which more than one Modi is directly in charge of each company) was not working satisfactorily and that he wanted either a split or a clear separation of managements. But when the institutions talked to Gujar Mal Modi's five sons, the eldest, Krishan Kumar, said that he didn't see a serious problem, and that the group should stay together.

Nadkarni said that the institutions did not want to intervene in a family squabble and that they should sort the matter out themselves. This was more or less equivalent to holding a gun in a hand gloved in velvet, and the Modis quickly got the message. That evening K.K. Modi and his brothers went across to visit K.N. Modi at his guest-house in the city, and sought a discussion on how to amicably settle the family feud. K.N. Modi, according to one of his nephews, declined to discuss the matter, pleading that he had nothing to say. One of K.N. Modi's sons countered that if, at the end of several months of dispute, someone came and asked what the fight was all about, he clearly was not trying to reach a settlement.

Whatever the actual events that night at the guest-house, the institutions were told the next morning that the family had failed to come to any settlement. Nadkarni now swung quickly into action, and summoned all the nine Modis to a joint meeting, with the other institutions and bank representatives also present. Once the meeting got under way, he made it plain that if the family could not settle its affairs, public investment in the group's companies was at risk.

A split was now more or less forced on the Modis. An IDBI stenographer was called in and K.K. Modi asked to dictate the minutes of what they had agreed to. This done, everyone dispersed for lunch with a decision to reconvene in the afternoon to sign the typed minutes of the agreement. K.N. Modi and his sons reconvened as scheduled and signed on the dotted line before leaving to catch their early-evening flight back to Delhi. But of K.K. Modi and his brothers there was no sign.

Eventually, they did turn up, but they signed only after K.K. Modi added in ink that his mother was abroad and that he would have to obtain her consent for the decision as recorded in the minutes of the meeting. As one of K.N. Modi's sons said later, this was advance warning that his cousins were having second thoughts and were looking for a way out of a situation into which they had been cornered by the financial institutions.

The minutes themselves said that "There is a desire of Shri K.N. Modi and his sons for separation. As mutual discussions have not succeeded between Shri K.N. Modi and Shri K.K. Modi, it has accordingly been agreed to take the help of outside mediators...." Each branch of the family was to nominate an eminent person as a mediator, the two mediators would choose an umpire and then give their final decision before December 30. This decision would be binding on all the Modis.

But the hand-written rider that K.K. Modi had added at the last minute was a foretaste of things to come, and the agreement at the November 3 meeting quickly came unstuck. Gujar Mal Modi and K.N. Modi are only two of the four sons that their father Multani Mal Modi had. The other two—the late Harmukh Rai Modi and Madan Lal Modi—had parted ways in 1976 and had only limited ties with the Modi group run by Gujar Mal Modi's sons and K.N. Modi's branch of the business family.

However, the 1976 separation had not been fully implemented for a variety of reasons, and four days after the Bombay meeting Madan Lal Modi wrote to K.K. Modi, objecting to the new understanding. He argued that the 1976 agreement was still pending and until the matter was sorted out there could be no further separation in the group. Implicit in his letter was the threat of legal action. A similar objection came from Harmukh Rai Modi's son Suresh, specifically warning of legal action.

But then, in another four days, M.L. Modi changed his stand again, and now wrote to K.K. Modi that the mediators chosen to settle the issue between him and K.N. Modi should be asked to settle the 1976 matter as well. Clearly, a great deal of manoeuvring was going on among the different branches of the family.

Meanwhile, Dayawati Modi and her sons sought, and got, a meeting with Rajiv Gandhi at his Race Course Road residence. Dayawati gave him a letter in which she argued that the decision taken in Bombay was "bad in law and illegal". She added that "some outside forces and enemies of (the) Modi group are bringing

Table by B.K. SHARMA

THE MODI GROUP (1985-86)

		TURNOVER (RS CRORE)	NET PROFIT/LOSS (RS CRORE)
	MODIPON	153.65	+ 2.07
MACL	*MODI ALKALIES	23.60	+ 0.63
Modistone	*BOMBAY TYRES	125.10	− 0.20
MODI XEROX	*MODI XEROX	64.51	+ 1.45
GODFREY PHILLIPS	GODFREY PHILLIPS	204.73	+ 0.69
MODI CEMENT	*MODI CEMENT	51.00	− 10.31**
	MODI RUBBER	318.69	+ 1.86
	MODI SPINNING & WEAVING MILLS	27.30	− 0.32
	MODI INDUSTRIES	161.00	+ 0.60
	MODI CARPETS	8.24	− 4.98

* Figures are for 1986-87
** Provisional

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undue and unjust pressure with the sole purpose of destroying (the) Modi group". Pleading that "I cannot live to see this fine institution...destroyed," she asked the prime minister to prevent the "forced disintegration", and said that if the K.N. Modi branch of the family wanted to separate, it should be allowed to do so "without affecting the integrity and indivisibility" of the mainstream Modi group. She added that the banks and financial institutions should support this objective.

Clearly, the K.K. Modi branch of the family felt that K.N. Modi had manoeuvred them into accepting a split of the group's business, and were now trying to undo the damage. The hostile reference to the financial institutions in the letter to Rajiv can only be seen in this light.

In point of fact, however, the more active role may have been played not by Rajiv but by Finance Minister Tiwari. At least some of the signals in Bombay were that the institutions acted on the basis of instructions from Tiwari.

But Tiwari was soon neutralised by some effective lobbying from a businessman considered close to him, Sitaram Singhania of LML (formerly Lohia Machines). Singhania is related by marriage to the K.K. Modi branch of the family. Tiwari was now seen as being more 'neutral'. Meanwhile, the prime minister reportedly told the two branches of the Modis that the Government did not want to intervene in a family dispute, but that there should not be any "hanky-panky" and that public money should be protected.

K.K. Modi also wrote directly to Nadkarni, pointing to the objections raised by his mother, M.L. Modi and Suresh Modi, and said there were legal problems involved. "Notwithstanding our earnest desire to put an end to the matter, the mediation...cannot proceed," he wrote, and added that if K.N. Modi's family wanted to separate, it should do so without affecting the "integrity and indivisibility" of the group. K.K. Modi also noted that he was meeting Tiwari in this connection.

That seemed to take matters back to square one, although K.N. Modi's sons argued that their lawyers had told them that the 1976 settlement did not come in the way of the November decision hammered out with the institutions.

Contacted last fortnight for his response to the latest situation, the chairman of a financial institution said: "They are busy fighting among themselves; we don't want to get involved in a family matter and would like them to sort it out themselves. But public money must always be safeguarded."

In Delhi, meanwhile, there were unsubstantiated rumours of a tax raid being mounted on some Modi companies, based on tip-offs received from within the group. There was even talk of the Government taking over the management of one of the group's prominent companies, though there was no substantiation possible of any such move.

But such rumours harked back to events in 1976, immediately before the family split had taken place. At the height of the Emergency in the country, a major tax raid was mounted on the Modis—reportedly on the basis of tip-offs from within the family. If history was about to be repeated, things were going to get very messy indeed.

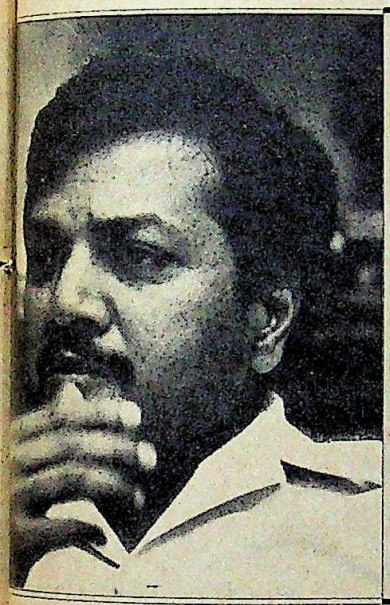
Certainly, one of K.N. Modi's sons had warned K.K. Modi at a meeting that if the family did not settle matters quickly and to mutual satisfaction, the whole business group would be destroyed by the infighting. And papers were circulated showing how Modi Carpets' stock figures reported in two different places showed a substantial difference.

K.K. Modi was out of the country last fortnight and unavailable for comment. But his brother V.K. Modi said that "as far as we are concerned, the group cannot be split. If K.N. Modi has a problem, he should talk to us instead of going to outsiders. I don't even know what the problem is." That was being disingenuous.

As any observer of the Modi family knows, there have been tensions for years because Gujar Mal Modi's five sons have firm control of the group's major companies. And although K.N. Modi has been chairman of the group since Gujar Mal's death in 1976, his sons have been junior partners in the companies. K.N. Modi has been concerned about this for some time, especially after he was afflicted by cancer some years ago. For if his sons were to get a bigger share of the pie, they stood little chance of doing so if K.N. Modi was not around to give a helping hand.

Thus, in virtually all the companies, it is either K.K. Modi or one of his brothers who is the senior family member in charge;

- K.K. Modi himself runs Modipon and Godfrey Phillips;
- B.K. Modi and V.K. Modi (both from the K.K. Modi branch) run Modi Rubber and Bombay Tyres; B.K. Modi also has Modi Xerox;



"The group is ours as much as anyone else's. Just because I want a proper separation of management, it doesn't mean that I want to split the group."
M.K. MODI

"Just because they want more, they can't snatch the management away from someone else. That kind of negative thinking won't get anywhere."
V.K. MODI

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► S.K. Modi is the senior man in charge at Modi Carpets and Modi Spinning;

► V.K. Modi is once again the senior man at Modi Cement; and

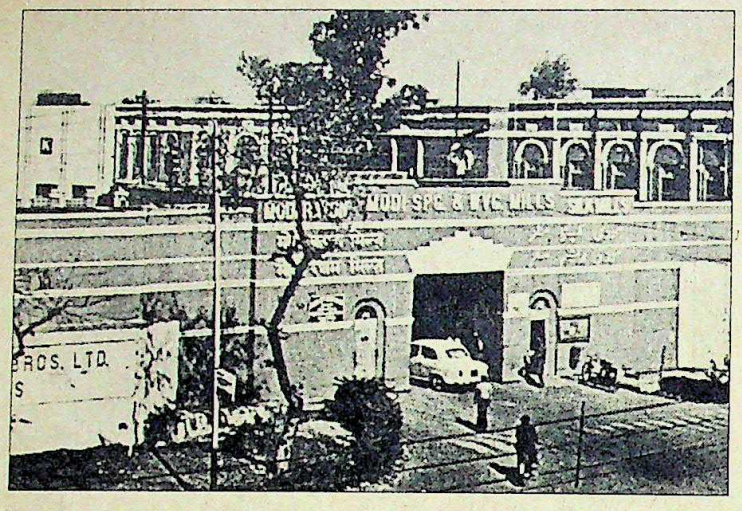
► Umesh Modi has Bihar Sponge Iron and Sterling Drugs.

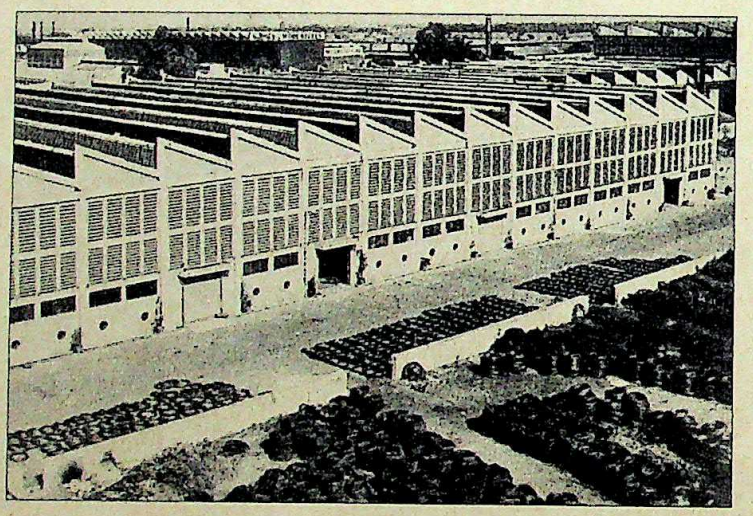
In comparison, the only company run exclusively by K.N. Modi's sons is Modi Alkali, while M.K. Modi has a part of Modipon and Modi Industries.

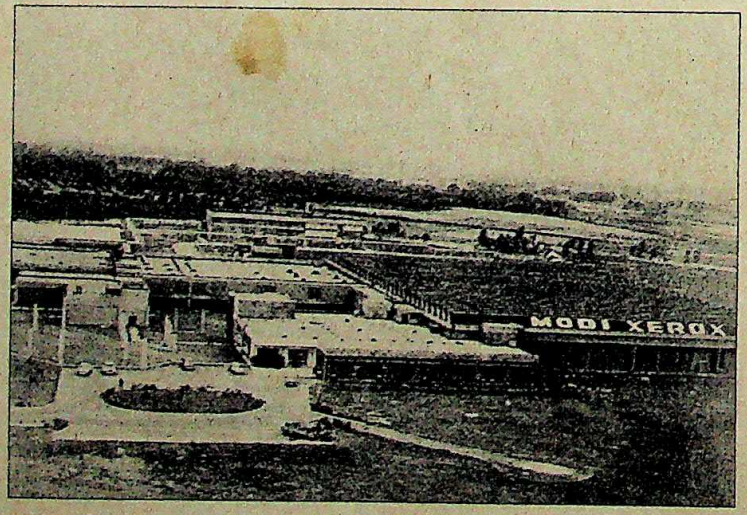
In all the other companies, they are junior partners to the rival branch of the family. The same story is repeated in the case of new projects. Perhaps the vital fact in all this is also that, in virtually all the companies, it is the K.K. Modi branch which controls the finances.

But B.K. Modi said: "It is not by chance that some of us have done better. If you put eight horses in a race, some will run faster than others." And V.K. Modi argued last fortnight that "Just because they want more, it doesn't mean that they can snatch the management away from someone else. That kind of negative thinking won't get anywhere." S.K. Modi in turn pointed out that "It is not for any family to decide on a company's management, or change it. Each company's shareholders have to decide what is best for them."

K.K. Modi's brothers also argue that the seeds of the dispute have been sown by K.N. Modi's youngest son Devendra Kumar who, they say, has been unable to settle down at any company and has frequently clashed with the group's collaborators. But Devendra Kumar's brothers insist that the problem goes beyond that, and concerns having a fair share of management responsibility. They argue that K.K. Modi has himself accepted this, but that he is unable to carry his brothers along with him.







(From top) Modi Silk Mills; Modi Steels; and Modi Xerox

K.N. Modi's eldest son Mahendra Kumar argued last fortnight that he had worked as managing director for Modipon just as hard as K.K.Modi. He said: "The group is ours as much as anyone else's. Just because I want a proper separation of management, it does not mean I want to split the group. Why don't they agree to an independent mediator deciding things? Is it because they realise that no mediator will find it possible to agree to their stand?"

While the slanging match went on, it was clear that left to themselves the Modis would not be able to come to any mutual understanding. While the K.K. Modi branch maintained that there was no problem, that outsiders should not be involved in family matters, and that anyone who wanted to separate could sell his shares and take cash for them, K.N. Modi's sons said that all they wanted was a more equitable distribution of the management, with the decision to be taken by independent outsiders of eminence.

An outright battle based on shareholding strength is not possible either, because the family as a rule holds only about 25 per cent of the shares in any of its companies, and these shares are divided among the different branches of the family. Moreover, frequently, the group's foreign collaborators and the financial institutions have a bigger shareholding strength in its companies.

Given the impasse, it remains to be seen whether the institutions will step into the fray afresh, or whether the instructions from the Finance Ministry will be to maintain a hands-off policy. One well-informed observer predicted that there would be no immediate settlement, and that the dispute would continue.

If that proves to be true, what remains to be seen is whether matters will get messier—and bloodier—than they already are.

—T.N. NINAN and SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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TEXTILES

Tax Trouble

Absurd rates for industry

RARELY has an industry been in a state of continuous crisis, as textiles have been for the past several years. And rarely has the Government's response been so quixotic.

Late last month, the Government issued a tax notification that left the industry gasping in amazement. Excise duties on cheaper fabrics were raised dramatically, by up to 900 per cent, while the duty on costly cloth was slashed (in some cases) to a quarter of the existing levels. An enraged Indian Cotton Mills Federation (ICMF) estimated that while cheap cloth would cost 20 per cent more, a handful of companies producing expensive cloth would benefit substantially from the duty structure.

Inevitably, there was a storm of protest. And it soon turned out that the Finance Ministry had not even consulted the Textile Ministry before deciding on the new tax structure. Finance Ministry officials argued that the change had been aimed at putting an end to rampant tax evasion by cloth processing houses which undervalue the fabric to reduce the financial burden. So the basis of the tax had been shifted from the cloth's value to its width and weight.

However, the new tax rates are heavily weighted against cheap cloth. By one estimate, the extra tax burden on inexpensive fabric—of around Rs 200 crore—would be substantially offset by the tax cuts on more costly cloth.

Kapal Mehra, chairman of Orkay Silk Mills (one of the half a dozen companies that stood to gain from this) argues that "it's nonsense to say revised rates will help only the top few companies. This will cut tax evasion." Nevertheless, the Government developed second thoughts, and officials admitted they had erred. Two weeks later, a fresh tax notification was issued, putting an end to some absurdities of the earlier one.

But that was not the end of the story. Tax officials blundered again in fixing a rock bottom tax rate of 50 paise per square metre on knitted fabric. As some lobbyists pointed out to the Central Board of Excise and Customs, up-market upholstery and curtain material produced by Orkay and soon to be manufactured by Reliance Industries—for prices up to Rs 600 per metre—were also knitted fabric, and therefore taxable at just 50 paise. For all one knows, a third tax notification may be round the corner.

An incredulous textile industry pointed out, meanwhile, that in the middle of an unnecessary to-do over these tax rates, more serious problems continued to be ignored. Says ICMF President S.K. Modi: "The industry is urgently in need of help, but we aren't getting it from the Government."

The textile mills have certainly been going through hard times. In March last year, 72 mills were lying closed. A year later, that number had gone up to 90. Now, no fewer than 127 have shut down, and the figure is continually climbing.

Central to the crisis is the fact that cloth prices haven't kept pace with the soaring prices of raw cotton, which have virtually doubled over the past year. The index for cotton prices shot up from 162.9 in September 1986 to 310 a year later. Prices then dipped momentarily, when the new crop began arriving in the market, but have now shot up again.

The Government argues that cotton prices a year ago were unusually depressed, but the industry counters that now they are much too high, due to which more mills will close down. The ICMF's estimates of the cotton crop, the carry-over stock and the mills' requirements lead to the conclusion that the demand-supply balance is delicately poised, and prices could keep rising as a result. Says Modi: "The only way out is to import viscose yarn, which can blend easily with cotton. Viscose now commands fantastic premiums and that indicates the shortage of raw material."

Textile Secretary Shiromani Sharma says that viscose fibre import can be considered. But the industry's problems are more deep-rooted. Complains S.P. Oswal, chairman of Vardhman Spinning Mills: "Being in the organised sector, we can't close temporarily when raw materials fall short. At the same time we have 25 per cent excess spinning capacity. This is why mills become sick."

The new textile policy was supposed to deliver the industry from its troubles. It has not done so despite being in operation for more than two years. Sharma, however, maintains that the policy is working because total cloth production is up. Nevertheless, most of the increased production is coming from powerlooms, not mills in the organised sector. The textiles secretary argues that a kind of restructuring is going on in the industry. He may be right—and the Government is unlikely to interfere with the forces at work. But if the raw cotton situation does indeed get difficult, things will only get worse for the mills.

—T.N.NINAN with P.G. MATHAI

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"The industry is in need of urgent help, but we aren't getting it from the Government ...The only way is to import viscose yarn."

S.K. MODI,
president, Indian Cotton Mills Federation

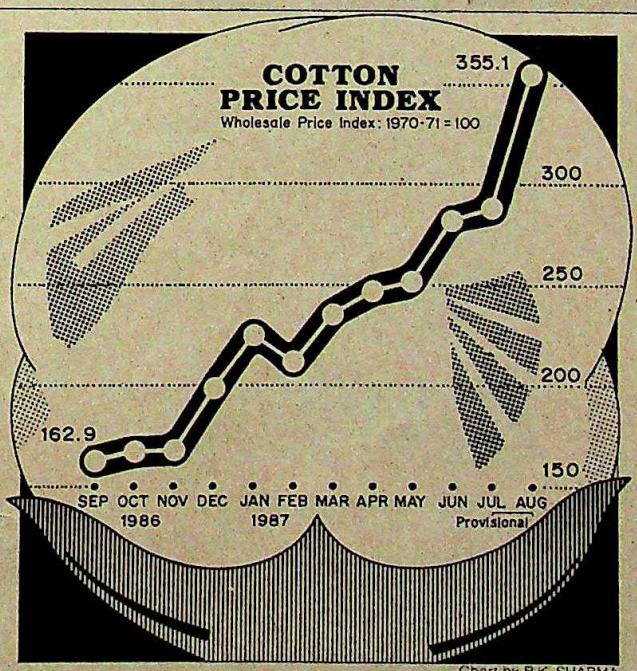

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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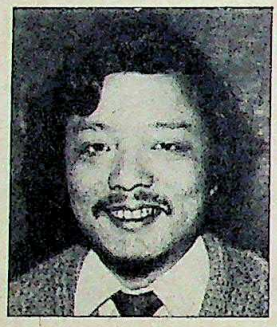
GTC INDUSTRIES

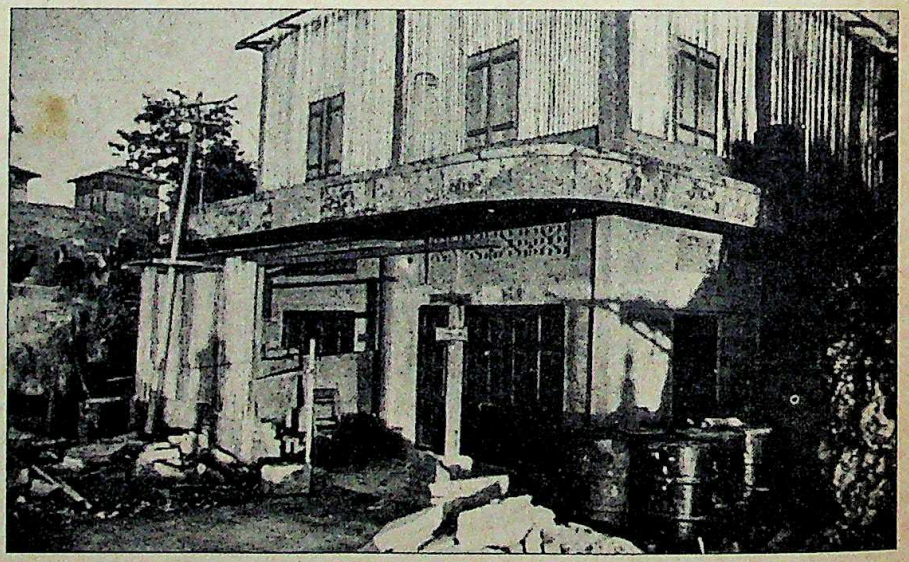
Excise Scam

Raids reveal illegal operation

EVEN before it has completed a year in office, the Mizo National Front (MNF) Government in Mizoram is in the throes of a major scandal. Close relatives of Law Minister Saingura Sailo floated a cigarette factory that is charged with acting as an ally of the Delhi-based GTC Industries (one of the three giants in the cigarette business) to illegally produce Panama cigarettes and thus evade excise duty. Excise officials busted the operation just 15 days after it began on October 16 and say the excise duty evaded runs into nearly Rs 1 crore. The scandal has greatly embarrassed the Laldenga Ministry, with the Congress(I) swearing to unearth the murky details of government involvement.



Law Minister Sailo (left); and unauthorised cigarette shed



After a series of simultaneous raids on GTC in New Delhi, Bombay, Hyderabad and Guwahati, excise officials last fortnight tried to piece together the evidence to show how the Mizoram unit was being used by GTC to evade the heavy excise duty on cigarettes. On a pack of 20 Panama cigarettes (cost: Rs 4), nearly Rs 3 is excise duty.

But GTC responded by obtaining an order from the Calcutta High Court staying any further investigations. The cigarette company denies wrong-doing, and says it acted within the law.

Three months ago, North Eastern Tobacco (NET), set up by Sailo's wife's uncle, Liantlinga, nephew Lalchungnunga and brother-in-law Richard Sailo applied to the district Industries Centre in Aizawl for permission to produce "Mizo cigarettes", made from tobacco grown locally. As the firm declared that it would have an investment of less than Rs 25 lakh, no licence was necessary.

It then began producing Panama cigarettes, allegedly under GTC's direct supervision. The plant was apparently run by 30 employees on deputation from GTC's Hyderabad unit. Taxmen claim it did not have a Central excise licence.

The cigarette plant at Vairengte village in north Mizoram, had struck a deal with GTC to produce nine popular GTC brands. GTC was to provide machinery, technical expertise and raw materials, with the two companies sharing the profits. Excise officials maintain that fake seals with false excise licence numbers were got from Bombay to be put on the packets. They allege this was not only to hoodwink excise officials but also to fool buyers into paying for a pack inclusive of all duties.

Surprisingly, the local firm managed to procure a certificate from Mizoram's Finance Commissioner Rinsanga, saying Central excise laws do not apply to Mizoram. Earlier, Laldenga had also said this. But in the heart of Aizawl is a customs and Central excise office which has been there for over a decade. The taxmen charge that GTC knew Central excise laws apply to Mizoram because—or so they allege—it took the trouble to put fake licence numbers.

Mizoram Law Minister Saingura Sailo's relatives floated a cigarette unit that is charged with evading excise duty on Panama cigarettes

Laldenga's brother, Industry Minister Ngurchhina, wipes his hands off all responsibility by saying that the permission given to NET was only to produce local cigarettes, and if they went about producing cigarettes for GTC, the Government was not responsible. Said he: "If the Government gave a gun licence to a man who after getting it decided to use it to kill innocent people, the Government cannot be blamed." He also suggests this was a stopgap arrangement.

The excise men say their investigations show it was not temporary, that GTC had a subsidiary—North Eastern Tobacco Company at Guwahati (with a valid excise licence)—and was diverting tobacco from there to the NET plant.

GTC President and Director-General P.P. Bhandari, however, says that GTC had entered into a technical know-how and royalty agreement with NET for the use of GTC brand names, that the onus for obtaining official permissions rested with the local company, that NET had passed on to GTC a written opinion from the state Government that Central excise laws do not apply to Mizoram.

Bhandari also says that GTC has documents to prove that NET holds a valid state Government registration certificate: "We categorically state that GTC has acted within the framework of the law. If excise duty is, in fact, payable on goods produced in Mizoram, the liability would rest solely with the manufacturing company and not GTC."

Nevertheless, the affair is quickly acquiring political overtones. Says former chief minister Lalthanhawla: "The cigarette scandal is going to expose the pretensions of the MNF Government. Is this the clean Government they promised?" The Congress(I) Mizoram unit al-

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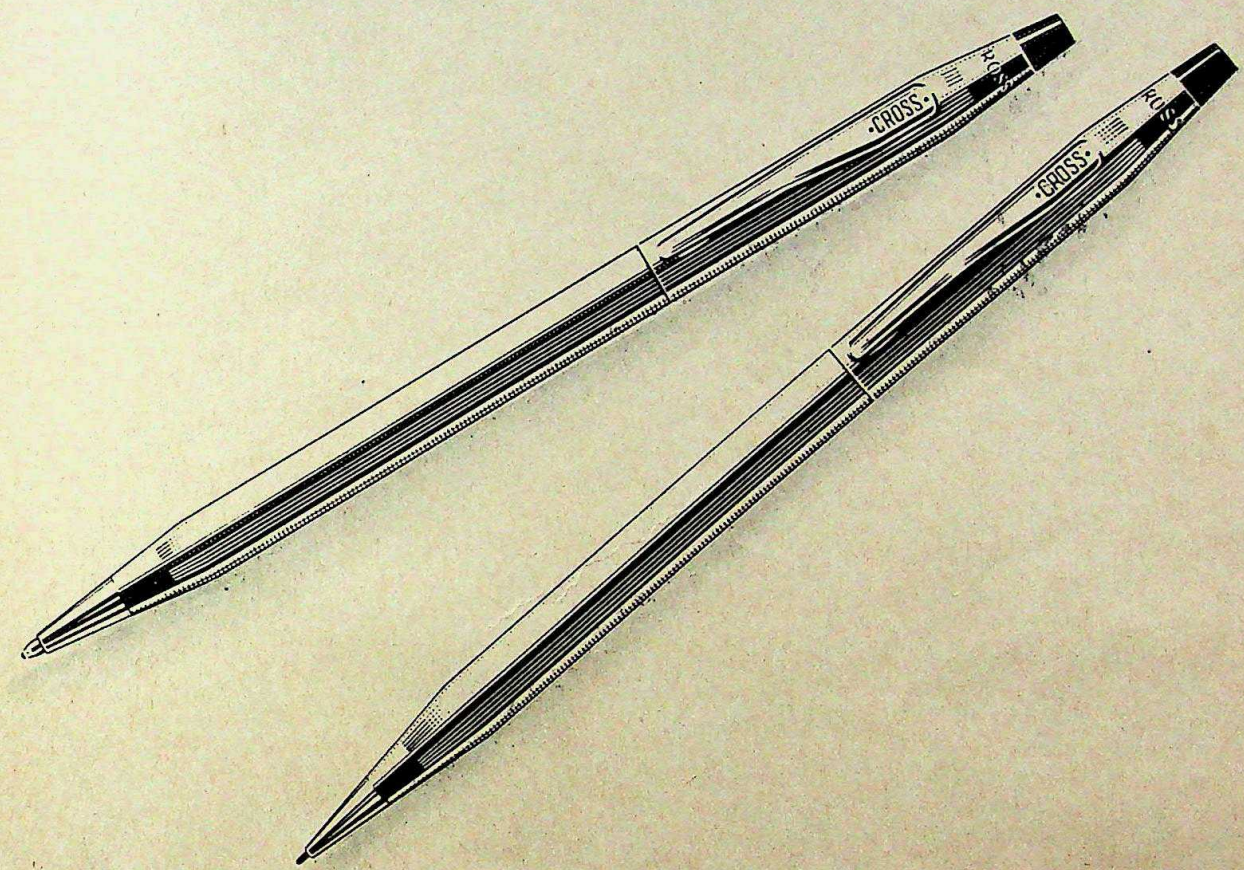

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leges that in late October, a senior GTC official came to Aizawl and was put up by Saingura Sailo at the district council guest-house as a Christian missionary and he was mostly closeted with Sailo and other MNF ministers.

But Saingura says that he booked him in the guest-house as he had said that he was a missionary wanting to work for the people. He says the whole scandal is a figment of the media's imagination and he did not even know his close relatives had floated a cigarette plant till the reports appeared.

The affair came to light because of a cursory excise check at a remote check-post in Dholai on the Assam-Mizoram border. A truck-load of 260 Panama cigarette cartons with 600 packs each was stopped at the post. Though it had a licence number pasted on each packet, officials at the post wondered why they hadn't heard of cigarettes being produced in industrially backward Mizoram. They checked and found the number (L-4/1/CIG/87) was non-existent.

Soon, the customs and excise collectorate in Silchar stumbled on to what they claim is the biggest excise evasion case in the North-east. Inder Singh, assistant collector of customs and central excise, raided the Vairengte plant and seized another 523 cartons and tobacco worth Rs 22 lakh. The plant had a capacity to produce 50 lakh cigarettes a month, but looked like a poorly-built shed. Additional Collector of Customs and Central Excise, Ramesh Bhattacharjee, who supervised operations, had other units of GTC in the country raided in an attempt to discover additional evidence. He got many GTC officials picked up for questioning while the owners of NET absconded.

Last fortnight, Calcutta-based Principal Excise Collector, C. Bhujangaswamy, ordered provisional release of the seized cigarettes and asked GTC and NET to pay up nearly a crore of rupees as excise duty. That was before GTC obtained a stay order.

While the action could now move to the courts, Laldenga will have a lot of explaining to do. He is still recovering from a lottery scandal where the Government, under his directions, gave contracts to agents who quoted the lowest rates earlier this year, resulting in a revenue loss of lakhs of rupees. Said T. Mawia, an Aizawl resident: "All governments are the same when it comes to money." His response eloquently portrays the cynical mood in Mizoram today.

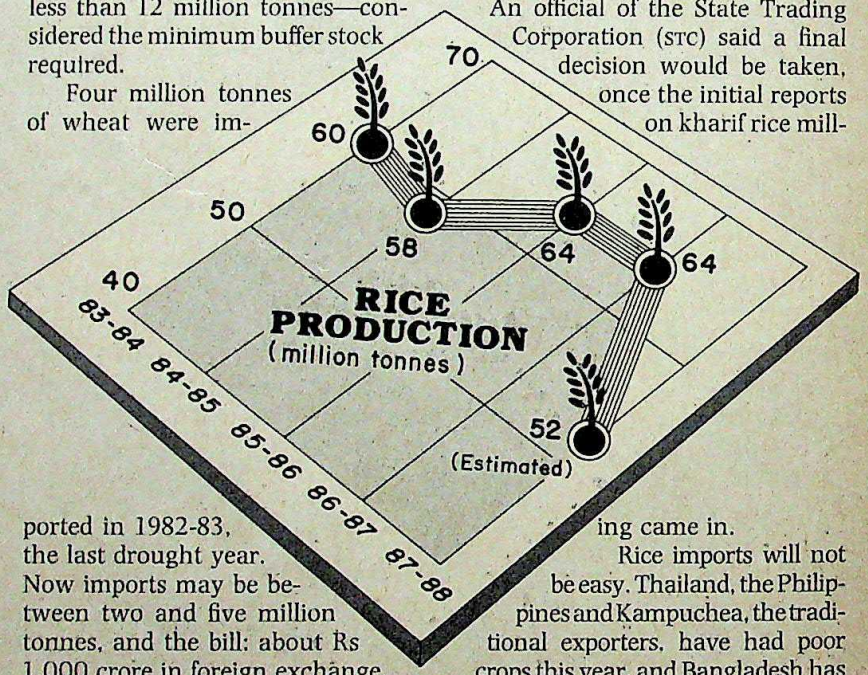
—RAMESH MENON in Aizawl

FOOD GRAINS

Import Issue

THE moment of truth has come. After five years of priding itself on self-sufficiency in food, India will soon return to the world grain markets, shopping initially for rice, and perhaps later for wheat. Two successive drought years have seen our food stocks drop from last year's record 29 million tonnes to 15 million tonnes now. By April, there may be less than 12 million tonnes—considered the minimum buffer stock required.

Four million tonnes of wheat were imported in 1982-83, the last drought year. Now imports may be between two and five million tonnes, and the bill: about Rs 1,000 crore in foreign exchange. That is apart from the oilseeds and pulses already imported to make up for domestic shortfalls. The fragility of India's food security is painfully evident. "Two droughts showed how our mountains of grain disappear," rued Professor S.S. Johl, Agricultural Prices Commission chairman.



Officials hesitate to confirm that the food import decision has been taken, but talks with people in the agriculture and finance ministries confirm that the imports are coming. "We may even have to import wheat," says Rao Birendra Singh, former Union agriculture minister.

Y.K. Alagh, the Planning Commission's member in charge of agriculture, feels the drop in kharif production this year will be between 12 and 15 million tonnes (not all of it rice). Prospects for the rabi harvest in April have improved with the winter rains, but clearly these are not good enough. Johl predicts that by April the wheat stocks would be down to five million tonnes and the rice stocks, by September, to three million tonnes—each 2.5 million tonnes below the minimum India should keep.

Some critics argue that imports can be avoided, but experts say some of the Food Corporation of India's stocks may be unusable. Besides, imports will give a psychological cushion. Said an official: "We may buy the grain and keep it abroad, selling it back if we don't ultimately need it."

An official of the State Trading Corporation (STC) said a final decision would be taken, once the initial reports on kharif rice milling came in.

Rice imports will not be easy. Thailand, the Philippines and Kampuchea, the traditional exporters, have had poor crops this year, and Bangladesh has already been buying. Experts note that at the best of times the world doesn't have too much surplus rice. If India makes heavy imports, world prices will rise sharply from their present level of Rs 285 per quintal.

"Instead of buying food grains silently in August they've been shouting about it leading world prices to rise," says Arun Ghosh, the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices' former chairman and a prolific commentator on the economy. Others counsel patience. "By crying wolf now, we'll make international prices shoot up," warns T. Prakash, STC executive director. But Johl says: "The whole world knows India's requirements are large." For a country that's prided itself on its food self-sufficiency, that is a sobering thought.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA and SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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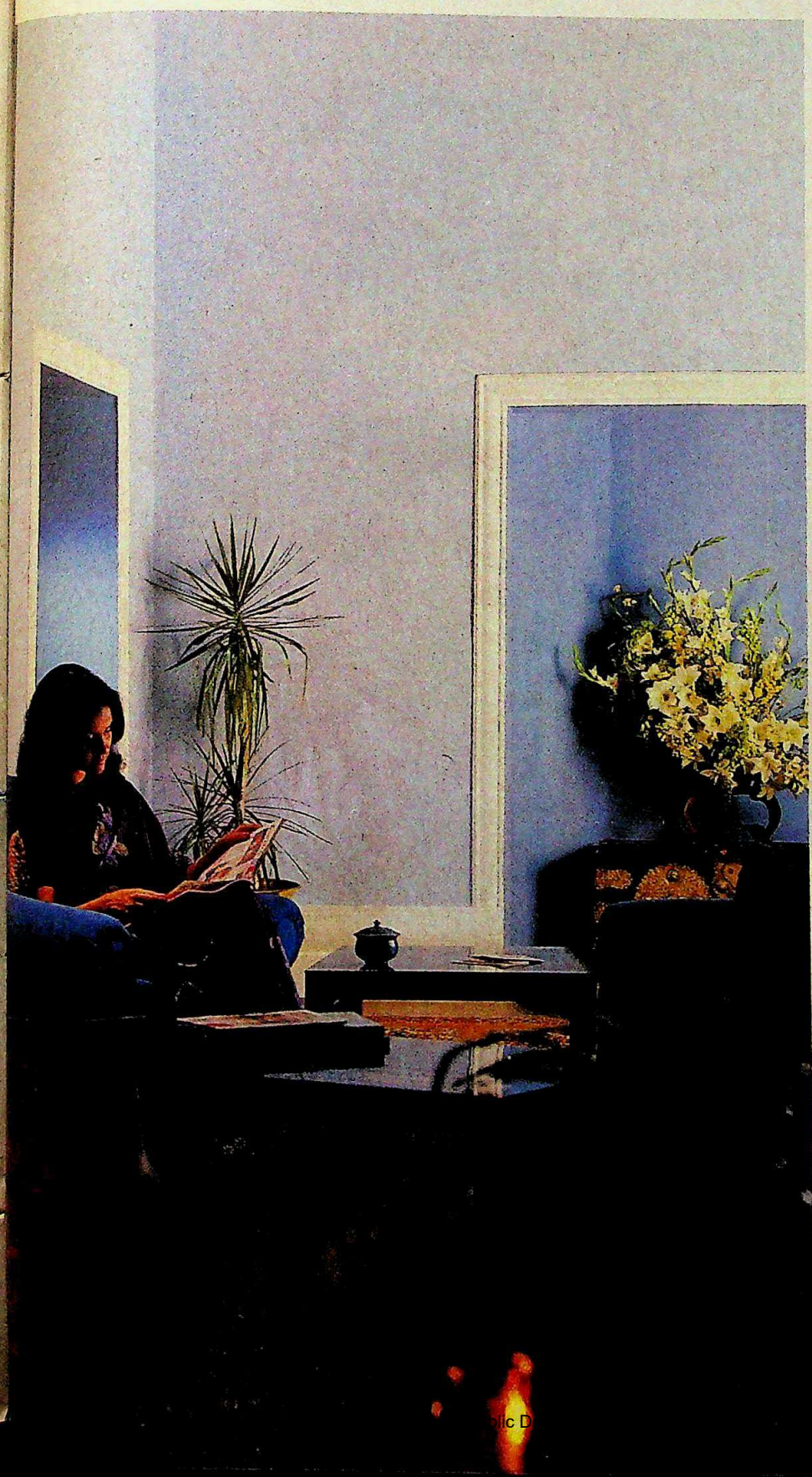

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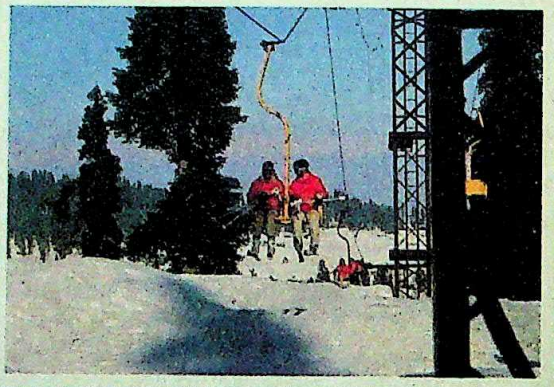

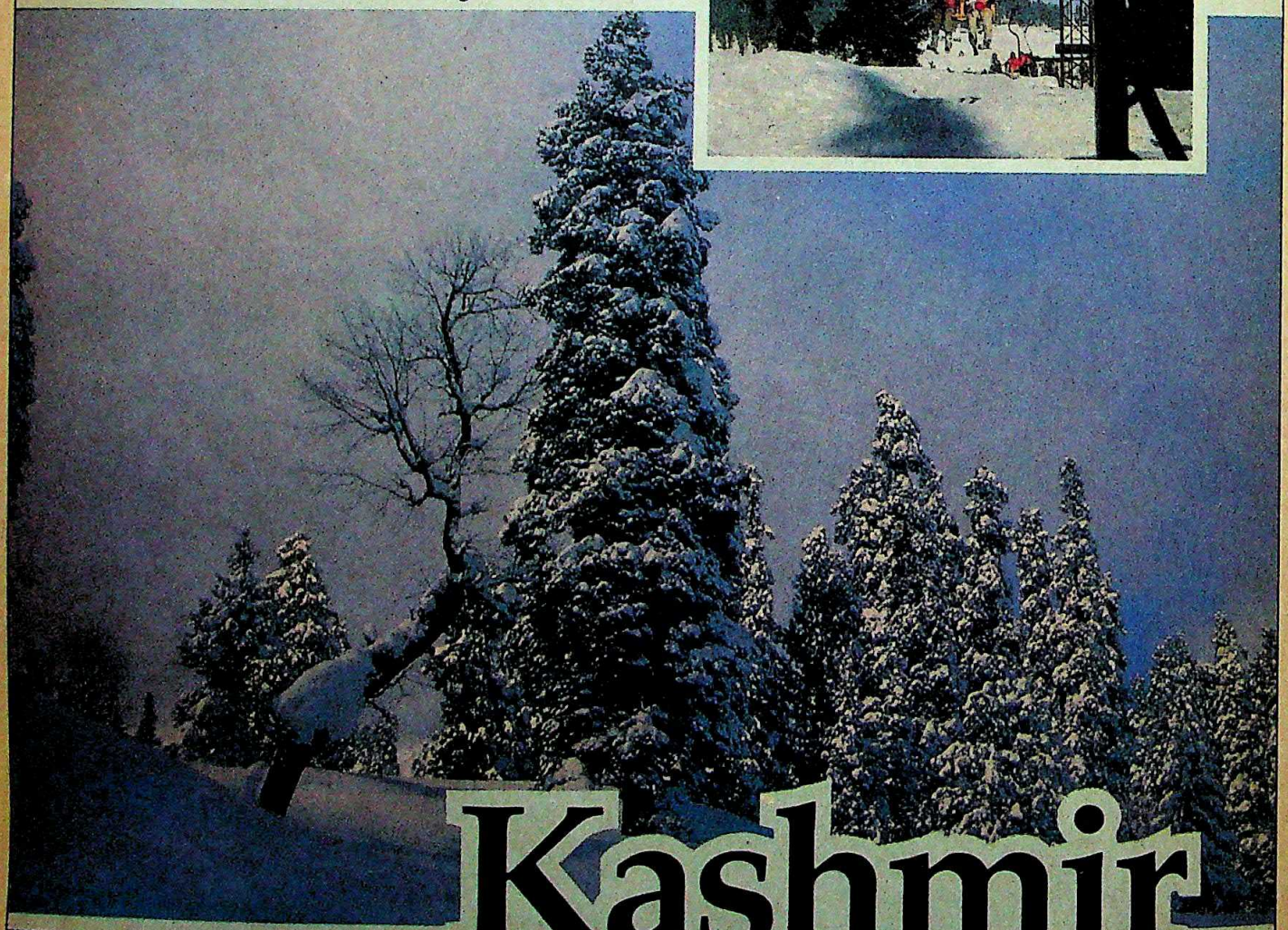

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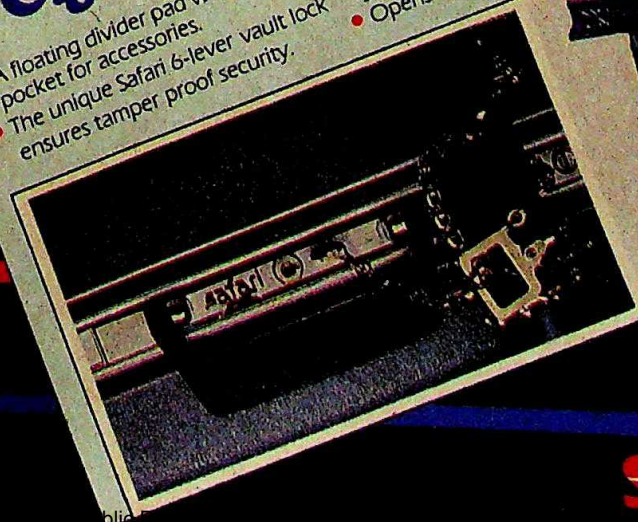

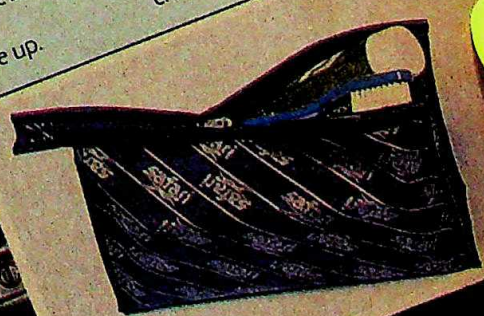

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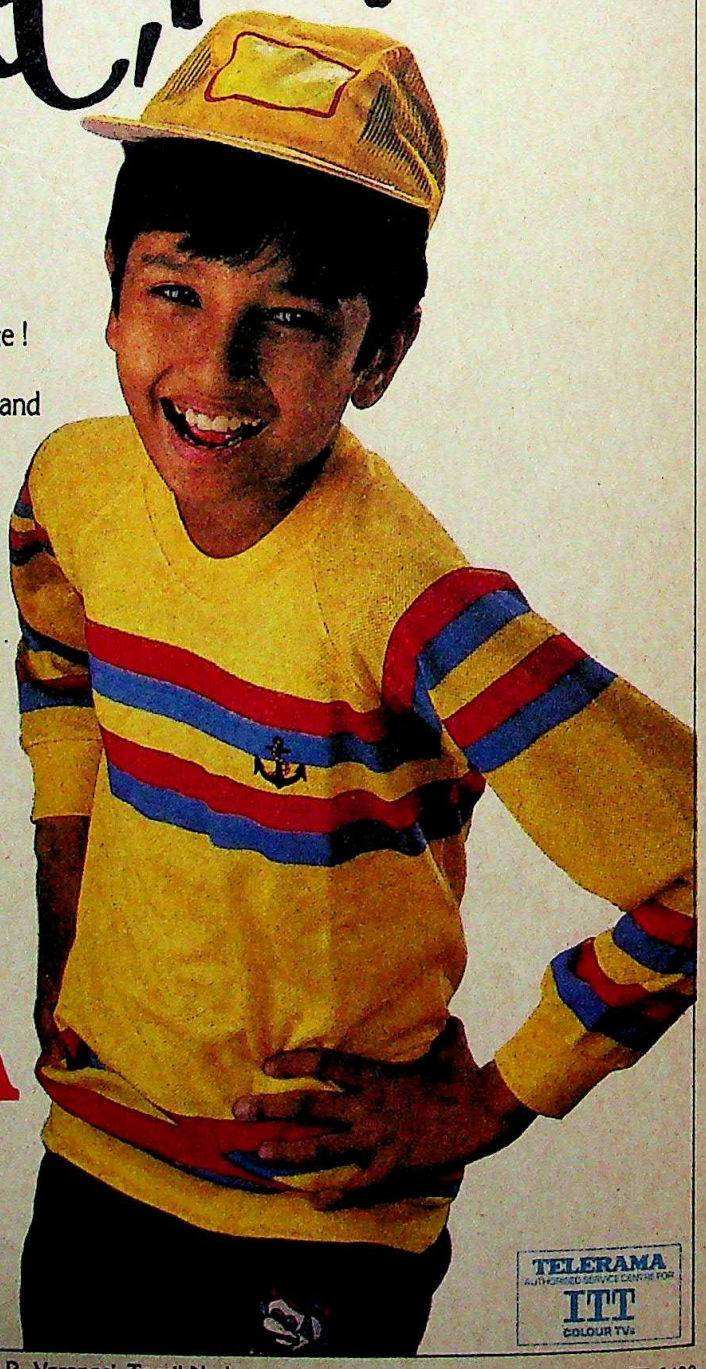

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TFAI

A New Trend

Specialised fairs catch on

HAS a mela, it was a roistering success. Roving teams of acrobats performed tricks before the teeming crowds, which took time off from feverishly buying handicrafts and electronic gizzmos to gawk and applaud. But by the time the curtain rang down on the seventh India International Trade Fair (IITF) in the capital last month, the hoopla had not quite overshadowed one stark fact—general fairs like this one are going the way of the dinosaur.

Exhibitions have the serious purpose of helping businessmen establish contacts and sign deals, and of providing them with glimpses of the latest technologies world-wide. Increasingly, however, foreign nations, Indian big business and even state-owned firms are steering clear of general fairs like the IITF. Instead, they are heading for specialised trade fairs in droves.

Consider the sobering evidence. Some 40 nations took part in the Trade Fair Authority of India-run IITF this year, down from 64 in 1981-82 when the fair promotion agency held its first international fair. What is more even major industrialised countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Austria and France either stayed away this time or showed up only to mark a token attendance.

And while 17 state-owned companies took out kiosks at the fair, two of the big boys opted out. Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) and the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation, both of which had turned out in force at earlier fairs, were conspicuous by their absence. Confessed an executive in one of the companies: "We used the drought as an excuse to stay away."

The reluctance is common to many firms, and flows from the widening perception that general fairs with their mela ambience do not offer good value for money. Says DCM Managing Director Vinay Bharat Ram: "Specialised fairs are short, more business-like and provide you with a forum to have a look at what your competitors are doing in your specialised field." Such sentiments are shared by foreign diplomats too. Affirms Michael Hand, commercial attache at the US Embassy in India: "We prefer the specialised trade fairs which have a clearer focus and attract the serious businessman."

Exhibiting at specialised trade fairs can be far more rewarding for companies. Weston Electroniks participated in both the IITF and in electronic industry fairs but found that while the first generated Rs 1.5 crore worth of business, the industry fairs brought in twice or thrice the sum. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that BHEL shunned the IITF but will show up at the engineering industry fair next year.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The 7th IITF: teeming crowds

Then, foreign participants view the IITF as far too long (they used to stretch out for over a month, but have now been limited to two weeks). Complains H.P. Kaufmann, Austrian trade commissioner in India: "The IITF is too long, unlike those in other countries which are only for a few days. Hardly any company can afford to let its top managers stay away for such a long period from their country." So overseas companies prefer to invest executive time in the much shorter specialised trade fairs.

Inevitably, therefore, specialised fairs have caught on in a big way. In the last five years, India has seen over 50 of them: for engineering goods, machine tools, the chemical industry, the automobile industry, and so on down a steadily growing list. And more and more countries are seen waving their flags at these exhibitions.

The Oil and Gas Machinery Exhibition sponsored by the Confederation of Engineering Industry (CEI) and held in the capital two years ago attracted 70 companies from around the world. Austria, which gave a wide berth to IITF, turned out in strength with 72 firms at the Indian Engineering Trade Fair in New Delhi last February. Around 40 US companies will show up at next year's engineering exhibition. Says a CEI official: "Engineering is their area of strength. Why should they come to a general fair when a specialised fair is on the anvil?"

Helping along the trend are Delhi-based companies like Modern Multi Media Marketing and Delta Group who, sensing a business opportunity, have started organising specialised fairs themselves. Delta, for instance, has about four fairs lined up for next year and Chief Executive G.V. Subramaniam claims that the company has already received responses from about 400 companies in 23 countries for one of them.

The lessons offered by all this have not been entirely lost on the Trade Fair Authority of India (TFAI). It too has held a handful of specialised exhibitions, and holds out the promise of more. TFAI Chief General Manager K.V. Rajan says: "Specialised fairs will surely be the trend." And in a burst of realism, the state agency reserved the first four days of last fortnight's fair exclusively for businessmen and introduced themes that stressed the plastics and rubber industries as well as crafts.

Such developments could of course put paid to some of the hoopla—a fact not everyone will mourn, least of all businessmen.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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Company Meeting

THE ASSOCIATED CEMENT COMPANIES LIMITED

Statement of the Chairman, Mr. N.A. Palkhivala

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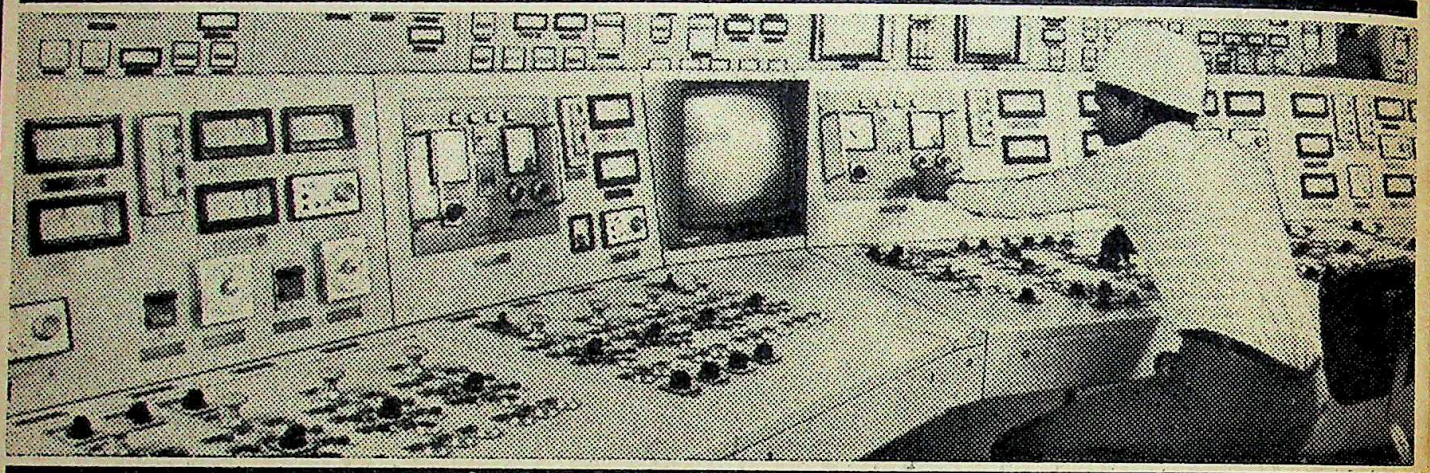

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We started with great advantages. We had 5000 years of civilization behind us, — a civilization which had reached the summit of human thought. We had fantastic skills and many-splendoured intelligence, since the genes had evolved over five luminous millenia. We had a super entrepreneurial spirit, honed over a century of obstacles. The accident of British rule had united us into one country, one nation; and when independence came we had been in unified nationality for 90 years under one head of state.

PERPETUATION OF POVERTY

However, the 40 years have established India's claim to be regarded as the world's leading expert in the art of perpetuating poverty. The per capita income has increased only 71 per cent in real terms since 1950, and the country is today the 17th poorest on earth. This is partly due to the growing population which increases by 2000 every hour, and partly to the fact that the economic progress of India has been only a small fraction of its potential. The causes of the persistent adversity are in the main two.

First, the Indian economy has been a giant held in chains. We adopted socialism as our official policy and were obsessed with the shells of that ideology — state ownership and state control. We refused to recognize the truth that socialism is to social justice what ritual is to religion and dogma is to truth. **Even now, when privatization is sweeping across the world, we stubbornly refuse to see the reality that the public sector does not necessarily spell public good, and the private sector does not merely mean private gain. The peacock is our national bird, but we could have more appropriately chosen the ostrich.**

Every segment of the people's enterprise is festooned with red tape. From the 1950s, the steel claws of the permit-quota-licence raj have been laid upon the national economy, and even today their grip continues with negligible relaxation.

In 1984, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi wisely initiated the policy of liberalization and dismantling of controls: the new goal being fruitful egalitarianism in place of sterile socialism. But the new policy was never fairly implemented by the top-heavy bureaucracy reluctant to shed its enormous powers, and is now sought to be checkmated by those members of the ruling party who prefer to let socialism remain the opiate of the people. The Prime Minister should say to the Congress Socialist Forum what Attlee said in 1945 to the left-wing Professor Laski, "A period of silence from you would be welcome." Nothing would darken the economic future of the country more effectively than politics of the pendulum.

Secondly, we made far less investment in human resources — in education, family planning, nutrition and public health — than in brick and mortar, plants and factories. We had quantitative growth without qualitative development. Our gross national product increased, but not gross national happiness. Different parts of India live in different centuries, so far as basic amenities and cultural awareness are concerned.

Afflicted by the Indian disease — divisiveness, we enter the fifth decade of freedom. Truly, divisiveness is the AIDS of India — spreading fast and wide, without a cure in sight. Communal hatred, linguistic fanaticism and regional loyalty are gnawing at the vitals of the unity and integrity of the country.

PLIGHT OF THE CEMENT INDUSTRY

The cement industry is passing through a difficult period. Despite its growth in terms of production capacities, its financial health has been

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gravely impaired. Some companies are already in the intensive care unit, others are *en route*. Since partial decontrol in 1982, the profit after tax, as a percentage of net worth, nose-dived from 33.9 per cent in 1982-83 to a mere 6.3 per cent by 1985-86, — as against the government's declared policy of 12 per cent post-tax return of net worth.

The cement industry has been making representations from time to time to the Government for granting a price rise in levy cement on account of continuous escalations in inputs cost — three-fourths of which are under government control. The cumulative impact of these escalations works out to Rs. 195 per tonne, since partial decontrol in February 1982. The Government has allowed an increase in levy price only twice, — in July 1984 at the rate of Rs. 40 per tonne and in December 1986 at the rate of Rs. 24.50 per tonne, leaving uncompensated cost increases of Rs. 73 per tonne (even after taking into account the impact of the reduction in levy quota).

The loss suffered by your Company on account of these uncompensated costs since February 1982 aggregates to a whopping Rs.142 crore. **The industry continues to endure the unwanted honour of subsidizing the Central and State Governments on their purchases of levy cement. We are exhorted to modernize — without being allowed a fair price to finance modernization.**

"Dost thou know, my son", asked Count Oxenstierna, "with how little wisdom the world is governed?" The State Governments refuse permission to your Company to close plants which are antiquated and can only be worked now at a heavy loss. Present jobs are protected by mortgaging the economic future of the country.

In the years prior to 1982, total control on the price and distribution of cement was the great begetter of corruption and black money. The present policy of partial control — when there is a glut of cement — represents only the triumph of obstinacy over experience.

The industry has not been able to achieve its targeted production of 20 million tonnes in the first half of the current financial year because of stifling power cuts in the major cement-producing states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Your Company's factories — Kistna and Mancherial in Andhra Pradesh, and Wadi and Shahabad in Karnataka — have suffered from repeated bouts of power failure.

Since 1982 the industry has been vigorously pursuing a programme of installing captive power sets. Your Company has spent more than Rs. 75 crore on such a programme during the last five years. The capital cost of captive power plants is so high that they would make no economic sense in a country governed with economic wisdom. In India they are a painful necessity.

FALL IN COMPANY'S PROFITS

Production of cement by your Company during the year under review has been only marginally lower than in the previous year despite the stoppage of operations at Dwarka since January 1987 and unexpected power cuts in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Although the gross profits before depreciation and interest declined only from Rs. 71.41 crore in 1985-86 to Rs. 68.55 crore in 1986-87 despite the uncompensated costs, there has been a steep fall in profit before tax—from Rs. 8.61 crore to a mere Rs. 0.50 crore. This has been primarily on account of the increase of Rs. 5.35 crore in depreciation provision due to additional investments in power generating and pollution control equipments which *per se* do not add to the productive base of the Company.

Inevitably your Company will have to rechannel its efforts and resources, if it is to continue to generate adequate profits. It has already commenced its slimming diet, pruning the excess fat which tends to clog the corporate arteries. Simultaneously, the Company is also undertaking several steps to improve operational efficiency.

As of today, our productivity norms in the cement industry range between two manhours and 34 manhours per tonne of cement. Yet it has become a ritual to seek hefty increases in wages (over and above the normal increases which are given to compensate for rise in the cost of living) for the workforce every three years. **India is drifting towards a stage when it will combine the high labour costs of a developed country with the low labour productivity of a developing country — a combination fatal to economic growth and to export promotion.**

OPTIMIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

Conversion of Madukkarai Cement Works from wet to semi-dry process — at an outlay of Rs. 42.4 crore — is well in hand. The project, which is being implemented with World Bank assistance, would result in much lower energy consumption as well as an increase in capacity from 3.77 lakh tonnes to 5.20 lakh tonnes. We shall soon embark upon conversion of the Shahabad unit from wet to dry process involving a capital expenditure of Rs. 80 crore.

Optimization at Wadi plants (Phase I and II) on the basis of recommendations made by Mitsubishi Mining and Cement Company — to achieve substantial improvements in production and saving in energy consumption — is also under way.

Other optimization schemes have been approved for implementation at Jamul, Chanda and Gagal for which a total outlay of almost Rs. 27 crore has been earmarked. These schemes have a very short gestation period, and the returns are expected to be high and quick. The programme for modernization of other units will be taken up at an appropriate time in your Company's growth.

We have augmented our marketing outlets in semi-urban/rural areas, and our stockists network has also been enlarged. We are experimenting with new forms of packaging to meet the needs of the discerning consumer.

I look forward to the future of your Company with justified optimism. There is every hope that the synergic effect of our various efforts will be to make the current year and the future brighter than the year under review.

WASTED CAPACITY

Much needs to be done if we are to avert a situation of wasted or idle capacity due to insufficient demand. Today, the industry is poised to make India more than self-sufficient in cement. But unless demand catches up, we will face a scenario where productive units become sick because of poor offtake.

The Government has a vital role to play in creating the enabling environment conducive to a faster growth rate than the current six to seven per cent. The two potential areas for such growth are the construction of concrete roads and highways and a more imaginative housing development programme.

Construction of concrete roads and highways would result in sure and quick benefits to the economy. Roads are the road to growth. Building and maintenance of roads, and road transport, are two of the largest sources of employment. Today many of our roads resemble the test tracks of commercial vehicle manufacturers. Better road surfaces would result in substantial savings in energy cost — an imperative in the context of our huge oil imports.

We welcome Mr. B.K. Banerjee who, with his fine track record, was invited last June to head the management team of your Company. He has the capacity, strength and vision to make the hard decisions which are required to be made in the challenging future.

I should like to join the shareholders in extending our gratitude to one and all in the ACC family for their co-operation, dedication and goodwill.

Bombay, November 14, 1987

ACC

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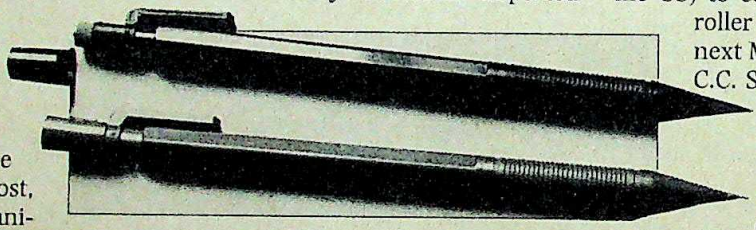
WRITING INSTRUMENTS

Making a Mark

A home-grown revolution hits the industry

FIRST, there was the fountain pen. Then along came the ball pen. Ubiquitous, it arrogantly banished the messy fountain pen to the back waters of academia and law. The ball pen has yet to get its come-uppance—and perhaps never will—but a host of new writing cousins are timorously taking a bash at it: the roller ball pen, the needle-point pen and the fibre-tipped pen.

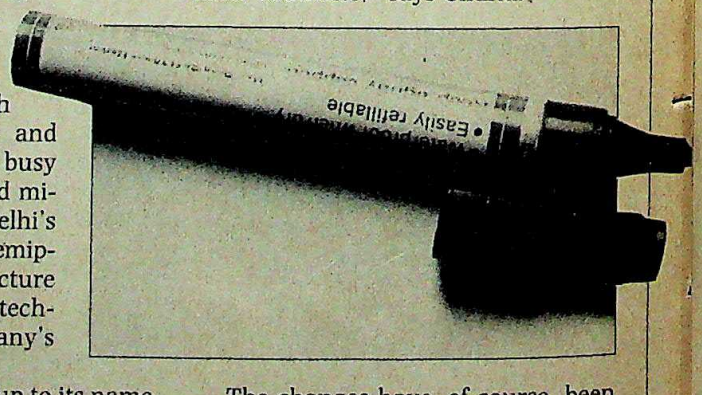
Other newfangled writing instruments, meanwhile, are leaving their mark on paper, plastic, wood and metal. Chisel-tipped highlighting pens are—what else?—highlighting the printed or written word with luminous inks. Squat "marker" pens are moving in where brush and stencil ruled the roost, while sleek, plastic "mechanical" pencils slowly make waves in schools and offices. And plastic crayons that can be sharpened are now visible on shop shelves.



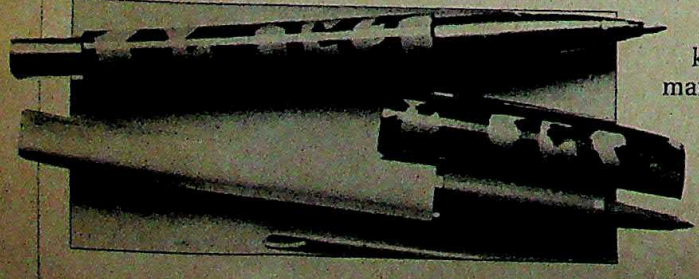
"Things are changing in the pen industry. New writing instruments are coming up," notes D.K. Jain, president of the innovative Delhi-based Luxor Pen Company (sales: roughly Rs 10 crore), which was the first to launch the new pens quite some time ago. Some of these wares have been skulking around the market for some time. Most were smuggled in or locally assembled from imported components and processed. But the industry is now heading for a home-grown revolution.

Underlining the point, the Camlin group of stationery, art materials and pen and pencil companies (sales: Rs 35 crore) signed a collaboration agreement last fortnight with Pilot of Japan to manufacture the lead for mechanical pencils locally, with an associate company making the pencils themselves. The Bombay company also has double-colour markers up its sleeves. Not to be outdone, the Rs 40-crore Balkrishna group (better known as the manufacturers of Wilson pens) will launch two mechanical pencil models a couple of months from now. The 18-company group has already forked out Rs 40 lakh for an imported Japanese plant. "Today, nearly everybody assembles imported components, and sells mechanical pencils. We'll make everything except the lead and the eraser," says Jayant D. Sanghvi, the company's director. Balkrishna also has on its drawing-boards some of the new pens.

The drive to make the new pencils and pens entirely at home is reflected elsewhere too. In the capital, Ambitious Gold Nib Manufacturing Company, the ball pen and nib manufacturer which hawks nibs to Parker and Schaeffer in the US, is busy developing roller ball and micro-tipped pens. And on Delhi's outskirts, Dharsons Chemiplast has plans to manufacture highlighting pens using technology from West Germany's Faber Castell.



Ambitious could live up to its name in other ways too. The Rs 2.5-crore company has been talking to client Parker on launching upmarket Parker fountain pens and ball pens. "We were talking to Parker," confirms Development Director Sunil Charla. "But we're still waiting to see how Cross pens fare."



So far, Cross seems to have fared well enough for Chandra Industries (which launched Cross ball pens in May 1986 under an agreement with A.T. Cross of the US) to consider introducing Cross roller pens and fountain pens next March. Managing Director C.C. Sheth is bullish on the expensive—Rs 175 to Rs 500—pen's sales prospects: "We're just reaching this year's production target of one lakh pens. And next year, we will produce as much as 2.5 lakh pens."

Such optimism is increasingly becoming common in the industry and signals the sweeping changes that are overtaking it. The upshot is that the industry is fast catching up with the rest of the world. "We're not very far behind other countries," says Charla.

The changes have, of course, been helped by the fact that the new instruments have caught on in the marketplace. After they were introduced by companies such as Luxor in Delhi and Flair Writing Instruments in Bombay, others quickly launched me-too wares.

What has also encouraged them to leap in are the market trends. Instead of chewing into the traditional ball pen's sales, the new instruments are carving out their own market niche. "The new

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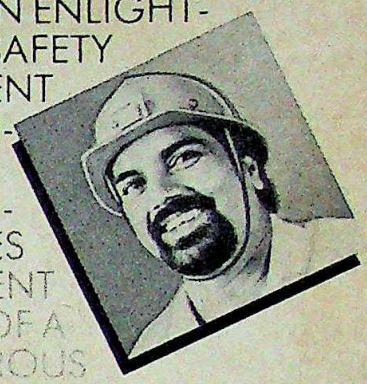
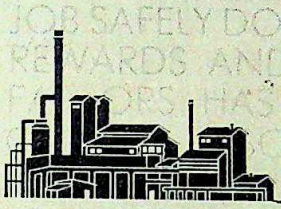
"THE EMPLOYEE ON HIS PART EXPECTS AN ENLIGHTENED MANAGEMENT TO GIVE A LEAD IN SAFETY MANAGEMENT BY EXHIBITING ITS COMMITMENT TO GOOD PERFORMANCE. THEY EXPECT MANAGEMENT TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SAFETY OF ITS PEOPLE AND IN IMPLEMENTING CAPITAL-INVOLVING SCHEMES FOR PURCHASE OF GOOD SAFETY EQUIPMENT AND DEVICES. THEY EXPECT RECOGNITION OF A JOB SAFELY DONE THROUGH TIMELY, GENEROUS REWARDS AND INCENTIVES. RECOGNITION OF THESE FACTORS HAS LED TO IMPLEMENTATION OF A PRO- SCRIBED HEREAFTER."





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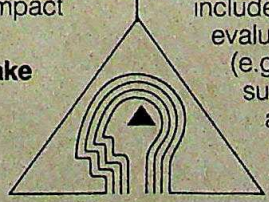

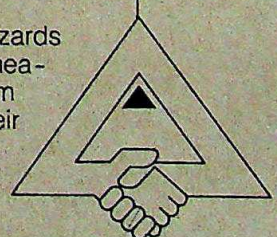

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items are creating their own market and adding to the total market which is growing," reports V.J. Rathod, managing partner of the Rs 2.5-crore Flair Writing Instruments. So far, they've a market share of under 15 per cent. Even so, manufacturers expect bigger things. Jayant Sanghvi predicts an annual growth rate of 25 per cent for mechanical pencils over the next five years.

The hope, of course, is that the convenience of the new instruments will increasingly influence people to buy them. All the new pens, for instance, use inks based on water and dyes, inks which are far less viscous than ball pen inks. Even their nibs are different. The roller ball, as the name implies, has a round ball at the end, as does the needle point. The fibre-tipped pen is crowned with a plastic extruded tip.

These qualities aid the writing process. "Paper is abrasive. Ball pens use viscous ink which doesn't act as a lubricant. These pens, with their water-based inks, require 30 per cent less effort to write with," explains Rajiv Agrawal, whose small firm Kingson Pen & Plastic Industries turns out many of the new geegaws. "There's no doubt about it. The new pens have a future," adds Dwarkadas J. Sanghvi, the 75-year-old industry patriarch who heads Balkrishna, the industry's big daddy.

On a wider plane, rising population and literacy levels have assured companies of sales growth rates of 15 per cent to 20 per cent a year. Even the lowly fountain pen seems to be flourishing. Dislodged from its 80 per cent market share of the '50s by the ball pen (fountain pens now command a market share of under 10 per cent), Camlin reports that fountain pen sales have grown by 33 per cent a year for the last two years.

Given the industry's flourishing fortunes, it is not surprising that even bigger companies are eyeing the pen market. Pen and pencil manufacture is reserved for small business, but Blow Plast made a modest foray into marketing a range of ball pens last July. "We found that it's a big, growing market," explains Dilip Piramal, chairman and managing director. "Our technology also was common."

Exactly how big the market is, is not clear. Figures are hard to come by in an industry comprising cottage and small units (the bigger boys like Balkrishna have remained in the small sector and beaten the Rs 35-lakh investment ceiling by floating multiple units to take advantage of official concessions). But aggregate annual production estimates range from Rs 75 crore to Rs 300 crore. "This industry is mostly in the small sector. So there are hardly any records or statistics," says Madhav Dandekar, managing director of Camlin.

What is clear is that prices could be trimmed with more local manufacture in the works. At Rs 9 to Rs 11 retail, roller ball pens do not exactly come cheap because much of the components are imported, with import duties running to 145 per cent. Wholly domestic manufacture could change some of this. Balkrishna, for instance, will retail its roller pens for 30 to 40 per cent less.

For all the exciting new products that are hitting the stores, manufacturers do not universally welcome them. Indeed, a heated debate is raging in the industry over the new wares, with rivals accusing companies like Luxor and Flair of merely assembling them from imported components. Charges Charla: "All these things are imported and assembled through a loophole in the import policy. This is not good for the industry."

And thereby hangs a tale. The latest three-year import policy permits companies to import plastic moulded components under open general licence, while manufacturers can bring in other parts by buying replenishment licences. "So a unit can import everything," maintains Kantilal Ghellani, president of the Bombay Fountain Pen Manufacturers and Traders Association. "If one can import the cap, barrel and refills, what is left?" The association, in fact, has been unsuccessfully lobbying for a policy change.

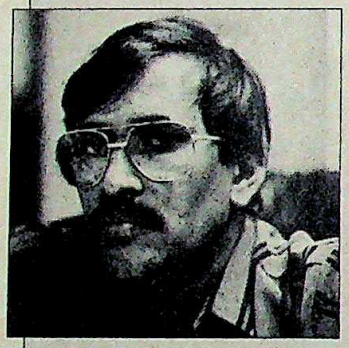
Such allegations are dismissed by those who kicked off the new pens. Luxor President D.K. Jain counters that companies like Luxor have rapidly indigenised production: "We employ 400 people to manufacture 45 products, out of which 40 are indigenous. We have a research unit. In the pen industry, you can't just import and then assemble components. You have to process them with specially equipped plant and machinery."

The case for the defence is that the liberal import policy has helped push exports and usher changes into the industry, that companies could not initially afford to invest in expensive equipment and so brought in components, and now, manufacturers are investing in machinery. "If imported components had not been available, we would have had to immediately invest Rs 25 lakh in a mould and another Rs 25 lakh in machines—and that too just to make one model," says Jain, who's also the vice-president of the Delhi Pen Dealers and Manufacturers Association. But now with the stiff rise in the value of the German mark and the Japanese yen vis-a-vis the rupee, manufacturers simply cannot afford to continue with assembling products.

Whatever the forces at work, the ultimate gainers will be those who use writing instruments. The writing on the wall: cheaper pens, possibly better pens, classy pencils and markers.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI in Bombay

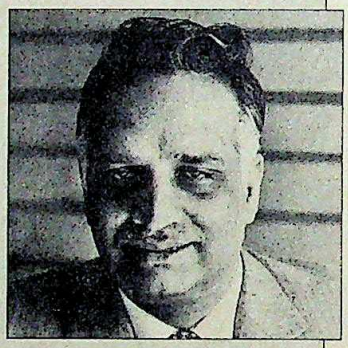
NAMAS BHOJANI



"The new items are creating their own market and adding to the total market which is growing."

V.J. RATHOD
managing partner
Flair Writing Instruments

BHAWAN SINGH



"Things are changing in the pen industry. New writing instruments are coming up."

D.K. JAIN
president
Luxor Pen Company.

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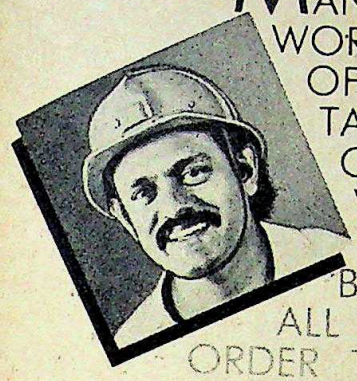

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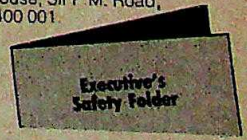

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THE MARKETS

Dismal Days

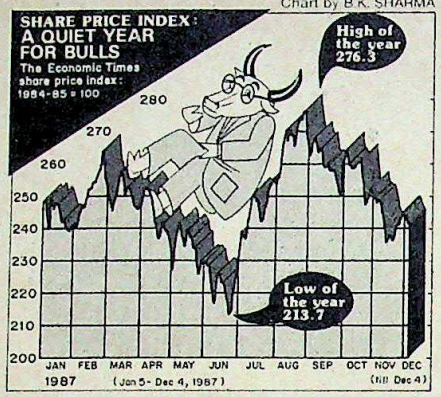
Cheerless end to the year

IT has been a depressing year for the stock-markets. After the heady optimism of 1985, last year marked a return to reality as the market settled down with a thud. This year, share prices went through the floor. Several paper fortunes—built on puffed up share values—disappeared overnight. And the future seems bleak.

In hard, factual terms, *The Economic Times* share price index has moved from 248.2 in early January to 242.7 in early December. But where there was hope earlier, now there is a fear of the future. For, after dropping to the year's low point of 213.7 in June, the index then soared to a high point of 276.3 in August. Since then, it has slipped steadily—and may well do so till the shape of things to come is clear in the next Union budget.

The market has meanwhile been propped up by artificial measures: restrictions on bear activity, specified

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



bands within which share prices must fluctuate, periodic buying activity by the government-owned financial institutions, and a great deal else. But investors have rushed to sell every time the institutions have gone in to buy, and nothing has underlined the absence of confidence in shares as the flight of hot capital to the bullion markets—where gold and silver prices have soared.

The big, talked-about shares all lost ground over the year. The real gainers have been unfancied scrips like Finolex, KSB Pumps, Bharat Forge and Voltas. Polyester share prices have crashed, Tisco has been in the dumps and two-wheeler shares fared poorly as well.

Company results have been mixed. There has been an unmistakeable drop in profits, though in recent months companies have reported encouraging quarterly and half-yearly results. But with the effects of the drought still to play themselves out, the future cannot be very promising—especially when the next budget is widely expected to provide a dose of unpleasant medicine.

The share issue market also suffered. Several companies postponed planned public issues after Indo-Gulf Fertilisers only managed to escape humiliation because the financial institutions stepped in. But Reliance's rights issue was again oversubscribed, as was the recent Thapar venture for TV tubes. Several other companies now plan to test the waters, and might get a decent response.

Certainly, the tendency among investors is towards the opinion that the time may have come to get back into the market and pick up shares that are going relatively cheap. If this trend catches on, the market might still revive in the near future. But at the moment, it has been a cheerless year that investors would be happy to forget very quickly.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1987 HIGH	1987 LOW	CLOSE 4.12.87	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	47.25	28.00	32.00	1.00 +
Associated Cement	241.50	132.00	143.50	1.00 –
Atlas Copco	152.00	46.00	51.00	5.00 +
Asian Paints	272.50	133.75	136.25	7.50 –
Bajaj Auto	5860.00	3950.00	4735.00	435.00 +
Baroda Rayon	270.00	145.00	147.50	10.00 –
Bata India	160.00	59.50	61.50	0.50 –
Bayer	785.00	300.00	335.00	5.00 +
Bharat Forge	140.00	63.00	110.00	6.00 –
Birla Jute	58.00	35.75	39.75	0.75 +
Blow Plast	178.00	92.50	127.50	10.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	143.00	40.50	102.00	18.00 +
Britannia Ind.	190.00	85.00	93.00	4.00 +
Brooke Bond	109.00	77.00	81.50	0.75 –
Ceat Tyres	86.00	45.00	77.00	5.50 –*
Century Enka	1175.00	815.00	1030.00	10.00 +
Chloride India	148.00	67.00	80.00	6.00 +
Citurgia	77.50	53.00	61.50	1.50 –
Colgate	415.00	192.00	197.00	1.00 +
DCM	47.00	20.00	25.25	0.75 +
Dunlop	101.50	71.25	78.00	1.50 +
Escorts	84.00	35.00	38.00	1.00 +
Finolex Cables	380.00	114.00	280.00	11.25 +
Food Specialities	188.50	119.00	135.00	1.00 –
Garware Nylon	36.00	17.50	20.00	1.50 +
G.E. Shipping	35.50	16.00	23.75	0.25 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	183.50	74.00	86.50	4.00 +
Grasim Ind.	118.00	80.00	99.00	6.00 –
Hind. Aluminium	143.00	71.00	109.00	1.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	262.50	156.25	193.75	15.00 –
Hindustan Lever	212.00	64.50	69.00	1.00 +
Hindustan Motors	35.35	16.70	22.80	0.20 –
Hind. Dorr	407.50	140.00	187.50	32.50 +
IEL	64.75	37.50	40.00	0.50 +
Indian Hotels	130.00	62.50	102.50	10.00 –
Indian Organic	78.00	20.00	22.00	6.00 –
Indian Rayon	76.50	48.00	52.00	1.00 –
Indrol	510.00	160.00	185.00	nil *
Ingersoll-Rand	360.00	265.00	304.00	4.00 –
ITC	78.00	40.00	43.00	1.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	93.50	39.50	58.50	0.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	312.50	137.50	157.50	6.25 +
Kirloskar Cummins	97.50	40.00	53.75	2.50 +
KSB Pumps	480.00	220.00	420.00	30.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	107.00	67.00	75.00	1.00 +
Lipton	79.50	57.00	61.00	2.50 –
LML Ltd.	32.00	7.75	9.00	0.75 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	61.00	38.00	52.00	1.00 –
McDowell	108.50	41.50	85.00	2.50 +
Motor Industries	695.00	317.50	490.00	20.00 +
Mukand Iron	89.50	62.00	73.00	nil
National Organic	577.50	382.50	480.00	nil
Nirlon	26.00	5.00	9.00	3.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	115.00	20.00	21.00	3.50 –
Oswal Agro	142.00	79.00	115.50	10.50 –
Otis Elevator	260.00	155.00	192.50	7.50 +
Peico Electronics	57.25	32.25	35.50	1.50 +
Premier Auto	33.00	17.00	23.00	1.50 –
Ranbaxy	135.00	71.00	80.00	1.25 –
Raymond	109.00	48.00	87.00	3.00 –
Reliance Industries	277.00	92.00	114.00	10.00 +
Richardson Hind.	350.00	210.00	260.00	5.00 +
Shriram Fibres	36.00	19.50	32.25	2.75 +
Sandoz	140.00	57.50	63.25	0.75 +
Shaw Wallace	158.50	101.00	112.00	2.00 –
Siemens India	144.50	68.00	69.00	9.00 –
SPIC	53.50	27.00	27.75	1.00 –
Tata Steel	1207.50	505.00	510.00	2.50 –
Telco	665.00	340.00	350.00	5.00 –
Wimco	56.50	20.50	21.00	0.25 +

*Ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.0777	9.0021
Austria	Schilling	1	1.1288	1.1167
Bahrain	Dinar	1	34.3360	34.2013
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.8018	42.7216
Canada	Dollar	1	10.0011	9.9101
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.0451	2.0239
Egypt	Pound	1	9.4923	9.4260
France	Franc	1	2.3529	2.2946
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6627	1.6518
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0080	0.0079
Iran	Rial	100	19.2920	19.2430
Italy	Lira	100	1.1132	1.0931
Japan	Yen	100	10.00	9.75
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7669	0.7332
Kuwait	Dinar	1	46.5832	46.5019
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1718	5.1290
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0432	0.990
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6200	0.5901
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.9648	6.9162
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7570	0.7300
Singapore	Dollar	1	6.4156	6.3344
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1157	0.1148
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4319	0.4163
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.0451	2.0239
Switzerland	Franc	1	9.5855	9.5158
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1719	0.1500
Thailand	Baht	100	51.5934	51.3021
UK	Pound	1	23.4750	23.3425
USA	Dollar	1	13.14	13.01
UAE	Dirham	1	3.5061	3.4732
USSR	Rouble	1	21.8071	21.6332
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.9936	7.7942

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.12.87.

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V.I.P.

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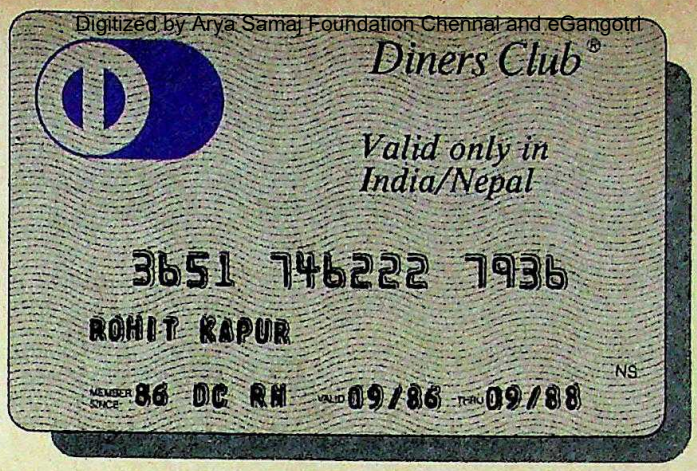

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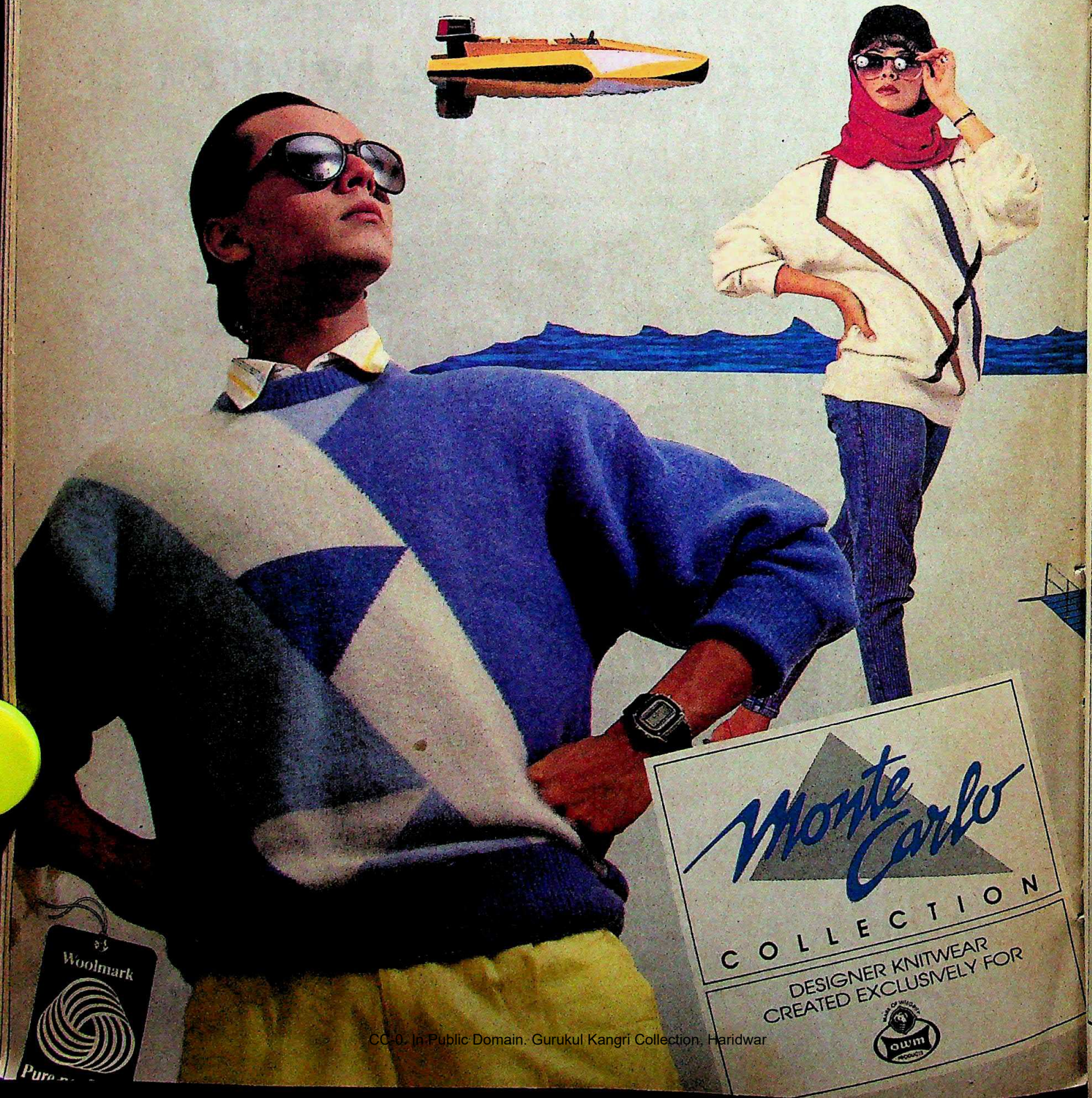

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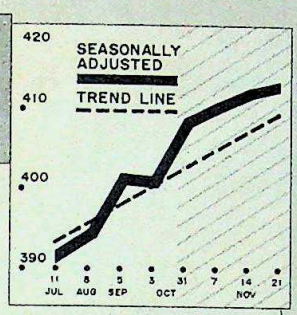
PRICE trends continues to indicate double digit inflation this year though the last week finally showed some indications of a slow down caused by normal seasonal factors. Industry picked up after a depressing start to the year, but tight credit conditions may prove restrictive. Gold prices continue to soar in contrast to the stock-market, which reflects uncertainty in the economy.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
11.7% p.a.

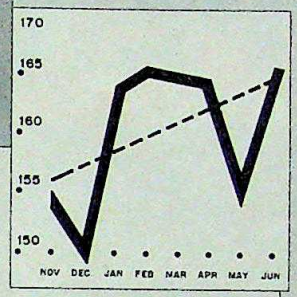


Prices accelerated sharply in October in a counter-seasonal fashion. However, the last week finally showed a seasonal downturn.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.3% p.a.

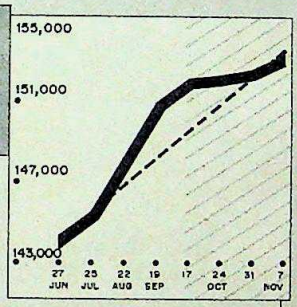


Industrial production is on the uptrend after hitting a low in May that matched levels reached eight months earlier in September '86.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
18.4% p.a.

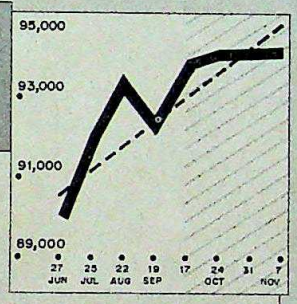


Money supply growth is about 1.5 percentage points above its trend over the last five years. The last fortnight showed no signs of a slow down.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.3% p.a.

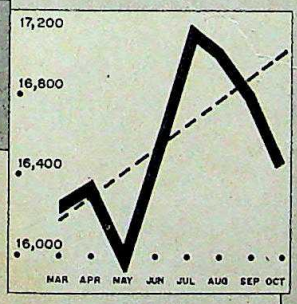


Credit conditions remain fairly tight. Unless an expansionary policy is followed, recessionary trends caused by drought may be exacerbated.

Electricity Generation

Million KwH

Current Trend
8.8% p.a.

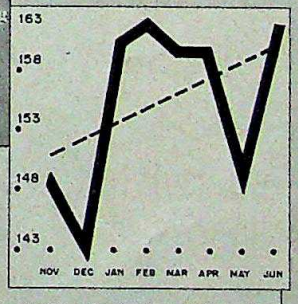


While thermal power output is increasing, falling hydel and nuclear power generation has cut overall power generation.

Manufacturing Output

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.8% p.a.

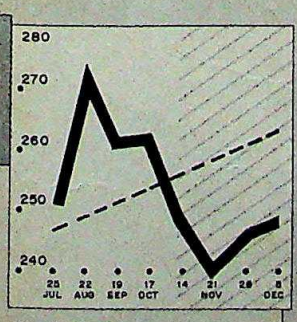


After plummeting in March, April and May, the manufacturing sector showed a better performance in June.

Share Price Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
17.8%p.a.

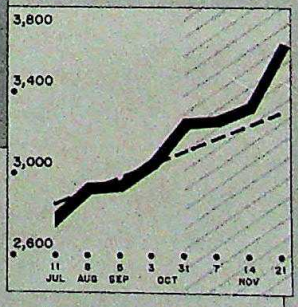


The small uptrend is likely to be in the nature of fluctuations and is not sustained enough to be an indicator of a revival of the market.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
42.4% p.a.



Gold prices increased very sharply in the third week of November, and now rule far above international prices.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in first fortnight of November, 987

	% Growth
Eggs	17.16
Mustard Oilcake	13.41
Masoor	10.84
Logs Timber Bamboo	9.35
Linseed	9.10
Rape & Mustard Seed	8.76
Mustard Oil	8.53
Moong	8.41
Limestone	7.47
Copra	7.38
Coconut Oil	7.18
Linseed Oil	7.18
Silk Raw	7.07
Groundnut Seeds	6.88
Tapioca	5.94
Chillies	5.77
Cycles	5.01
Jute Textiles	4.31
Groundnut Oil	3.87
Groundnut Oilcake	3.47
Arhar	3.36
Maize	3.28
Gram	3.09
Onions	2.91
Tobacco Raw	2.82
Coffee	2.48
Bajra	2.24
Pet Crude & Natural Gas	2.17
Copper & Alloys	2.00
Atta	1.91
Hides Raw	1.79
Phosphatic Fertiliser	1.77
Hides Tanned & Leather Belting	1.69
Bananas	1.63
Wheat	1.61
Semis Billets	1.56
Rubber	1.46
Urad	1.37
Polythene Moulding Powder	.98
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	.97
Maida	.91
Cotton Raw	.86
PVC Compounds	.72
Pesticides & Insecticides	.68
Power-Driven Pumps	.68
Industrial Instruments	.68

Of the 139 series considered, 68 of them with a total weight of 39.693 had a positive growth and 71 of them with a total weight of 46.933 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1987	1986
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, October	138.2	129.89
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, October	739.3	741.00
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, October	3180.0	3169.00
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, October	556.4	643.7
Thermal: Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, October	55.7	52.1

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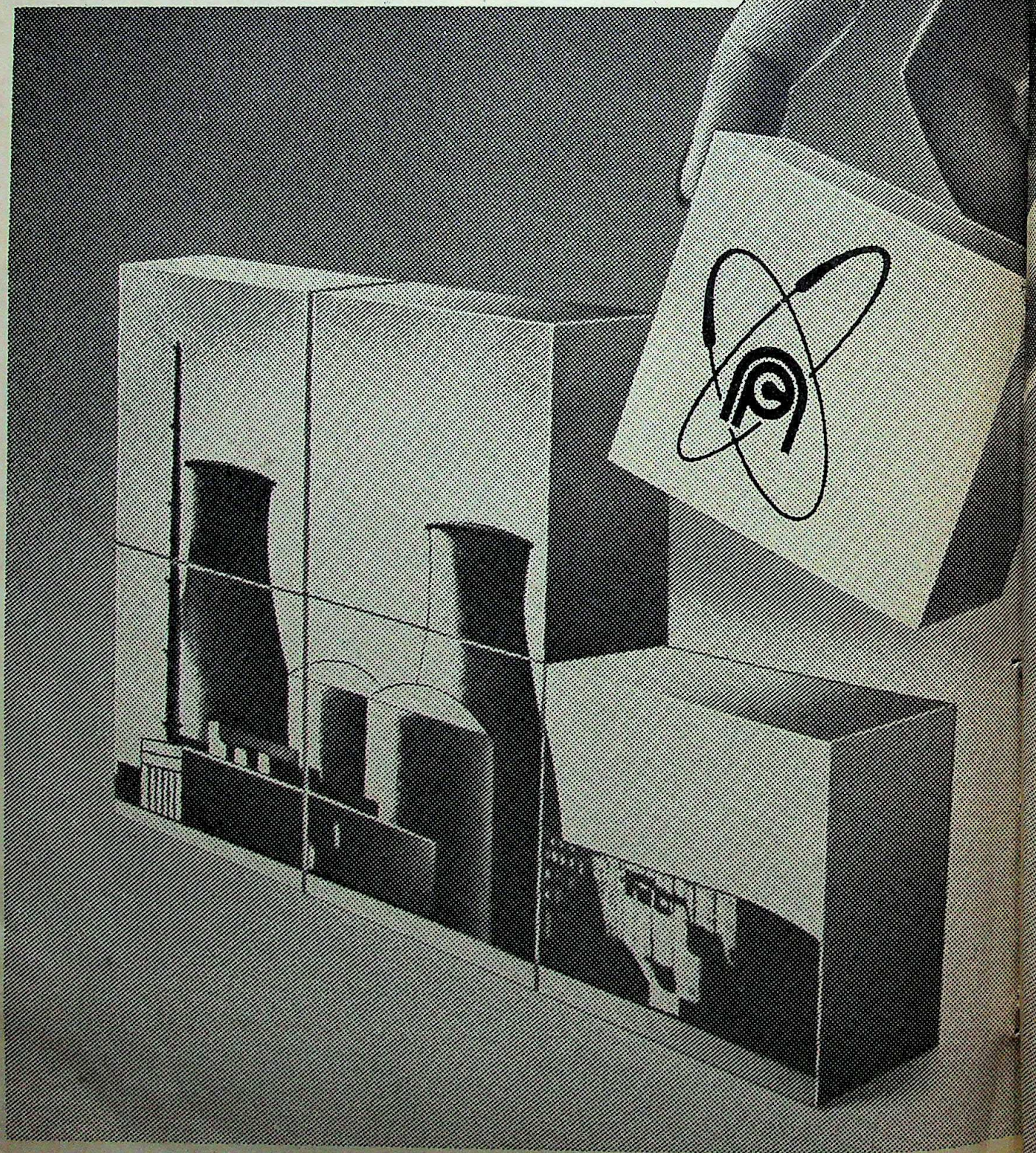
THE NUCLEAR HAPPENING.



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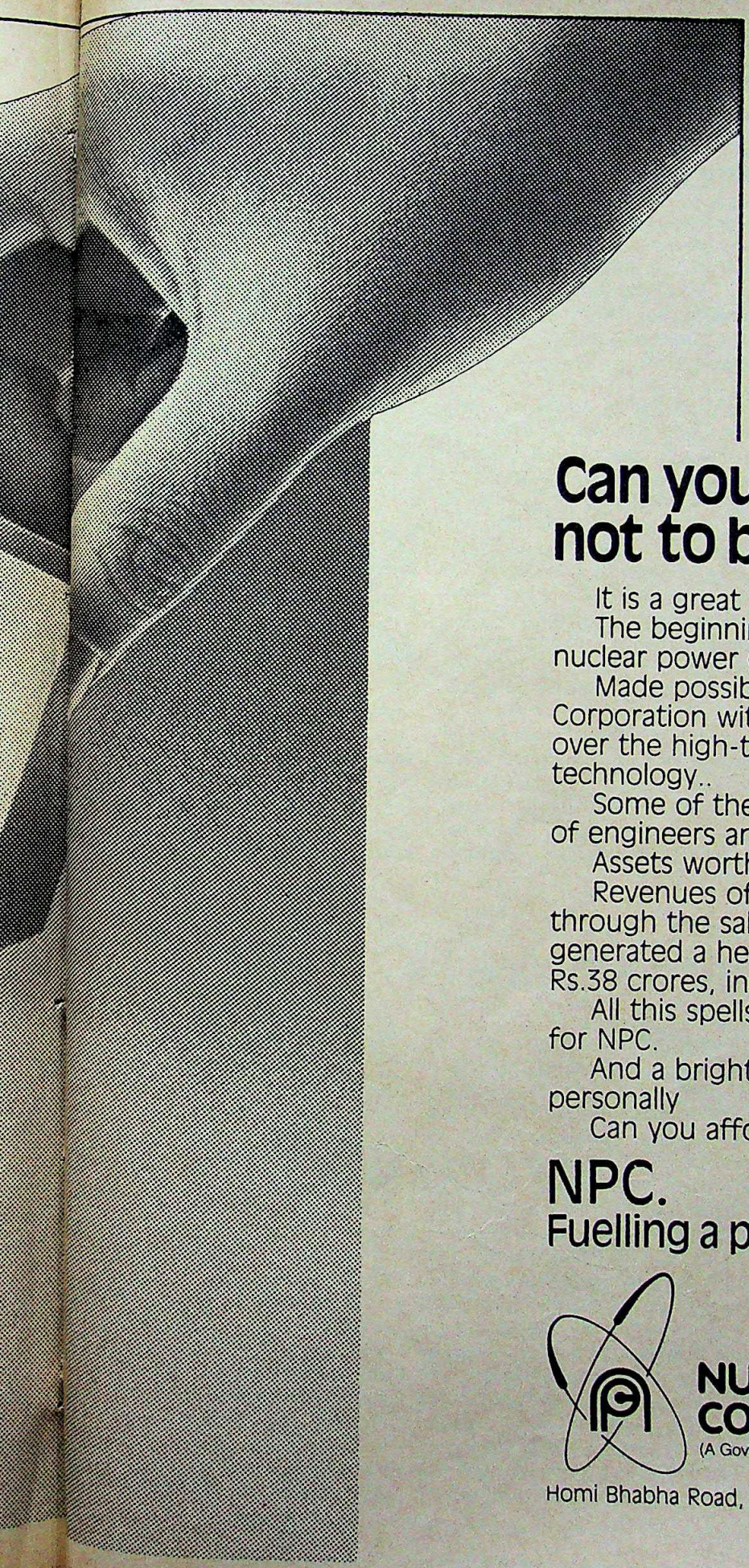

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THE NAVY

A Sea Change

The Navy has ambitious expansion plans

JUST a decade ago such a build-up would have belonged to the world of fancy fiction-writers or incorrigible hawks. Today it is more than half-way to becoming a reality. India's armed might now is no more than four years and Rs 15,000 crore away from becoming the spearhead of a cocky new regional superpower, practising an activist foreign policy within its own sphere of influence and having the military means to enforce it, a la Sri Lanka. And much of this expanding new strength is attributable to the sudden strategic change in the size, strength and role of the navy.

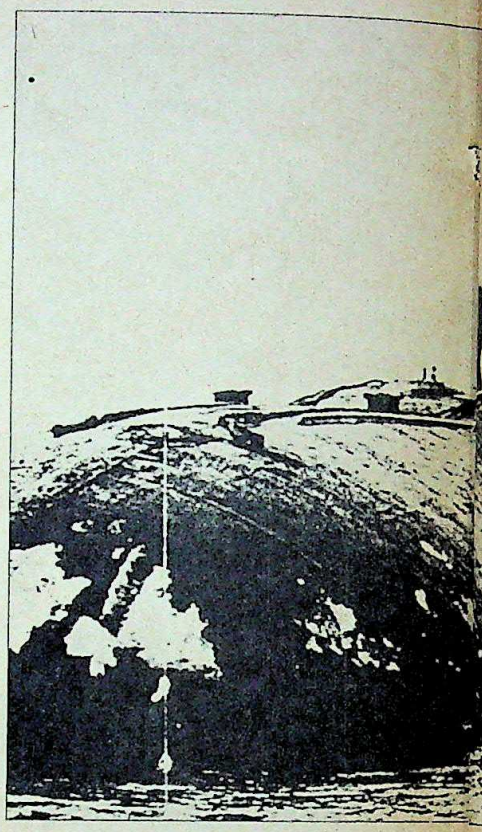
Quietly, the navy has been buying instruments that will take India rapidly into a regional superpower role. With at least 30 more vessels including the fast, deep-diving, quiet and destructive nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) to follow the new aircraft-carrier Viraat, the navy will have blue-water clout, considered essential by South Block policy makers for our new aggressive foreign policy.

While the air force and the army, despite their own ambitious expansion programmes, will still be worrying about Pakistan as their major threat, the new Indian Navy by 1990 will have outdistanced itself decisively from Pakistan. The natural consequence of this growth would be the advent of a new blue-water navy doctrine that could see India flexing its naval muscle to the very edges of the Indian Ocean: the Gulf, the east coast of Africa and Indonesia.

It is true that the air force and the army will indeed be spending more money than the navy, but it is the nature of the naval acquisitions that makes them strategically and politically the most significant. At a cost of more than Rs 3,000 crore, the navy will be leasing four to six nuclear submarines from the Soviet Navy besides buying new frigates, destroyers, escorts, minesweepers and missiles—confirming the Government's acceptance of the new naval doctrine and theory propounded by the outgoing naval chief, Admiral R.H. Tahiliani. He has often argued that after the Third Battle of Panipat, India's long-term threats have all originated from the sea. Corollary: with India's arrival on the world scene as an intermediate power, the future threats may not come just from Pakistan and China.

Accordingly, the navy has been clamouring for nuclear-powered submarines. India's submariners have often complained of getting the Cinderella treatment, in contrast with their counterparts in the Pakistani Navy where submarines are considered the elite arm, having produced two naval chiefs. Indian submariners point out that during the 1965 war, the Indian Navy, then without a submarine, had stayed in harbours for fear of Pakistan's American-leased PNS Ghazi. Even in 1971, the Pakistani submarine fleet was much more effective than India's. And till recently, India has had to do with its heavy Foxtrot-class boats bought from the Soviets in the '60s. Even the Type 209 HDW submarines recently acquired from West Germany are not much better than Pakistan's Augustas and Daphnes.

The induction of the nuclear submarines is expected to change all that. What type of submarines the navy is planning to acquire is still a closely-guarded secret. But experts say it could be one of the middle-technology machines, probably some of the newer-built Victor-class types. The other, newer nuclear submarines, like Akula and Sierra are, at least for the moment, known to be in short supply even for the Soviet Navy.



Victor-class nuclear sub: deadly reach

THE ARMY

Hard Choice

SOMEWHERE in the southern sector, the army is busy giving a fresh coat of paint to a new prototype of Arjun, the indigenously-designed Main Battle Tank (MBT) that is expected to be driven down Rajpath on Republic Day. But neither the paint nor the first paces of the proud debutant can mask serious problems that the army faces on the tank front.

Till recently, the army has remained smug in the feeling that Pakistan has no answer to its spearhead, the T-72M tank, and that even its T-59s and Pattons will barely measure up to the T-55s and Vijayantas that form the bulk of the Indian armour. This could now change with the purchase of the American M1A1 Abrams tank by Pakistan.

The T-55s, most of which were built in the '60s, are not getting any younger and the Vijayanta still poses problems of lack of power, untrustworthy transmission and clogged filters. The army is firmly committed to Arjun as its MBT of the future, despite teething troubles being faced by its prototypes. Thus, no other MBT can be bought for the interim period of three years before the Arjun begins to roll out of the factories.

The army is meeting this major challenge by retro-fitting old tanks under two projects: Project Bison and Project Gulmohur. Last fortnight, Defence Minister K.C. Pant inaugurated Project Gulmohur, under which the T-55s will be upgraded with Polish help.

Project Bison will modernise the Vijayanta. Experts are in the final stages of experimenting with additional protection for the tank with the home-made Kanchan armour, a complex mix of steel and ceramics. This is adequate but adds to the weight when the engine is underpowered even with the existing tank. So the army plans to replace the Leyland L-60

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Officially, however, government spokesmen tend to play down the impact of the submarines' induction in the regional security scenario. "This is nothing but a case of natural progression from conventional modes to the nuclear mode of propulsion for us," Tahiliani said. But experts point out that three or four nuclear-powered submarines, with their phenomenal endurance and range, will give the navy an unprecedented capability for sea denial.

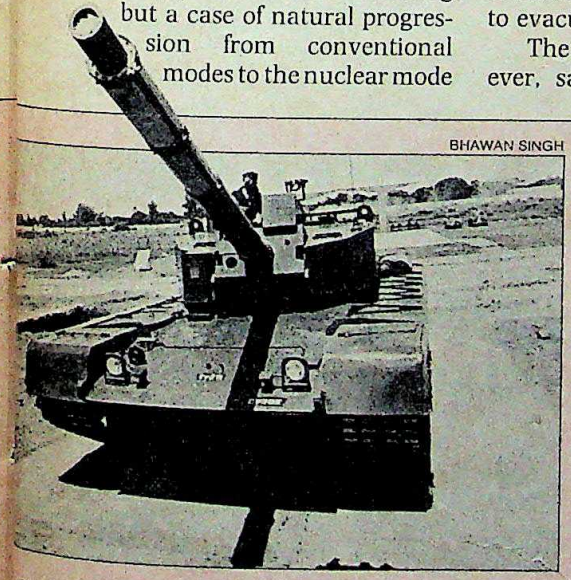
At the same time, however, some critical experts question the strategic logic of making such heavy investments in submarines (two more Type 1500s are being assembled indigenously); they feel that what the navy really needs in keeping with its doctrine is greater ability of sea control (as opposed to sea denial). Says a retired naval officer: "Pakistan still remains our primary threat, and the blockade of Karachi is the prime objective in the event of any future war. The nuclear submarines will be of little use there as, under international convention, a submarine cannot torpedo a merchant vessel without surfacing and warning its occupants to evacuate."

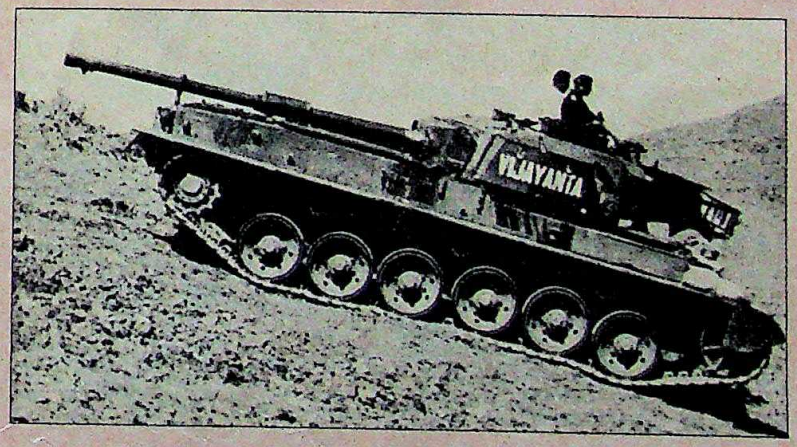
The backers of the nuclear subs, however, say that the earlier India stops thinking of Pakistan as its sole naval threat the better. Says a senior naval officer: "Who has forgotten the trauma of the US Seventh Fleet sailing towards India in 1971? A few long-range nuclear subs will certainly discourage a similar venture in future." He adds that, as in 1965 when it got active help of the Indonesian Navy, Pakistan, which has strong military ties in West Asia, may not be alone in a future conflict. They refer to the recent joint Pakistan-Turkey naval exercises in the Aegean Sea.

Yet the acquisition and the unusual fact that the submarines are going to be leased and not bought raise some inconvenient questions. While modalities are still being finalised, sources say the Soviets, who would be sparing for India subs already in front line service with their navy, are likely to keep some kind of a lien on them under the terms of the lease. Indian officials justify the lease arrangement by arguing that there is no point in paying huge sums for used boats and, secondly, that in a few years India's own nuclear-powered submarine would be ready for commissioning. This, however, is extremely optimistic. The several groups working on the project in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Bombay are unlikely to produce a submarine in any foreseeable time-frame. In effect, India will be stuck with the old Soviet SSNs.

Some experts also point out that it is the Soviets themselves who would gain

BHAWAN SINGH





MBT Arjun (left); and Vijayanta: packing a new punch

engine. Three Vijayantas have been tried with British Perkins, West German MTU, and Indian Kirloskar-Cummins engines respectively.

Alongside, experiments are being carried out with a new fire-control system and other vital electronics designed by Bharat Electronics Ltd. Says a senior armoured corps officer associated with the project: "We have to ensure that the new Vijayanta passes what we call the RAM-D (reliability, availability, maintainability and durability) test. For, tomorrow's battlefield will have no mercy for problem machines."

Meanwhile, efforts are also on to use the Vijayanta chassis to add to the army's long-range fire-power. Tests have just been succesfully completed with the Vickers GBT 155 mm turret system on the Vijayanta chassis. It can fire a specialised projectile called RO 24 up to 25 km while giving the firing platform the mobility and protection of a tank. And though the system couldn't be better than Bofors, it would be cheaper and certainly less controversial.

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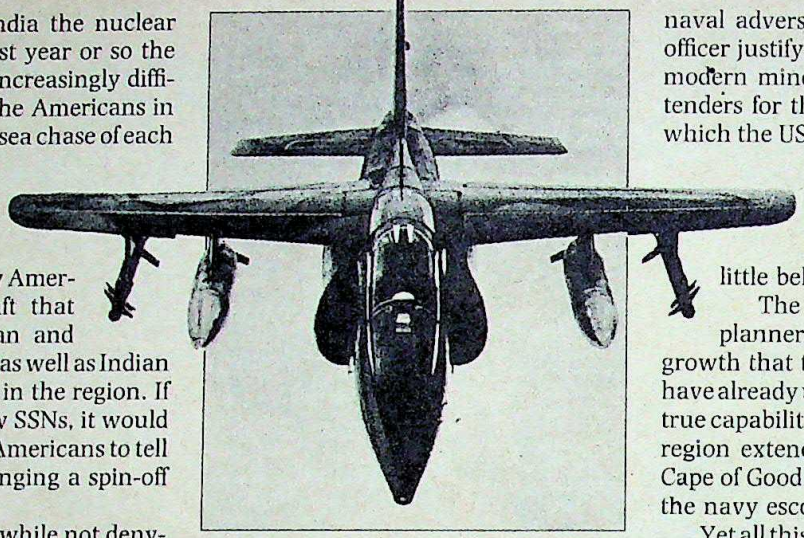
the most by giving India the nuclear submarines. In the past year or so the Soviets have found it increasingly difficult to keep ahead of the Americans in their continuing undersea chase of each other's submarines in the Indian Ocean-Arabian Sea region. Some of this is due to the effective surveillance by American P-3 Orion aircraft that often refuel in Pakistan and generate data on Soviet as well as Indian submarine movements in the region. If India too acquired a few SSNs, it would make it difficult for the Americans to tell one from the other, bringing a spin-off gain for the Soviets.



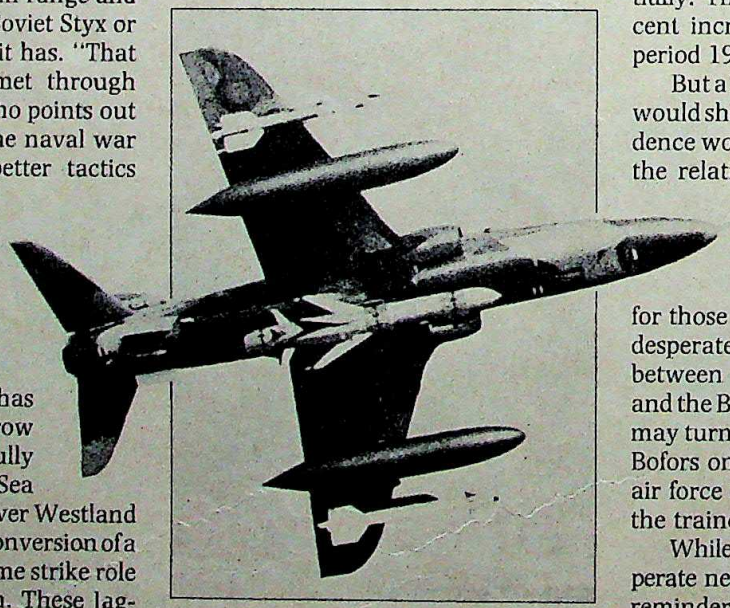
But Indian officials, while not denying this possibility, say this is no more than a minor motivation with either them or the Russians, who are also expected to supply India with more Kilo class submarines that dive almost as deep as the SSNs, newer Kashin class destroyers and Kresta-II escorts with Ka-27 Helix anti-submarine helicopters and Nanuchka corvettes. The Russians may help with some crucial aspects of the development of Project Sea Bird, the joint naval-air base at Karwar.

The navy plays down the fact that despite all these purchases it will not be able to match the threat from Pakistan's Harpoon missiles, greater in range and accuracy than either the Soviet Styx or the British Sea Eagle that it has. "That threat will have to be met through tactics," says Tahiliani, who points out that in 1973 Israel won the naval war against Egypt through better tactics despite its inferior missiles. Naval planners also say the induction of Viraat would add further to the navy's ability to take on a threat like the Harpoon or other long-range missiles.

Meanwhile, the navy has taken another step to narrow the missile gap by successfully firing the 70-km range Sea Eagle missiles from the newer Westland Sea King helicopters. The conversion of a Jaguar squadron to maritime strike role is also nearing completion. These Jaguars carry the French Sagem navigation attack system, and may ultimately be equipped with Exocets.

While this will more than double strike capability, the navy is also awaiting a major decision on the purchase of new minehunters, up to five of which will be bought and assembled at a cost of nearly Rs 300 crore. Minehunters are different from minesweepers in that they actively go and look for mines lying deep in the sea and then send submersibles to defuse them. "Mines, as the Gulf and (on land) Jaffna have shown, are the defence of the weak, and in any conflict in the near future that is what we expect our naval adversaries to be," says a navy officer justifying the need for the ultra-modern minehunters. The major contenders for this are the Italian Lerichi, which the US Air Force has just bought after its Persian Gulf experience, and the Swedish Landsort with challengers from Britain and France a little behind.

The air force will be spending Rs 2,000 crore to buy jet trainers. A struggle is on between the Franco-German Alphajet and the British Hawk for the deal which could be bigger than Bofors.



The massive naval expansion, planners say, will complement the growth that the army and the air force have already undergone and give India a true capability to make its might felt in a region extending from the Gulf to the Cape of Good Hope. This could result in the navy escorting merchant vessels.

Yet all this is not going to be achieved without paying a stiff price. The current phase of purchases will take the Indian arms import bill in the 1986-1990 period to upwards of Rs 20,000 crore, enough money to finance the seventh five-year plans for Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, and more than what India has ever spent in a comparable period of time. This, according to estimates circulated by Frost and Sullivan, a well-known New York-based defence market research firm in its latest report, would make India the largest arms importer in Asia, ahead of even Japan, which is in the process of increasing its defence expenditure substantially. This would also mean a 50 per cent increase over the imports in the period 1980-85.

But a look at the overall shopping list would show how total the Indian dependence would be on imports to fulfil even the relatively low-tech defence needs. For example, the air force would be spending as much as Rs 2,000 crore to buy jet trainers for its cadets as also for those of the naval aviation wing. A desperate struggle is already going on between the Franco-German Alphajet and the British Hawk for the deal, which may turn out to be even bigger than the Bofors one. But, squeezed for cash, the air force now wants the navy to share the trainer bill.

While the haggling goes on, the desperate need for the jet trainers is a grim reminder of the reality that the Indian policy makers seem to ignore in their heady rush for "mini-power status": that no nation has ever become a real power with its army firing mostly imported guns, its air force flying foreign aircraft and its navy riding submarines leased from another superpower.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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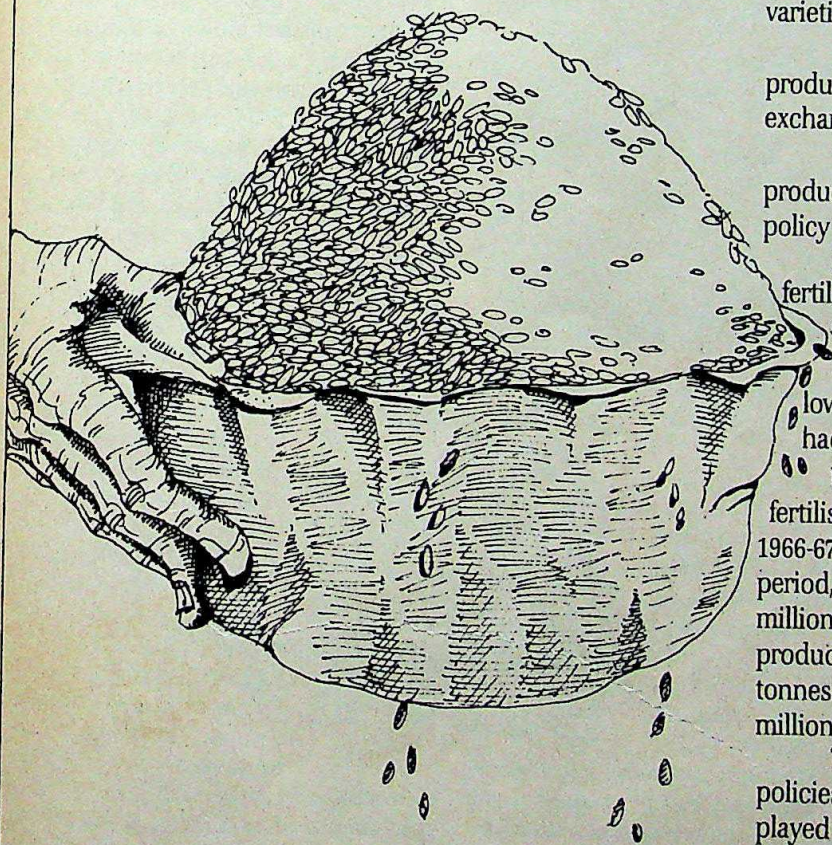
Beyond self-sufficiency : the lesson of the mid 60s drought.



The story of how India became self-sufficient in food has its roots in the drought of the 60s.

In the aftermath of those traumatic days, when the world's largest and youngest democracy was literally reduced to going around with a begging bowl, the government decided there was no substitute for self-sufficiency.

Consequently, a two-pronged approach was identified.

Large-scale adoption of high-yielding dwarf varieties of seeds. And extensive use of fertilisers.

The problem was the latter. Domestic fertiliser production was simply not enough. And foreign exchange shortage ruled out large- scale imports.

The solution could only be increased domestic production. And to make that happen, a dual-objective policy was evolved.

Manufacturers should find it profitable to produce fertiliser (only then could the industry grow). And farmers should get fertiliser at affordable prices (because only then would they use it). Since the latter is lower, the difference — termed the fertiliser subsidy — had to be borne, obviously, by the government.

What happened then is part of history. India's fertiliser output jumped from 0.455 million tonnes in 1966-67 to 7.07 million tonnes in 1986-87. In the same period, fertiliser consumption catapulated from 1.1 million tonnes to 8.8 million tonnes. Foodgrain production more than doubled to nearly 150 million tonnes. And foodgrain imports dropped from 10.4 million tonnes to zero.

Thanks, in large measure to the pragmatic policies of the government and to the positive role played by the fertiliser industry, India had gone beyond self-sufficiency. And the 'green revolution' had become a symbol of hope for developing nations.

Today we are visited by a drought that is even more severe than the one in 1960s. And we have the food buffer to cope with it. What a change from those 'ship-to-mouth' existence days.

Fertiliser Security. A pre-requisite to food security.

This, the first in a series of three advertisements by the Fertiliser Association of India, traces the evolution of the Fertiliser Policy, and the role it played in the miracle of the green revolution.

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SRINIVASA RAMANUJAN

Genius Acknowledged

Fresh interest in a centenary year

HE could not get into college, but he managed to produce truths about that purest of sciences—mathematics. The genius of Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887—1920) produced an incredible 4,000 formulae—which he recorded in three notebooks and some scraps of paper. Now, 67 years after his death, his hour of recognition has come, as more and more top scientists after several years of research discover they have only proved theorems Ramanujan had already stated to be true.

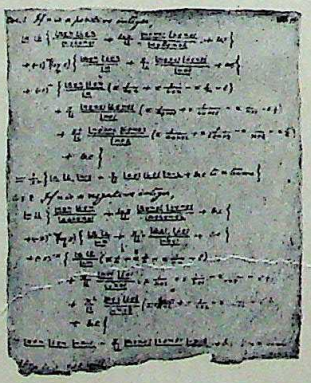
A telling indication of his growing reputation is the gathering of Ramanujan scholars and other mathematicians at three international conferences in Tamil Nadu this fortnight to mark his 100th birth anniversary. And the annual academic conference of the Association of Mathematics Teachers of India is being held on December 22 at the Kumbakonam town higher secondary school (Ramanujan's Alma Mater) to commemorate this centennial year.

The enigmatic genius of Ramanujan touched the very fundamental problems in number theory and analysis. There is hardly a field of formulae, except that of classical number theory, that he has not enriched, and in which he has not revealed unsuspected possibilities. Ramanujan's results are relevant to problems and challenges at the frontiers of mathematics—problems he could have known nothing about—the "superstring theory" of cosmology, algorithms in computer science and complicated molecular systems in statistical machines.

Yet his basic education in mathematics seems to have come from just two unfancied books. When he was 12, Ramanujan borrowed S.L. Linney's *Plane Trigonometry* from an older school student and G.S. Carr's *Synopsis of Elementary Results in Pure Mathematics* at the age of 15 from a government library.

Amazed American researchers found, however, that their "new" ideas were Ramanujan's old ones. At one meeting in the US held as part of the centennial celebrations, researcher William Gosper spoke on "Ramanujan as Nemesis". Gosper had devised a new computer algorithm to calculate the number Pi to 17.5 million digits. But he repeatedly found that his best ideas were already discovered by Ramanujan. Asked Gosper rhetorically: "How can we all love this man if he is forever reaching out from the grave and snatching our neatest results?"

One of the striking features of



Ramanujan (above) and his manuscripts

Ramanujan's work is the absence of detailed proof or workings. This was explained by Indian researchers as a continuum of a long Indian tradition. Said M.S. Rangachari of the Ramanujan Institute for Advanced Study in Mathematics, Madras University: "A distinct feature of ancient Indian mathematical works is that only results were stated in the form of verses or sutras and the justification or proof was rarely given. Unfortunately, this has led to some modern scholars dismissing it as borrowed works."

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) had, however, published Ramanujan's unorthodox ideas in two volumes. And Bruce Berndt, a mathematician at the University of Illinois, spent more than a decade analysing the collection and even proved some of the theorems for which Ramanujan had not given any proof. Two other mathematicians, George Andrews of the Pennsylvania State University and Richard Askey of the University of Wisconsin have also pored over these pages, which are to be released in a book form as part of the centennial celebrations.

Rangachari traces Ramanujan's work, unique in its own right, as a process of evolution. Said he: "Ramanujan's procedure for obtaining a continued fraction expansion is one of successive reduction used in the work of the 15th century Kerala mathematician Nilakanta Somayaji's Tanttrasangraha, available in the grantha leaf form at the Adyar Library, Madras. The striking connection cannot be missed if one knows Sanskrit."

Little, if anything, of path-finding quality has, however, happened in Indian mathematical research since Ramanujan. There is hardly any research in universities and Indian industry has little use for a mathematician unless he is a computer programmer. Lamented M.S. Raghunathan of the TIFR and chairman, National Board for Higher Mathematics: "The cream of mathematics talent is skimmed by the Indian Institutes of Technology from where the bright students go on to do management. We picked the top 20 in a national mathematical olympiad last year and offered them Rs 250 a month to study a B.Sc. course in mathematics. Sadly, only one of them is pursuing mathematics today."

In fact, when the Hinduja Foundation presented a purse of Rs 20,000 and announced a monthly pension of Rs 1,000 for Janaki, the 87-year old widow of Ramanujan, in August this year, she suggested a Srinivasa Ramanujan Trust be created to present a gold medal to a deserving mathematician and scholarships to brilliant students of the subject.

Meanwhile, the centennial celebrations are marked by clamour for naming schools and colleges after Ramanujan, installing his statue and more. Another demand is to take over his ancestral house and preserve it as a national monument. The only regret is that it has taken so long for the man's genius to be given full and final recognition.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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The fertiliser subsidy : and how, surprisingly, it goes right back to the Government.

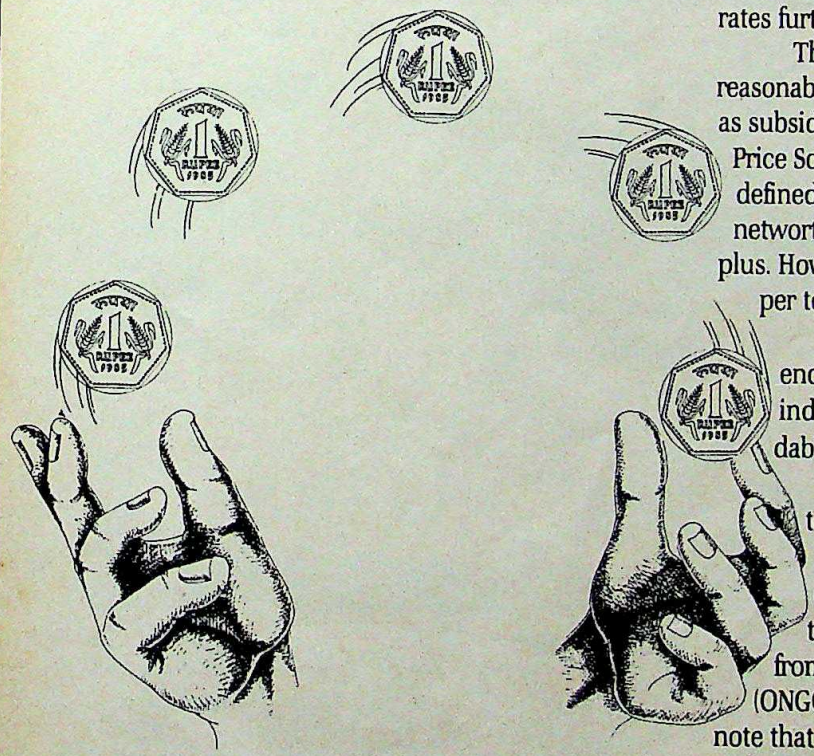
Our logic rests on a self-evident premise; that in a country like India, food prices have to be kept low.

This implies two things; one, that we produce sufficient foodgrain and two, that we do so at a low cost.

Which of-course means that fertiliser (the key input in food production) should be easily available, and at prices farmers can afford.

Unfortunately, the cost of producing fertiliser is substantially higher than the Government controlled price. This is so because inputs for making fertiliser — purchased almost entirely from Government organisations — are inordinately expensive. Various levies and high interest rates further add to the cost.

The difference — between the selling and the reasonable ex-factory price fixed by the Government is paid as subsidy under what is called the fertiliser Retention Price Scheme. Each fertiliser unit that conforms to pre-defined efficiency norms is allowed a post-tax return on networth of 12%. The system is normative, and not cost-plus. However, since the subsidy is pre-determined on a per tonne basis, it naturally rises with production.



The beauty of the system is that it simultaneously encourages the growth of an efficient fertiliser industry, makes fertilisers available to farmers at affordable prices, and keeps foodgrain prices at low levels.

As to the sum of Rs. 2,000 crores that is paid to the industry, there are many ways of looking at it. The most pertinent one is that the bulk of it actually comes right back to the Government through the surpluses of various organisations from whom the fertiliser industry buys inputs (ONGC, Railways, Coal India Ltd. etc.). It is interesting to note that of the net increase in subsidy between 1980-81 and 1986-87, 94% has gone back to the exchequer on this account. So it's hardly the fertiliser industry that's being 'subsidised'.

In any case the situation is not unique to India. Developed nations like USA and Japan subsidise agriculture to a far greater extent. They simply call it Farm Price Support, and not a subsidy. Perhaps that is why no hue and cry is raised by advocates of free market economies.

Fertiliser Security. A pre-requisite to food security.

This, the second in a series of three advertisements by the Fertiliser Association of India examines the fertiliser subsidy and concludes that at the very least, the term 'subsidy' is a misnomer.

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NATIONAL GAMES

On a New Track

Ambitious plans for revamping the games

EVEN games seem to be sporting a new look these days. The National Games, once a quadrennial or biennial (whichever was more convenient) sports round-up, have a more professional and streamlined look ahead. Stadia left over from the 1982 Asiad are being utilised, new stadia are coming up, excess flab in the form of the flotsam and jetsam of Indian sport is going to be shed. What is aimed at is a brave new world in which only the proven are chosen.

Or so it is hoped. The 27th National Games being held in Kerala this fortnight (Dec 20-28), called by track queen P.T. Usha "the dream games", are easily the most ambitious sports project the state has taken up—an unprecedented 6,400 competitors and about 1,500 officials from all states and union territories are expected to participate.

It was the success of the 1982 Asian Games that spurred the Indian Olympic Association and sports administrators to stress the necessity of regularising the National Games using standardised equipment and restricting participation to the best in the country. The 26th games, held in Delhi in November 1985, was a step in this direction.

The major innovation in the Kerala Games is that the competitions are not going to be held in one place alone. The events are being spread out in Trivandrum and the six other coastal districts of the state—Quilon, Alleppy, Ernakulam, Trichur, Kozhikode and Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar's native Cannanore. And entry is free, except where seating capacity or spectator flow has to be controlled. This is aimed at making the Games as open as possible.

New stadia have come up and the existing ones modernised. The new facilities include: the 10,000-capacity floodlit open air aquatic complex at Trichur; the 5,000-capacity indoor stadium at Trivandrum; the saucer-shaped Velodrome at Kariyavattom near Trivandrum; and the eight-lane Italian Polyuarethane track at the University Stadium, Trivandrum. The Central Government gave Rs 2 crore and the state Government Rs 2.5 crore while the remaining Rs 3 crore came as loans from the housing and urban development corporation and a consortium of five banks. The state Government is to clear the loans over the next four years. Unfortunately, however, because of a cut in hydel generation, the showpeice of the new facilities—the 10,000-capacity ship-shaped multi-purpose stadium at Ernakulam (cost: Rs 2.58 crore) will not be ready for the games.

The number of events has also been reduced from a planned 29 to 22. Yachting, equestrian events, golf, shooting, fencing, lawn bowling and taekwondo have been given the axe. The practical reason for this is that Kerala does not have the infrastructure to hold these events.

Also, participation has been restricted to the best six or eight in their states in individual events—based on the past year's performance. In team events also, a proven track record is going to be necessary.

Moreover, private companies will be sponsoring individual events. The organisers will rake in a total amount of over Rs 1 crore through sponsorship. Advertising in the various stadia will bring in another Rs 35 lakh. Says the General Convenor of the Games Organising Committee (GOC) Jiji Thomson, 30: "We are hoping to finish the Games with a surplus of about Rs 50 lakh."

But the changes are modest. Said Pathrose K. Mathia, the games' technical committee convenor and director of physical education, Kerala University: "Historical roots, popularity, performance levels and existing facilities have to be assessed when developing even newer facilities. So we have been choosy and not invested money on a synthetic turf for hockey or bought measuring equipment for various games, but borrowed it from the Sports Authority of India (SAI)." This approach has helped the GOC husband its resources. Now, the cost of the Games, including the loans for the stadia, adds up to about Rs 9.50 crore.

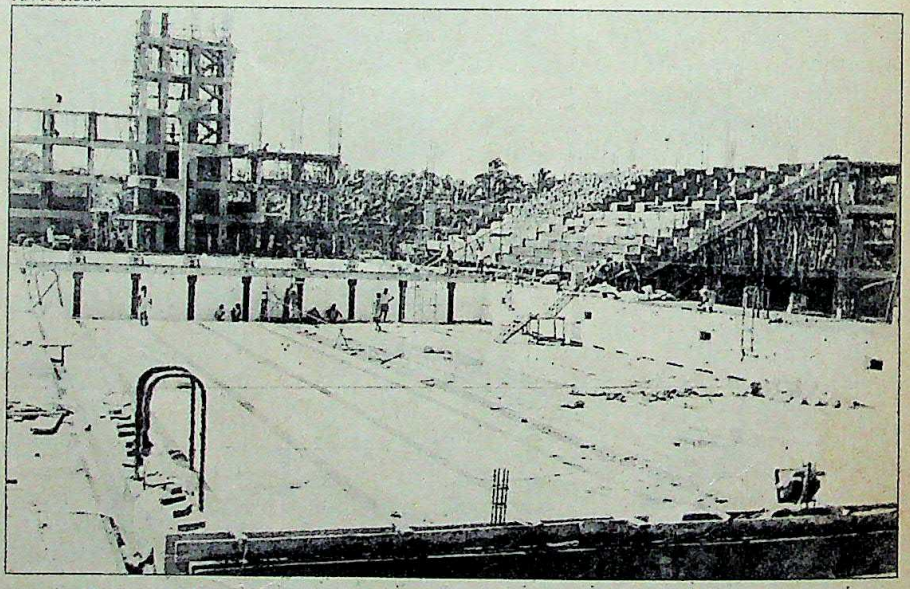
The idea is to introduce a new strategy to spot and shape talent by giving them the best competition and providing the best conditions. After the Delhi Asiad, fresh talent has not been found in any Olympic sport in which India could have a chance of winning a medal. The obvious signs were the idle stadia. But, says SAI Secretary S. Basu optimistically: "It took some time to draw youth to the Asiad facilities but in Kerala, one has only to wait till the Games are over."

Kerala Sports Minister Neelalohita Dasan Nadar concurred: "The fact that one of Usha's sprint records was broken in the state schools meet in the first week of December shows sports in our state is ahead of the rest." And if the Kerala Games prove a success, the organisers could well be on the right track.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

The Games emblem; Trichur swimming pool: fresh start

James Studio



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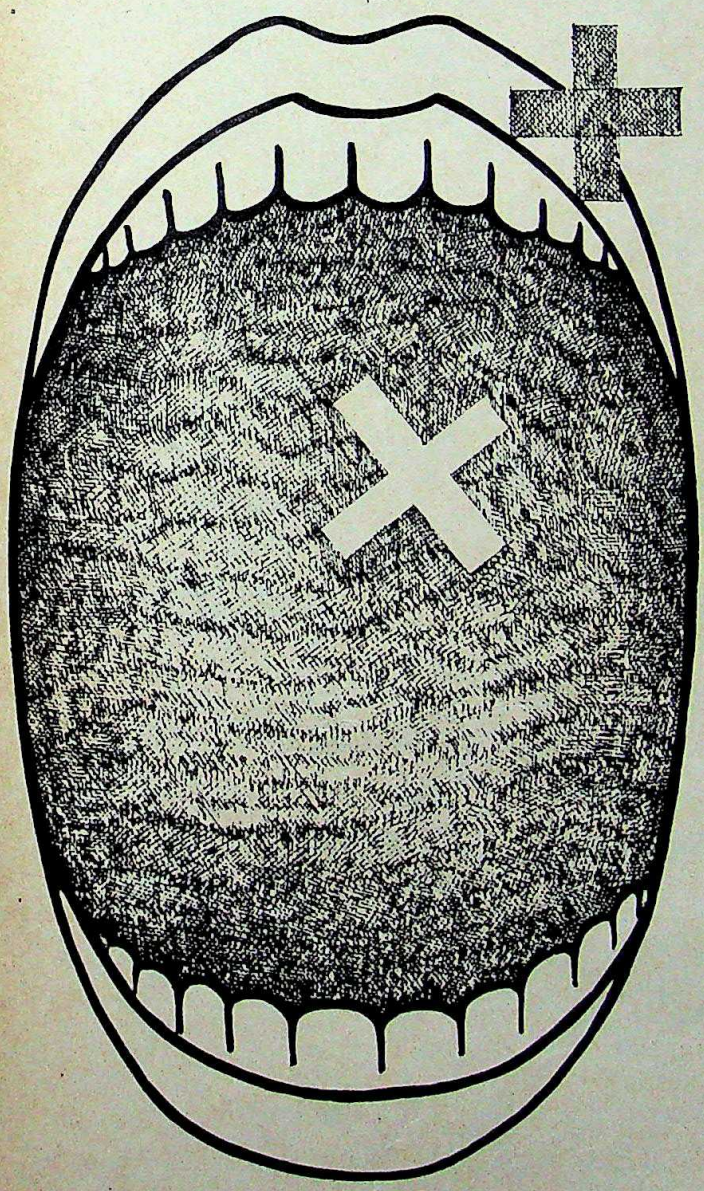
Feeding India in 2001 : the arithmetic of agriculture.



By the turn of the century, India's population is expected to nudge the 100 crore mark. To feed this, about 240 million tonnes of food-grain will be required, an increase of 53% over current production.

The Seventh Plan Document anticipates that 80% of this increase will have to come from improved productivity based on intensified fertiliser use.

The implication is that if India is to remain self-sufficient in food, then fertiliser use must double to 18 million tonnes by 2001 AD.

Therein lies an opportunity and a pitfall.

The opportunity is that steps can be taken to ensure that the domestic fertiliser industry meets nearly the entire requirement. The advantages of this are obvious. No dependence on other countries. Creation of employment and income. A big boost to industrial development etc. All that the Government has to do is to continue what it has been doing. The current policy has worked excellently and is, in a major way, responsible for India's comfortable foodgrain position.

The pitfall is the seeming attractiveness of cheap imports. First, cheap imports don't stay cheap the moment a big buyer like India enters the international market. Second, dependence in food or fertiliser amounts to the same thing. It compromises India's position in international affairs. And third, of-course is the question of foreign exchange. Why spend it when the same thing can be done equally well with rupees.

Why indeed.

Fertiliser Security. A pre-requisite to food security.

This, the last in a series of three advertisements by the Fertiliser Association of India establishes the crucial role that the fertiliser industry will have to play if India is to remain self-sufficient in food in the future.

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A STEP FORWARD, BACK TO MUD.

More than fifty percent of India's population builds with mud. Yet it is often rejected as a relevant building material.

It is time to rediscover the potential of mud. And mould it to meet the ever increasing housing needs of today and tomorrow.

A potential that is being increasingly recognised and promoted by HUDCO—Housing and Urban Development Corporation.

Homes for Rs. 6000/- each.

Over the years, HUDCO has helped construct a large number of houses in the country using mud as a basic building material. Converting a readily available resource into durable, cost effective homes. With a judicious mix of old and new methods—improved mud construction, hygienic water and sanitation facilities.

Homes that have benefited over 200,000 families in Kerala alone.

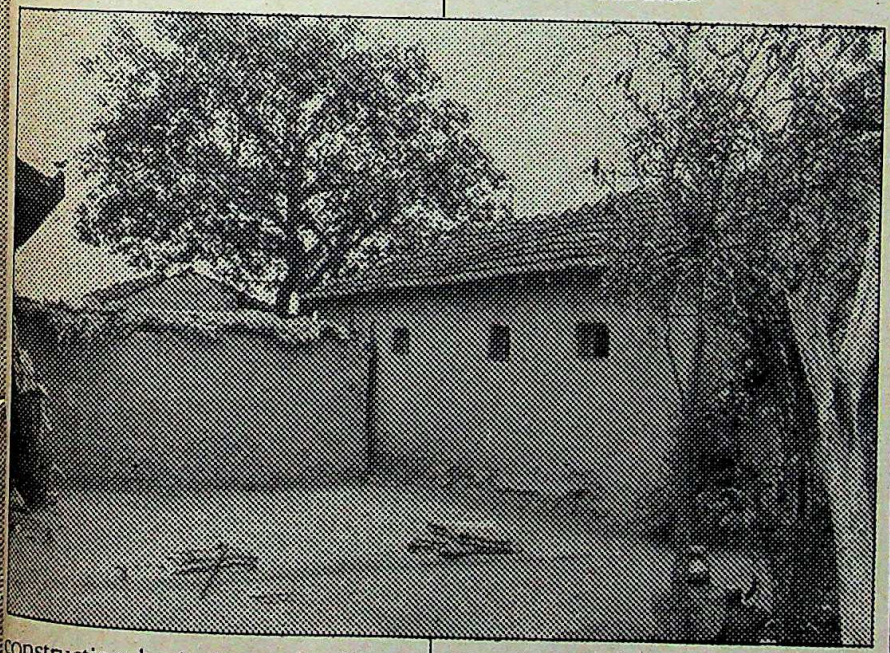
Housing—that adds meaning to life!

Innovation with mud is only one of the many facets of HUDCO's activities. Which covers the entire gamut of housing operations. From financing to architecture, provision of basic amenities to use of locally available building material.

And even distribution of subsidies for smokeless chullahs and Solar Cookers to the economically weaker sections. Bringing about a change in their lifestyle, for the better!

The building block of rural India too!

Today, HUDCO has helped over 2.6 million families to have a home of their choice. The only organisation to have financed over 1.45 million houses in rural India.



Housing—in harmony with nature!

At HUDCO, the concept of housing does not stop with the buildings. Projects are conceived to harmonise with the surroundings and the climatic conditions of the region. With special emphasis on preservation of green areas.

HUDCO HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 26 lakh houses financed.
- Over 14 lakh houses for rural areas.
- 88% of houses for economically weaker sections (EWS) and LIG.
- 1,30,000 houses for families affected by natural calamities e.g. cyclone & floods.
- Innovative use of non-traditional, energy efficient material.
- Cooking facilities like smokeless chullahs and solar cookers an integral part of low-cost housing.
- Use of viable locally available material, to keep costs low.
- Special care taken of environmental factors - to build in harmony with nature.
- Provision of hygienic water and basic low cost sanitation facilities.
- Special emphasis on improvement of slums.
- Site and services for the poor, supported by Cash Loan Schemes.
- Repairs and renewal of dilapidated houses for conservation of existing housing stock.
- HUDCO till 30.9.87 has sanctioned 333 schemes scattered over 17 states and Union Territories for a total project cost of Rs. 259 crores involving total loan assistance of Rs. 166 crores. After completion of these schemes, 3.64 lac families belonging to EWS and LIG would be benefited under IYSH 87.

HUDCO—a clear perspective!

It's mix of innovation and cost-consciousness has made HUDCO what it is today.

An organisation fulfilling the nation's priorities to provide homes for millions. With a vision that aims to enhance the quality of life itself.

IYSH 87

यत्र विश्व भवत्येक नीडम

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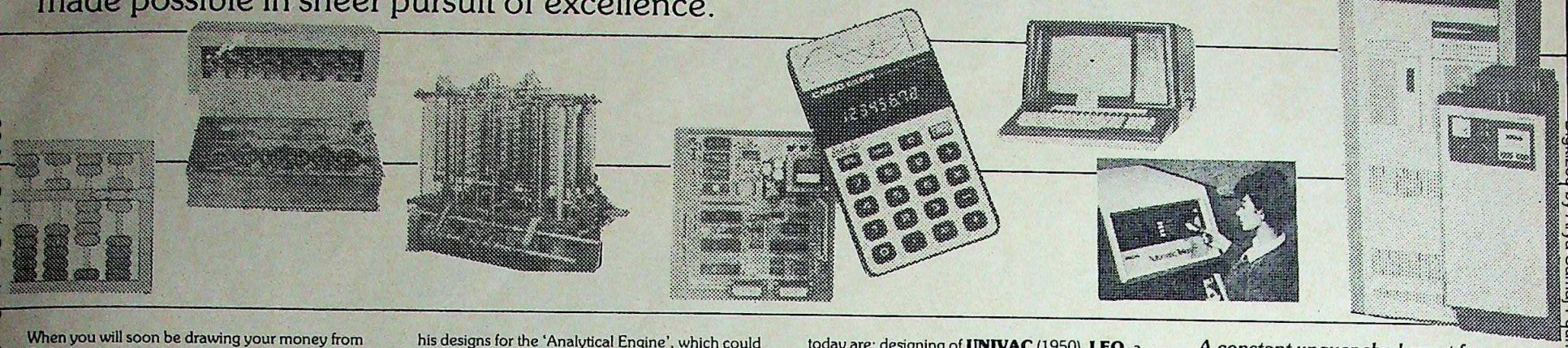

When you will soon be drawing your money from Cash dispenser machines anywhere and anytime, at your convenience, would you be wondering at the extending reach of the Computer Technology?

Today, a computer is involved in almost every activity that surrounds us. From the printing of morning newspaper to the last word of 'Good Night' flashed on the television, weather forecasting, food processing, package designing, aeronautics, space probes, medical diagnosis... the list is endless, but the first of the computer's intended applications were to banking.

The very first known computing method is the **Abacus,** rows of strung beads, denoting units, hundreds etc., when even numerals were unknown thousands of years ago. They, and their improved versions have survived even today, helping trade and commerce. The first attempt to make calculations easy were by John Napier, who designed the tables called '**logarithms**' in 1614. William Oughtred designed a devise - the **Slide rule** in 1622 on the principles of logarithms Attempts to fabricate a mechanical machine to compute were by Blaise Pascal's **'Adding Aid'** (1642), and Charles Babbage in 1834. The machines to compute tables by Charles Babbage in 1822, were called **'Difference Engine'** and his designs for the 'Analytical Engine', which could have been close to today's electronic computer could not be fabricated due to lack of technology then, in 1833.

It was in 1850, when the first workable model of adding machine, with a key board appeared in America. In 1890, Hermon Hollerith of New York, perfected the **'Tabulating Machine'** to total the census figures of America. While in 1930 Dr. Vannevar Bush led a team to develop his large size calculator of analogue type, the first generally regarded computer was the Automatic Electronic Digital Calculator or **Atanasoff Berry Computer** (1942), devised by Prof. John V Atanasoff and Clifford Berry, using thermonic valves. The **Digital Calculator,** devised by Prof. Howard H. Aiken (1944) and the **Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator** (ENIAC) devised by the researchers at Pennsylvania (1845) were the successful initial computers with speeds upto 5000 calculations per second. These were bulky with over 18000 thermonic valves in them. Neumann's concept of **Binary Notation** (1946) revolutioned computer making.

The other significant strides in the computer technology's growth, which have resulted in making this machine an integral, indispensable gadget today are: designing of **UNIVAC** (1950), **LEO,** a business computer (1954), **transistorised computer** (1960), introduction of **CHIP** (1965), first **mini computers** and **pocket calculators** (1971), single chip **micro processor** (1971), etc.

The growth of Computer industry is approximately dated as 1940-52 (1st generation with vacuum tubes), 1952-64 (2nd generation with transistors), 1964-71 (3rd generation with Integrated Circuits), 1971 - to present (4th generation with large - scale integrated circuits), Intelligent Computers (5th generation) are on the design.

Over the recent years, the computers themselves have grown complex in design with the objective of simplification in use and have entered every aspect of today's life, revolutionising the concept of communications and enabled instant access to information, simplified processing and planning.

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AHMEDABAD

The Swami Scandal

Godman accused of abducting industrialist's daughter

INDIAN godmen are increasingly proving that they are more men than god. The latest to join the growing list of swamis shrouded in scandal, is Swami Amarjyot Shyam.

In his passport, the Swami gives his address as the "Amarnath caves in the Himalayas". Last fortnight, however, his residence became the Ahmedabad jail where he has been incarcerated on allegations of abduction. The case has caused a sensation in the conservative industrial city, mainly because the Swami has a massive following in Ahmedabad and because he is being accused of abducting Tamanna, the 18-year-old daughter of well-known Ahmedabad industrialist Kanak Nanavaty.

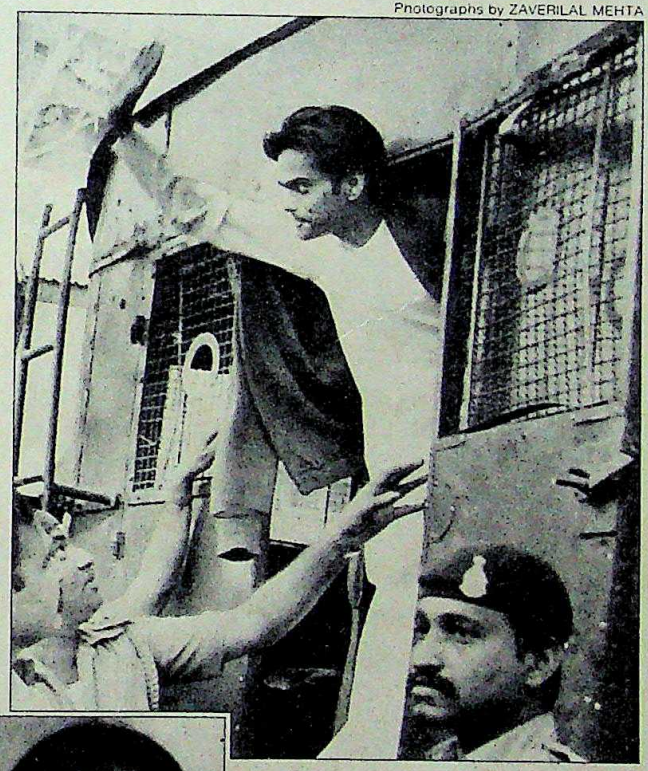
The scandal came to light last November when the Swami and Tamanna eloped to Baroda and from there to Indore, Kota, Jammu, Delhi and Jaipur where they were finally traced by Nanavaty's relatives on November 19. Nanavaty's lawyers have charged the Swami with abduction.

The Swami, however, claims that he married Tamanna in an Arya Samaj mandir in Jaipur and produces a marriage certificate as evidence. But detectives of the Crime Branch who have taken over the investigation, point out that the marriage ceremony was left incomplete when the priest saw that Tamanna was hesitant. The certificate, they say, is invalid.

Till now, the conflicting claims have obscured the real facts of the case. Tamanna had become a follower of the Swami in 1986 along with her mother, Rahatben. They were among the many others in Ahmedabad who had succumbed to the mysterious spiritual powers of the Swami.

In a six-page account of her first meeting with the godman, Tamanna praised his spiritual prowess in glowing terms. The relationship changed when the Swami decided to marry Tamanna after he received a "message" from his guru "to settle for a worldly life". But in her statement to the police, Tamanna said that the Swami had promised her moksha (salvation) and asked her to go along with him.

Photographs by ZAVERILAL MEHTA



The Swami waving to supporters; (inset) Tamanna: unholy controversy

Supporters of the Swami refuse to believe that statement. And the manner in which the investigation was conducted by the police has left an impression that he has already been tried and found guilty.

On November 20, when Tamanna and the Swami were brought back to Ahmedabad, Nanavaty prevented his daughter from making a statement to police officials. Instead, he produced a medical certificate—from a private doctor—which testified that Tamanna was not in a proper mental condition. And the police arrested the Swami on the basis of Nanavaty's complaint. It was only after two days that Tamanna gave her statement. The Swami's supporters allege that the industrialist brainwashed his daughter against the Swami in the intervening period.

S. Tripathi, the Swami's lawyer observed: "The whole controversy could have been prevented if only the police had taken Tamanna's statement on the very day she was brought back. If she was not in her proper state of mind, that could have been certified by a civil surgeon and not a private medical practitioner. Swamiji has not committed any crime because Tamanna is an adult."

Although Tamanna had disappeared on November 4, Nanavaty lodged a complaint only a week later. He charged the Swami and six of his disciples with hatching a conspiracy to abduct his daughter. One of the persons accused is film actress Urmilla Bhatt's husband and famous stage artiste Markand Bhatt, who is also the Dean of the College of Performing Arts at Baroda. The Swami allegedly used Bhatt's car to reach Baroda.

What has, however, given the case added sensationalism is the list of powerful followers that the Swami has collected around him. Among them is T.N. Fotedar, brother of Union Minister for Steel and Mines Makhanlal Fotedar. Others include a major general, a brigadier, a retired rear-admiral and a host of top government officials. The Swami used to stay with his disciples during his tours. In Gujarat, his main disciple was businessman Sakalchand Patel.

But the question that is baffling everybody—including the police—is the motive of the Swami in abducting Tamanna. Both sides agree that the relationship between the two was strictly spiritual. But the rumours that are circulating in Ahmedabad hint that the Swami was interested in the industrialist's money. Tamanna is Nanavaty's only daughter.

But the real test of the spiritualism of Swami Amarjyot Shyam will be when this already controversial case begins in court—a lower court though than the one the Swami would have obviously preferred.

—UDAY MAHURKAR

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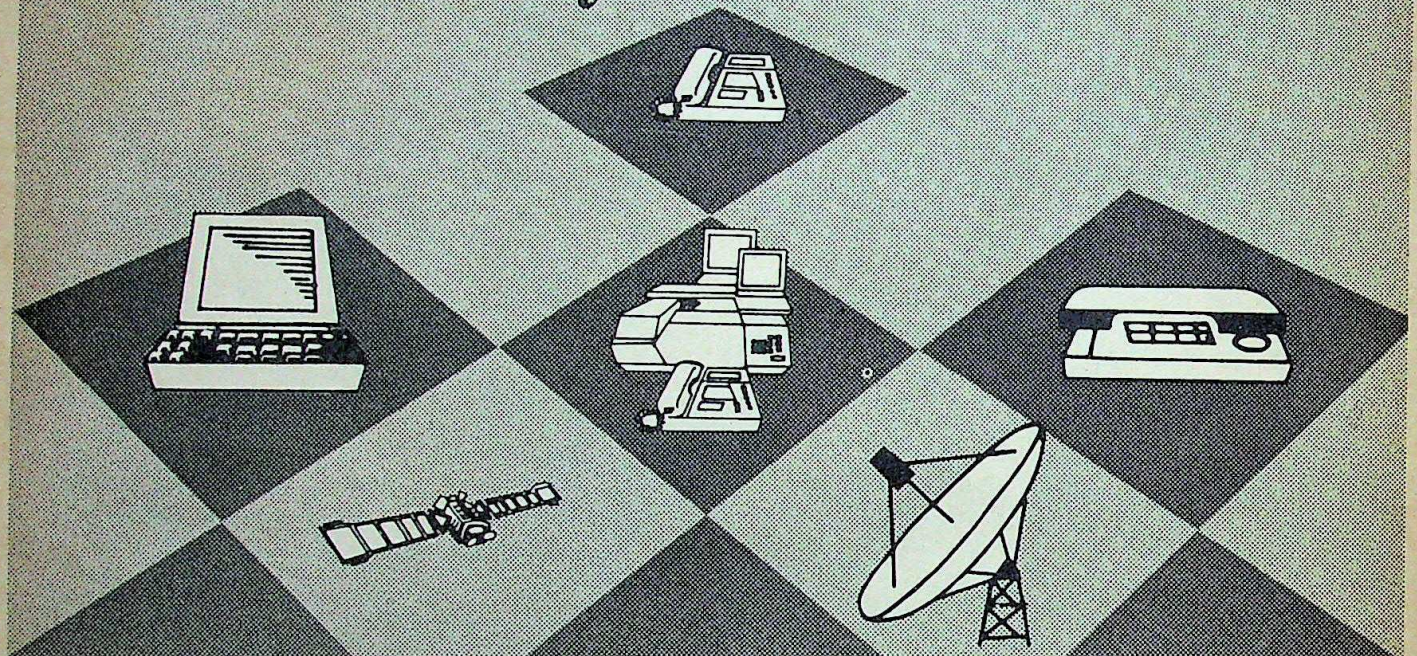

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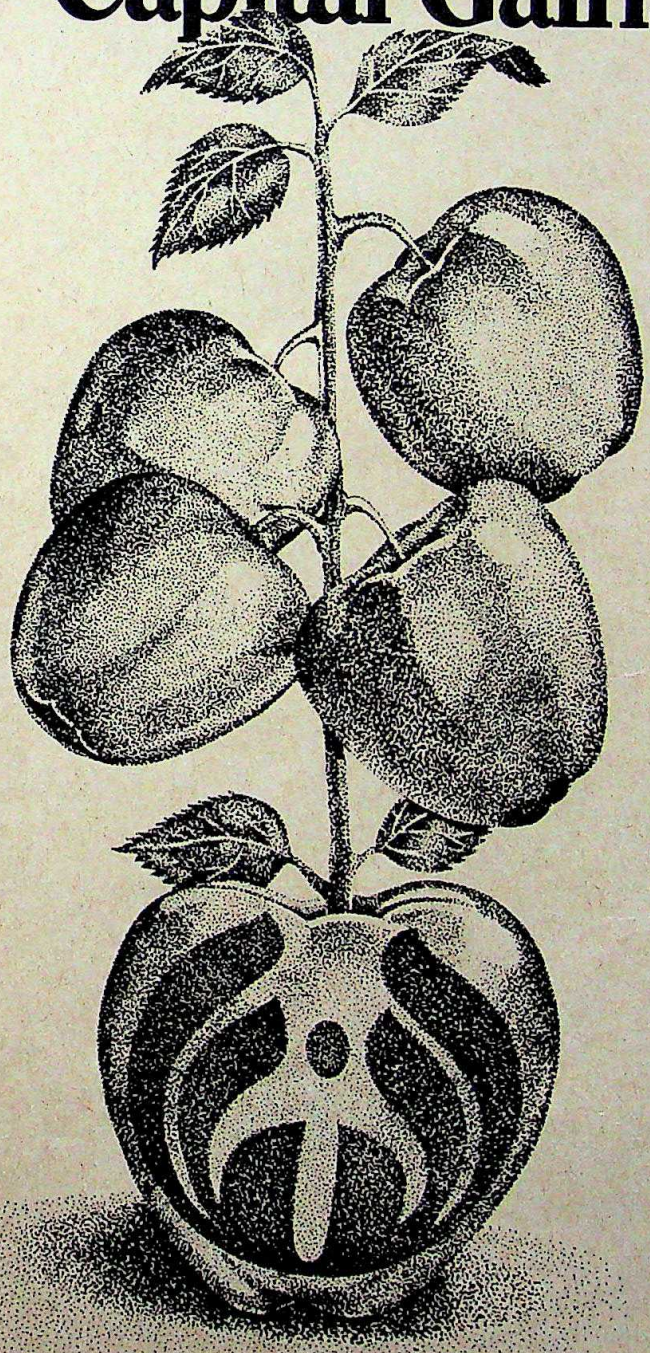

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DACOITS

Call of the Wild

Many 'reformed' dacoits take up guns again

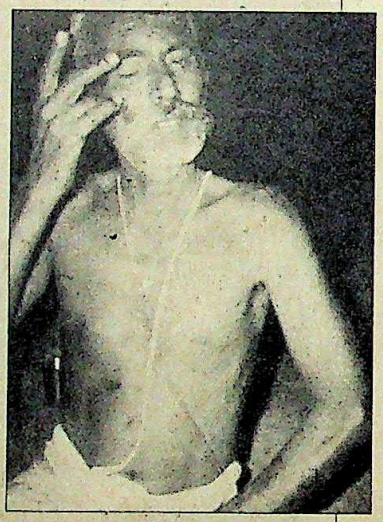
THE priest carried a gun. Silhouetted against the faint glow of a naked bulb, he walked down the deserted temple stairs with the ease of a man used to carrying a firearm all his life. On the banks of the Jhilmil—one of the tributaries of the Chambal—the ancient temple, half-hidden by a huge banyan tree, seemed like something from a bad dream.

The priest was Narayan Pujari, 55, a former Chambal outlaw, who surrendered along with other members of the dreaded Mohar Singh gang in 1972. Ever since his release from jail in 1982, he has been a priest at a temple near Behat in Gwalior district.

The gun slung across the frail shoulders of Pujari symbolises the status of surrendered dacoits today. Many of them still live on the periphery of the law. Officials concede that they have received complaints against several former dacoits. Even the reformers of yester-years, the Sarvodaya workers who persuaded two generations of dacoits to lay down arms in 1960 and again in 1972, admit there is a problem. Says the Chambal Peace Mission's Hemdeo Sharma, who had played a key role in the historic 1972 laying-down of arms: "Most dacoits are living as peace-loving citizens. The complaints are mainly against the gang leaders." But local residents add that many of the complaints don't reach the authorities. "Usually the terrorised victim is afraid to speak out," says D.K. Jhadhav, former chairman of the Gwalior Development Authority.

Of all the surrendered dacoits who have violated the law in recent times, the most glaring case is that of Madho Singh, 53, who had laid down arms before Jayaprakash Narayan 15 years ago. The man who has rubbed shoulders with chief ministers and addressed Sarvodaya conferences now faces a charge of attempted murder in a Morena court. He had absconded after allegedly firing at a villager in November last year following a land dispute. Police officials later 'persuaded' him to present himself in court this summer.

Pujari and Madho Singh symbolise the present status of surrendered dacoits, many of whom still live on the periphery of the law.



S. PREMI

Madho Singh; and (top) Narayan Pujari as a priest

But a former Congress(I) MLA close to Madho Singh is confident he will not be convicted: "The police have helped him reach an out-of-court settlement and no one will depose against him." If true, the incident shows how the former renegades operate—and survive.

Ever since his release from prison in 1980, Madho Singh has been involved in a number of brawls. His son was also arrested last year on the charge of stabbing a shopkeeper to death in Morena's market-place, for refusing to pay protection money. But he was released later for want of eyewitnesses.

Madho Singh's case is all the more dismaying because he was touted as a reformed dacoit both by Sarvodaya workers and the Government. While still serving his prison term, he started addressing public meetings and press conferences. After release, he became a magician, Chambal Sarkar—after P.C. Sarkar—and campaigned for the Congress(I). It is easy to see why his case was publicised.

Considered the number two dacoit in the Chambal—after Mohar Singh—he had a prize of Rs 1.50 lakh on his head for committing 71 murders, 62 dacoities and 112 kidnappings for ransom.

Another former dacoit gone astray is Suru Singh, who commanded one of the biggest gangs and had an award of Rs 75,000 on his head until he gave himself up in 1972. The man who supposedly would not hurt a fly allegedly shot dead a farmer in Datia district two years ago over a land dispute. Once more, Singh's mentors are hopeful of an out-of-court settlement.

Many others have returned to crime because of the Chambal's tradition of 'blood for blood'—like Mansaram. When he was released in 1980 after eight years in prison, he shot dead Ishwar Singh, an old enemy, in Datia district. The two fought while canvassing support for the Congress(I) and the Lok Dal in the assembly elections. Even as Mansaram was facing trial, he and a friend were shot dead in 1983 by Ishwar Singh's relatives and there followed a series of retaliatory killings, which left three more dead.

Mohar Singh, who attracted a prize of Rs 2 lakh and was accused of gunning down an incredible 115 people, is another facet of the surrender legend. Prosperous and overweight, he owns a huge mechanised and irrigated farm at Mehgaon (population: 10,000) in Bhind district and a house in Gwalior.

Until a few years ago, he was viewed

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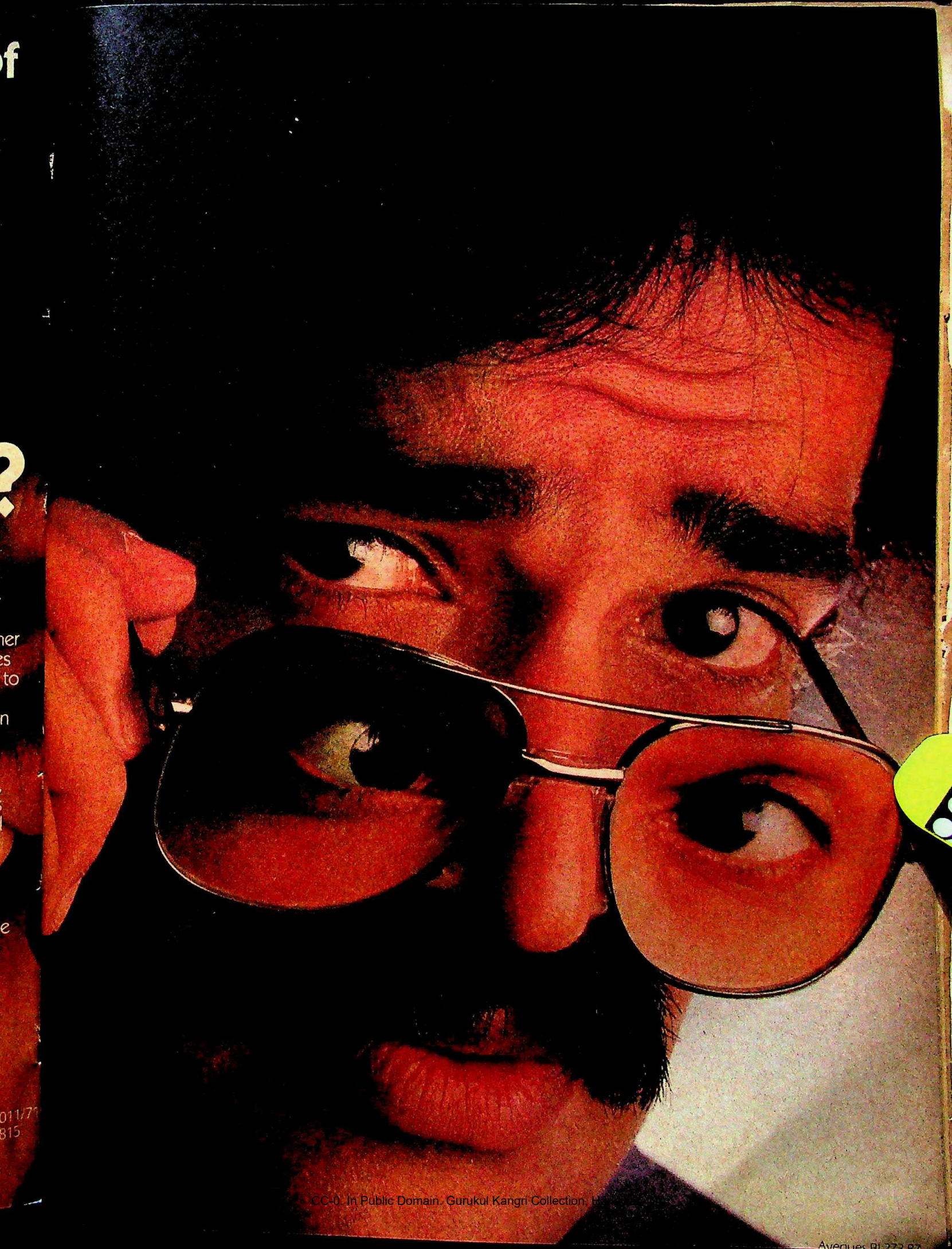

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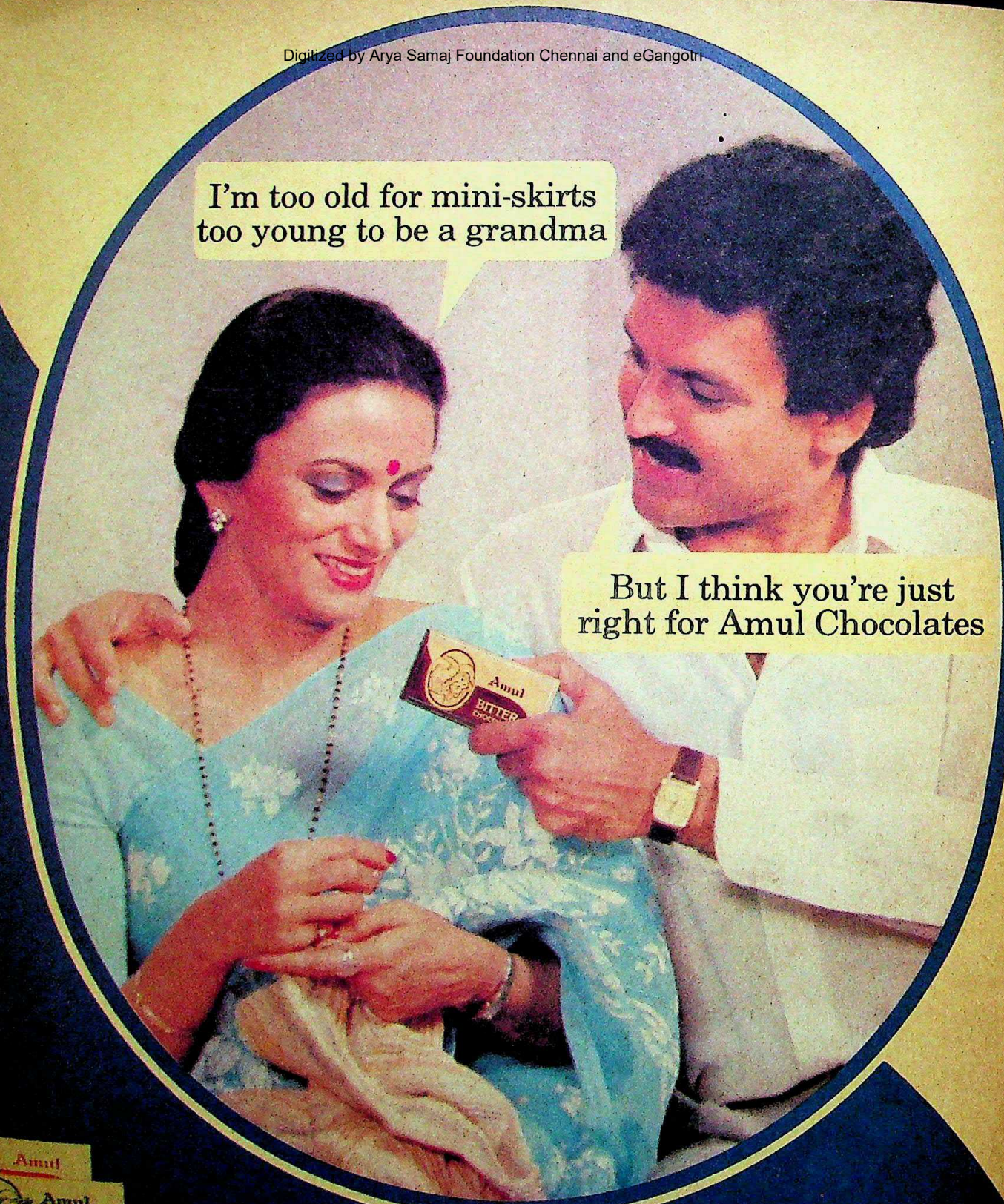

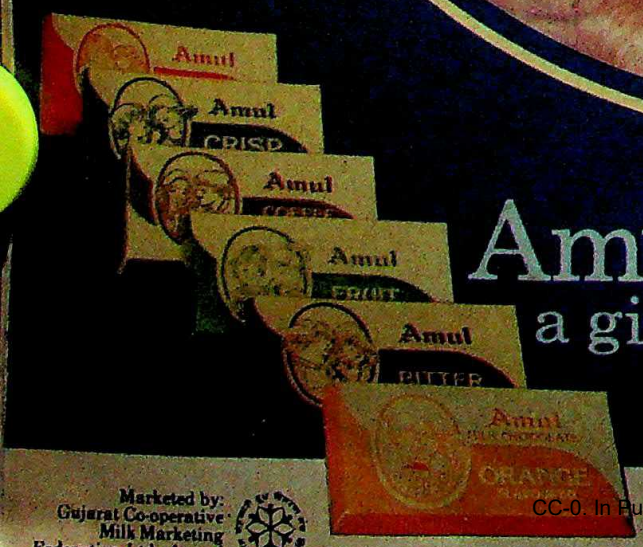

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as someone who could help landlords evict tenants in Gwalior and corner profitable government contracts almost at gunpoint. Other dacoits imitated him, forcing the police to come down on them with a heavy hand. Says B.P. Sahani, IG of anti-dacoity operations: "I've totally stopped that sort of thing though it was quite widespread earlier."

In another dacoit-prone area, Bundelkhand, working government contracts appears to be the favoured profession among men of this tribe. Dacoit chiefs Ram Sahay and Mauniram work diamond mines in Panna district. Puja Babba, alias Puran Singh, is licensed as a forest and public works contractor in Chhatarpur district's Bijawar tehsil. Most of the professional contractors prefer to avoid the area. In the Chambal area too, cartels of former dacoits often grab contracts.

How little their attitude to violence has altered became evident during their prison days. The Mungaoli police station has a number of cases of rioting and drunken behaviour against the inmates of the open jail. The behaviour of the new inmates—like Malkhan Singh and Phoolan Devi who surrendered in the early '80s—in Gwalior Central Jail, is as bad. Although they are treated like VIPs—each is given a special diet that costs Rs 20 per day—there have been about two dozen skirmishes between rival gangs, including those of Malkhan and Phoolan.

Dacoit participation in politics only worsens matters. It is widely believed that men like Madho Singh and Mohar Singh were given clemency in April 1980—on the eve of the state Assembly elections—because the ruling Congress(I) was aware of the clout they carry in their areas. Said Mohar Singh then: "They took my support secretly earlier. Now that I am a free man, I can support them openly."

All this has resulted in their glorification and has helped them project themselves not as repentant criminals but as social workers. "We used to rob the rich and help the poor and the needy," Madho Singh once grandly claimed.

There are also other dacoits who could not adjust to life in jail. More than a score of them have escaped, the best-known case being that of gang leader Ghanshyam, alias Ghansa Baba. He surrendered before the then chief minister Arjun Singh on February 12, 1983, but jumped back into the ravines within four months. He was gunned down last year.

"It's in their blood," says Gwalior range DIG Ayodhya Nath Pathak, referring to the local tendency to adopt violence at the slightest provocation. But Sarvodaya workers say that most of the surrendered men are forced by circumstances to take up weapons. Says Sharma: "The big names among the dacoits are happy but small-timers are harassed."

Many of them—including Madho Singh and Mohar Singh—are still afraid to return to their villages because they fear they will be gunned down by the relatives of those they had killed. Many have, in fact, been killed in this fashion.

If the attitude of the former dacoits has been disappointing, it has a lot to do with the state Government's own attitude towards them. Earlier this year, at a conference organised by the Chambal Peace Mission in Gwalior, the surrendered dacoits complained that the Government had not fulfilled assurances made 15 years ago. Said Sharma: "Half the dacoits have not got possession of the lands allotted to them."

Many like Madho Singh were allotted wastelands or disputed plots, which fanned trouble. Of the 20 acres allotted to Singh in Morena district, about seven acres lay in the ravines, one acre was under a canal system, half an acre was being used as a public thoroughfare and half an acre was wasteland. "The rest of the 11 acres was under the occupation of 11 villagers who had encroached upon it 40 years ago," said a Revenue Department report prepared after the bloodshed involving Madho Singh.

Much of the problem, says Sharma, stems from the fact that the Government has ignored voluntary agencies in the task of rehabilitation. Unless a two-pronged approach—reform as well as solving problems—is adopted, many more surrendered dacoits may find that the simplest solution lies in taking up arms again.

—N.K. SINGH in Gwalior

There have been clashes between the gangs of Malkhan and Phoolan in jail and Mohar Singh, now the owner of a huge farm, is known for cornering government contracts.

RAGHU RAI

(Clockwise from top) Mohar Singh; Phoolan Devi; Malkhan Singh

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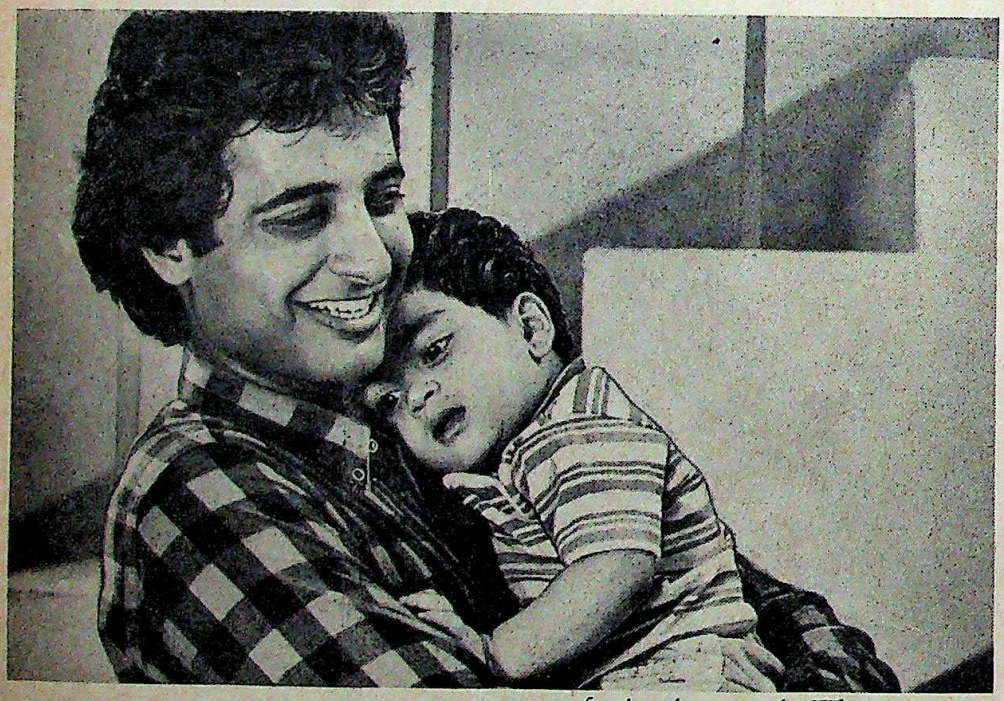

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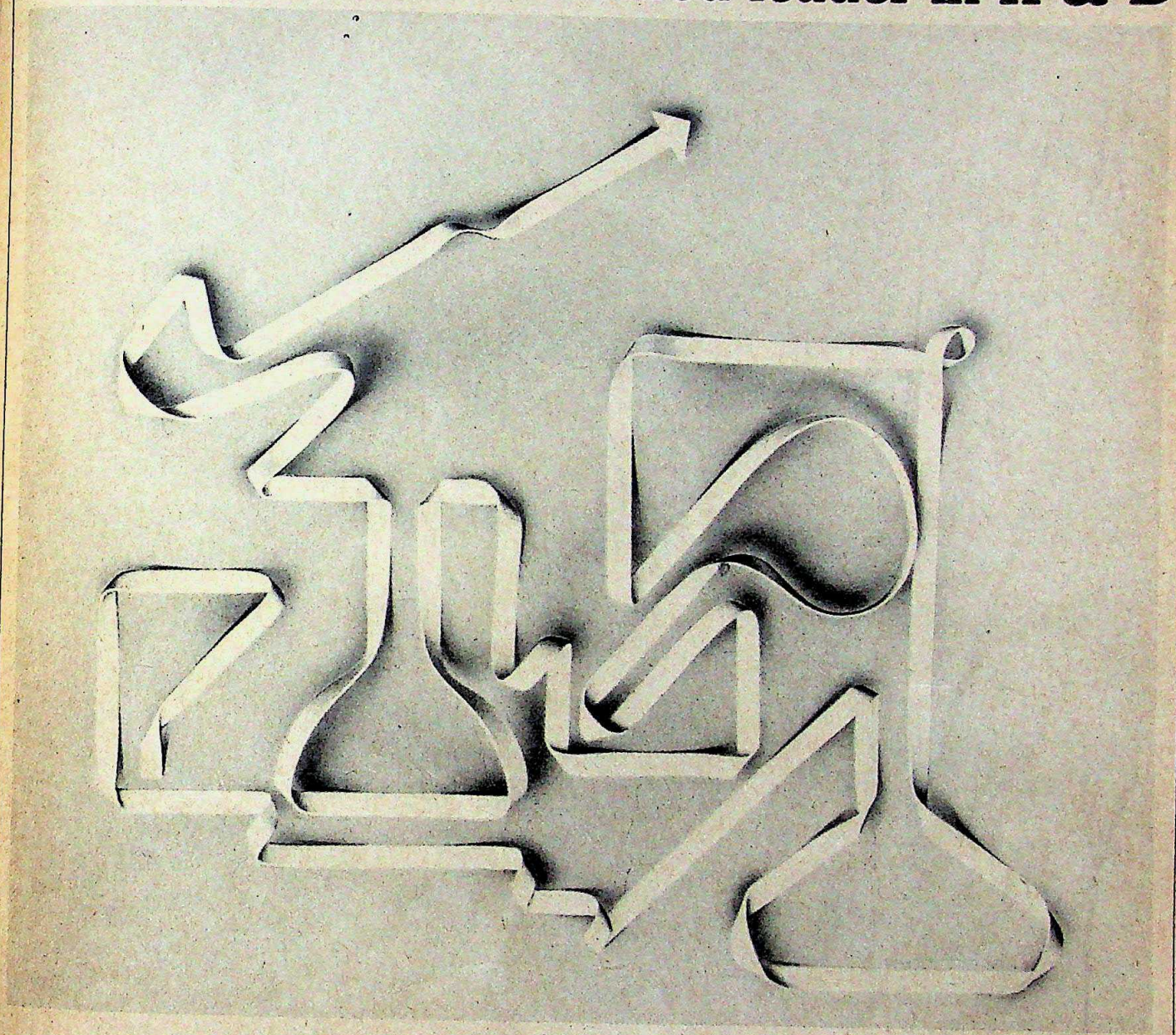

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AIR-INDIA

Collision Course

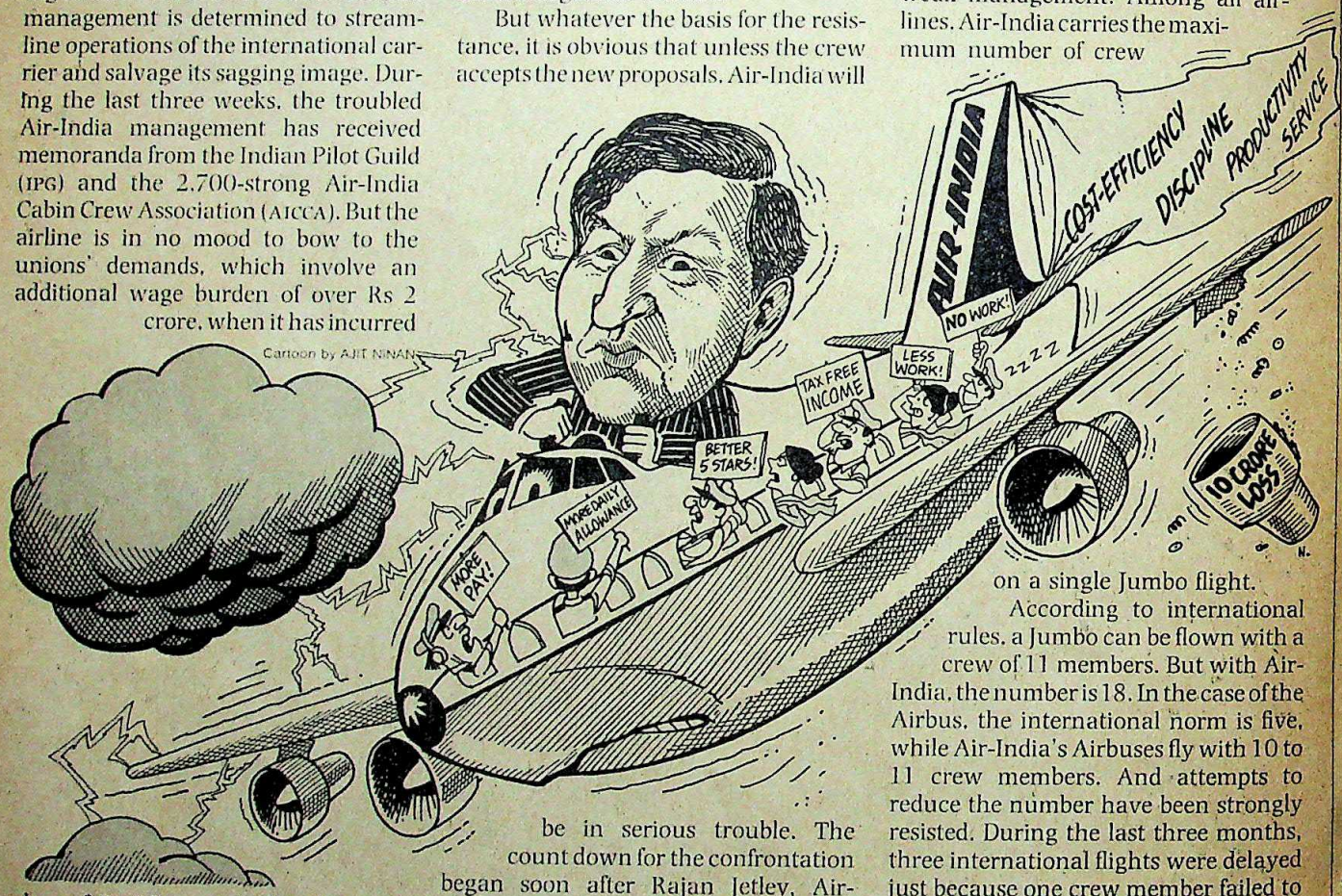
Efforts to streamline operations meet stiff resistance

CONFRONTATION is in the air. The pilots and cabin crew of Air-India have started a campaign demanding a host of benefits at a time when the management is determined to streamline operations of the international carrier and salvage its sagging image. During the last three weeks, the troubled Air-India management has received memoranda from the Indian Pilot Guild (IPG) and the 2,700-strong Air-India Cabin Crew Association (AICCA). But the airline is in no mood to bow to the unions' demands, which involve an additional wage burden of over Rs 2 crore, when it has incurred a loss of Rs 10 crore in the first nine months of the current year. In fact, the management has now even threatened to take the extreme step of suspending operations indefinitely unless the cabin crew falls in with their new proposals.

Declared Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Jagdish Tytler: "We will not mind closing the airline if the unions create chaos for unreasonable demands. Air-India must show some positive results. The management has complete freedom to handle the problem and the Government is totally behind it."

However, the flight crew maintains that its demands are not unreasonable and resistance to the management's proposals has now ended in an impasse. Declares IPG President, S. Raghwan: "A wrong impression is being created that we are against the airline's growth. We are asking for reasonable compensation for additional productivity. The ball is in the management's court."

But whatever the basis for the resistance, it is obvious that unless the crew accepts the new proposals, Air-India will be in serious trouble. The count down for the confrontation began soon after Rajan Jetley, Air-India's managing director, drew a new flying and service schedule for the pilots and the cabin crew in April this year. It was aimed at rationalising the duty hours and making the crew more responsive to passengers' needs so that the sagging image of Air-India received a boost. Under this proposal, the pilots were expected to fly long-haul flights. Earlier, under an old agreement, they were expected to fly only a maximum of nine hours at a time. In addition, it was proposed to double up the cabin crew in hotel rooms during overseas trips instead of allowing single occupancy as at present. According to Jetley, this exercise, if implemented, would save over Rs 10 crore in foreign exchange. Jetley also put down many new service rules for the inflight crew.



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Currently, Air-India doesn't have a service manual for its cabin crew. A set of rules which was framed in the early '70s has been kept in abeyance since 1972. In the absence of rules, chaos has reigned supreme. Both pilots and cabin crew refused to undergo the normal physical checks—mandatory for all airline staff throughout the world—and attempts to enforce discipline were thwarted because of powerful trade unions and a weak management. Among all airlines, Air-India carries the maximum number of crew on a single Jumbo flight.

According to international rules, a Jumbo can be flown with a crew of 11 members. But with Air-India, the number is 18. In the case of the Airbus, the international norm is five, while Air-India's Airbuses fly with 10 to 11 crew members. And attempts to reduce the number have been strongly resisted. During the last three months, three international flights were delayed just because one crew member failed to turn up. And in November, a flight to the Gulf was delayed by over six hours because of an altercation between the crew and the cabin staff—since one of the flight pursers was absent, the cabin crew refused to join the flight.

Even more appalling is the refusal of the cabin crew to collect blankets and headsets in the plane just before landing. The cabin crew maintains that it is not part of its duty. As a result of this stand, the airline lost 25,000 blankets and 44,000 headsets worth over Rs 40 lakh last year. Air-India is now the only airline which allows cabin crew members to choose their own flying partners. The management doesn't have the power to mark crew members for an international flight. And now the cabin crew has refused to clean wash-basins in

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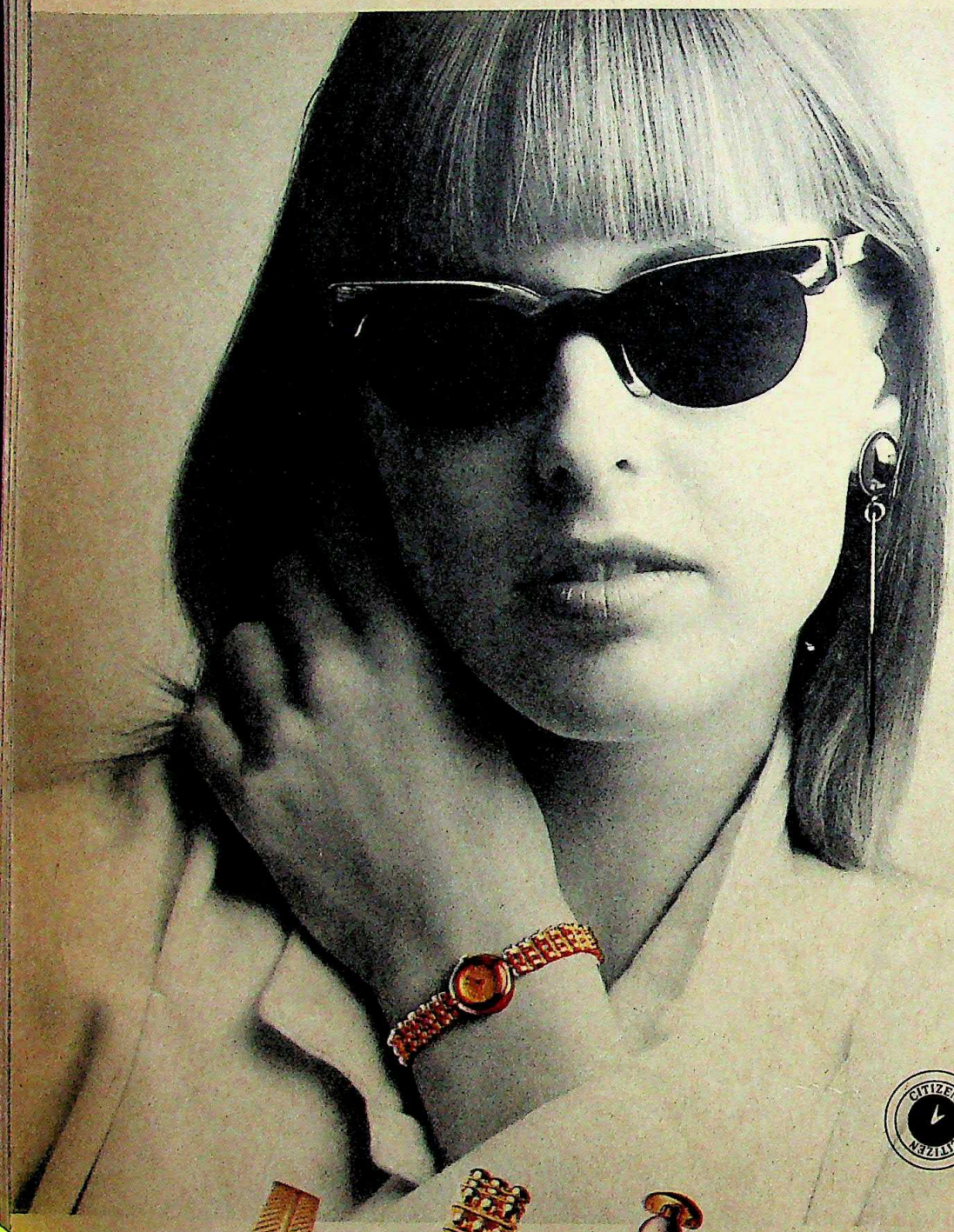
Elegant Times From Citizen.



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CITIZEN

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the flights, forcing the management to take a decision last month to appoint a sweeper for each outgoing flight.

It is precisely due to the recalcitrant attitude of its staff that Air-India has not been able to introduce more routes or operate long-haul flights like Delhi-London or London-Los Angeles directly. Since an agreement with the pilots provides that they will not be forced to fly more than nine hours at a stretch, Air-India has been allowing a 'technical halt' at Dubai to the entire crew during such flights. According to airline sources, a crew member makes an additional Rs 5,000 to 10,000 every month as a result of these technical halts. In this practice, the airline loses two ways—fewer passengers pay up for long flights with multiple stopovers, while the airline's overheads rise by over 50 per cent. And now, when Air-India plans to introduce direct flights, the pilots are demanding $ 500 (net of taxes) each for an additional flight. They also want a 48-hour break after each flight, which means additional hotel and food expenses for the management.

The management would have surrendered this time too, but for the heavy financial drain. It has already spent over Rs 600 crore on acquiring new Airbuses and Jumbos. Since 10 of its 19 planes are more than a decade old, Air-India proposes to invest over Rs 300 crore next year as well. But most of that money will go into replacing the old planes with new ones and there will be hardly any expansion in its fleet strength. To make up for the loss due to heavy depreciation and interest (Rs 30 crore) on new investments, Air-India plans to improve fleet utilisation and discipline the staff.

According to the latest financial results, the corporation is likely to suffer a loss of over Rs 10 crore, as against a net profit of Rs 30 crore last year. Though passenger traffic grew by over 15 per cent during the first six months, the airline has lost heavily even on the profitable Gulf route because of better service provided by its competitors. Says Jetley: "We are committed to offering the best sevice and we are investing a lot in improving our planes and making the airline competitive. But a lot depends on the cooperation of the staff." That seems unlikely now. And the outcome of the current confrontation will determine not only the profit graph of Air-India, but also the career graph of Jetley—a whizkid who was brought in to pilot the airline by the prime minister himself.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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BIHAR

Money for Moving

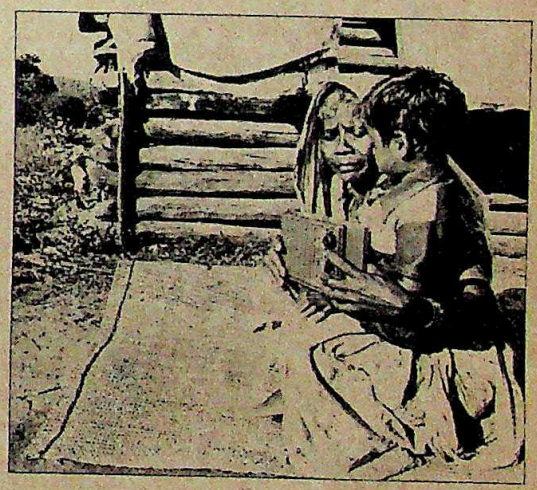
New scheme fuels consumerism and breeds paupers

AT Mandal, the site for the multi-crore Kutku Dam on the North Koel river, a group of villagers from areas which will soon be submerged under water, assemble around Rehabilitation Officer C.K. Mishra to receive their "shifting payments". Most of the villagers prefer cash. Jitan Karwa, 20, an illiterate tribal from Tanwai proudly displays the Rs 1,365 payment he has received as the government-fixed fee for shifting from the hut he now occupies. This one-time payment is distinct from the compensation he is still to be paid for the three acres of land he will also have to surrender for the project. At the moment he has not quite decided what to do with the cash.

But if he follows the example of other villagers, he might soon be the proud owner of a wrist-watch, a bicycle, or a transistor radio. And after the first flush of excitement is over and his introduction to the brave new world of consumerism has abated, Karwa, like others, will probably wind up wondering where his money went, and just what to do with all the goodies which are really not an organic part of his real work-a-day existence. Since 1985, tribal families in 17 similarly-situated villages have been spending on luxury items which, of course, soon lose meaning for them. In this small area, there are now five mopeds, 300 bicycles and numerous

Etwari Kisan; and (below) Mishra disburses cash to villagers

Like many others, Etwari Kisan has bought a transistor set. More than half the Rs 16,000 her family received as compensation has been spent, and they are yet to buy an alternate plot of land.



Photographs by K M. KISHAN

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transistors and tape recorders.

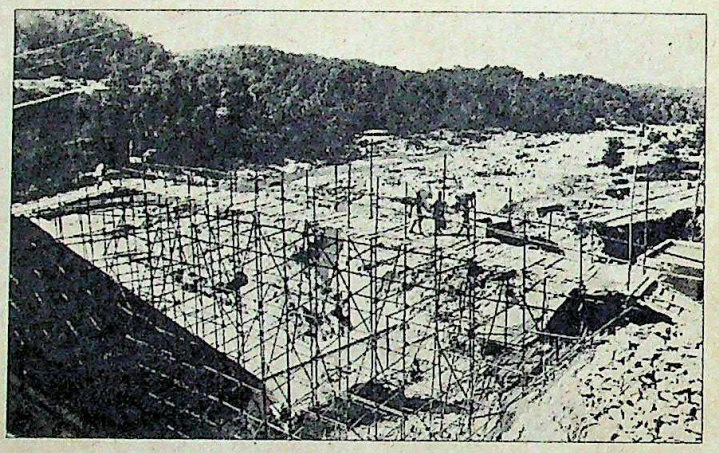
According to a recent survey conducted by the Kutku Doobakshetra Mukti Morcha, a group organising a movement for the proper rehabilitation of village folk, most of them are either unable to use these luxury goods or find them unsuitable to their needs.

Brokers and middlemen are having a field day luring the poor tribals with substandard goods. Tapeshwar Mochi is a middle-aged Harijan who was compensated for 1.33 acres of land. While he will not reveal the amount of money his family received, he admits: "With that money, however, my two teenaged sons—Ram Krishan and Lachua Phukli—got married. I do not know what the future holds for me or my seven-member family." In his house the womenfolk sport new saris and show off their brand-new utensils. There is also a tape recorder and a 12-volt rechargeable battery to run it. Mochi's family members bought another tape recorder at a high price. The salesman told them it was a Hong Kong-made Sharp system. On close inspection it becomes obvious that it is a dubious local brand.

Mochi's neighbour Phenkan Kisan, 65, who can barely walk, always carries a transistor slung over his shoulders. "We got some money as house compensation, but everything was spent on marriages in the family. Only this *baja* (transistor) remained with me and I listen to music and news now," he says. Not far from the houses of Mochi and Phenkan lives Etwari Kisan. She displays a new transistor set. She says: "With the money the Government gave us we bought this (transistor) besides bullocks and cows. Still some money is left and we will buy land somewhere." What she does not admit, but what emerges from questioning others, is that more than half of the Rs 16,000 her family received as compensation has already been spent on buying fancy knick-knacks.

This situation puts the poor, ignorant tribals in a frightening dilemma. With most of their "shifting" and compensation cash having been squandered, what will the villagers—accustomed only to farming for their livelihood—do when they are finally moved and have little or no money left to buy land? Because the crisis is not immediate, most of the families simply shrug and try not to contemplate what the future holds for them. And the obvious question being asked by social activists is why, when prudent rehabilitation was the crying need and the pitfalls of pumping in cash into areas that had never seen it were so obvious, did the Government not take adequate measures to safeguard the tribals' welfare?

Construction work at the Kutku dam site; and Jalja (below)



Palamau's Deputy Commissioner, S. Jalja, says that more than half the 676 affected families had demanded cash in lieu of rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation Officer Mishra points out that of the 676 families affected, most chose to take cash, as land was not easily available. He says that the Government had allotted 110 acres of land at Tehri village under Bhandaria block where 100 families were to be rehabilitated but while the site was being developed, some local people demanded compensation too. Things were yet to be sorted out when a legal aid committee based at Gumla filed a case in the Supreme Court and got a stay order. Now the Government had located another site at Marda in the same block where 40 acres of land are available.

But even as these schemes get underway, more and more tribals are lining up for the Rs 1,365 they get as shifting charges plus their compensation money. And the impression created is that after stuffing this money into the pockets of the tribals, the Government simply washes its hands off any further responsibilities towards them. According to district officials the Government has spent Rs 6 lakh as rehabilitation cost and Rs 4 crore as compensation so far. Palamau's new Deputy Commissioner, S. Jalja, says that more than half the 676 affected families had demanded cash in lieu of rehabilitation. According to government records there were strong objections from within the bureaucracy to the cash scheme but they were overruled at the state level on various grounds.

Jalja believes strongly that the tribals should not have been given total freedom to withdraw their money from banks or keep cash with them. "When I was in Lohardagga district," she says, "the tribals were paid some cash in connection with another project. I knew they are prone to spending carelessly so, I had ordered that for each withdrawal my countersignature was essential and this had worked satisfactorily."

But the situation in the Kutku area may be beyond repair because, when it mattered, few seemed to care. The state preferred to take the easy way out, by giving the tribals cash rather than undertaking the more arduous task of rehabilitation. The administration failed to implement its policy of ensuring that at least half the compensation money paid to each family is placed in fixed deposits in banks. And the Congress(I)'s local party leaders and cadres just did not care. The Congress(I) state legislator from the area, I.C. Pandey, has not even visited the area. And in the bargain, what has happened is that some 600 tribals who became consumers overnight now face the prospect of being transformed into nomads and paupers in their own land—the victims of a development project in a welfare state.

—FARZAND AHMED

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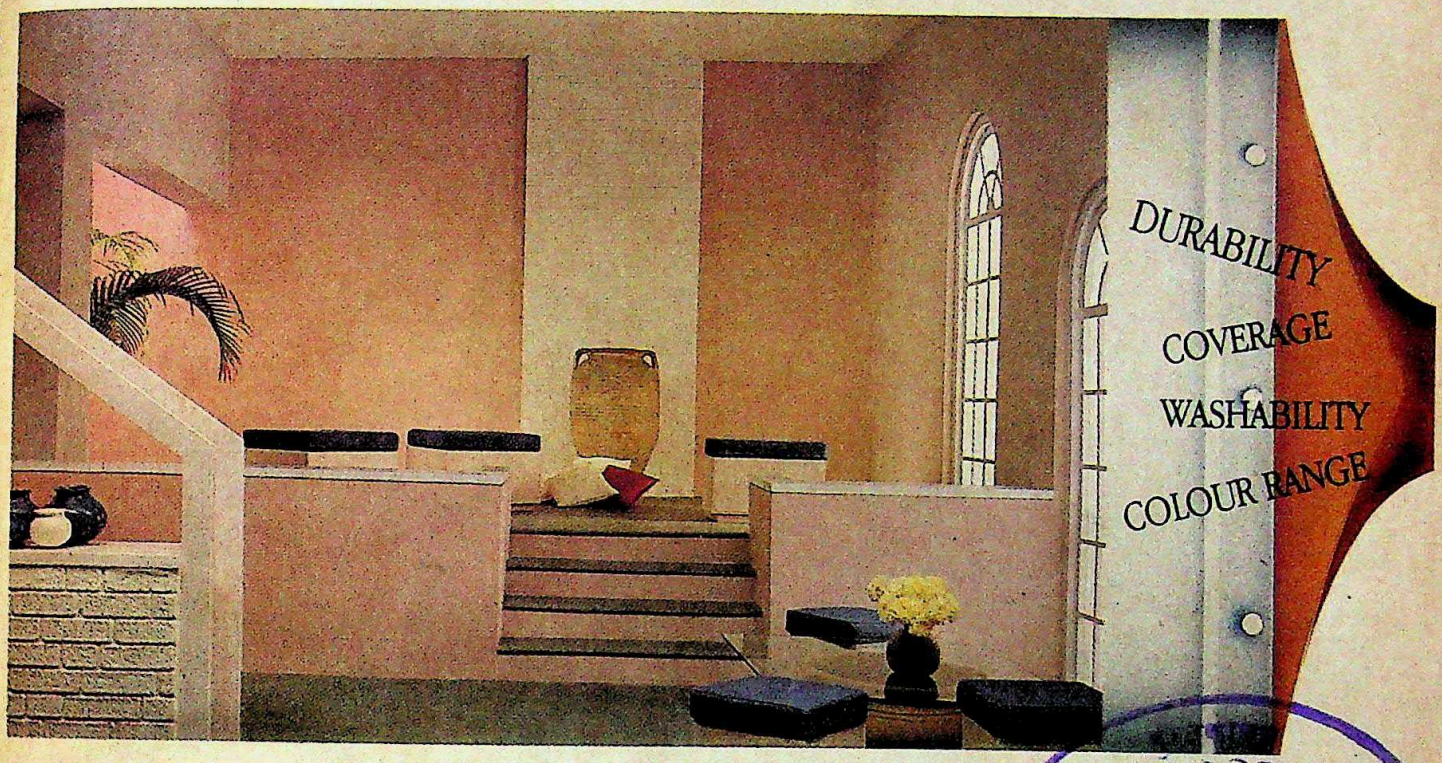

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TAMAS

An Emotional Odyssey

Govind Nihalani's serial will stir deep-rooted memories

TAMAS is like nothing television has ever screened before. Based on the few, dark weeks before Partition, Govind Nihalani's mini-series—which goes on the air in January—is the most serious, most sensitive and most relevant serial Doordarshan has ever sanctioned. If *Buniyaad* created a nostalgia for that time, *Tamas* is going to be a gut-wrenching experience. For a certain generation, it will bring back traumatic memories buried deep in the heart. *Tamas*—based on Bhisham Sahni's Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel—is the stuff nightmares are made of.

From the very beginning, Nihalani, 46, plunges the viewer straight into the pit with a message: "Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it." And at first it seems that, like *Aakrosh* and *Ardh Satya*, this is going to be another one of Nihalani's affairs with his conscience. But *Tamas* grows bigger and bigger and becomes almost epic in scale. The year is 1947 and the place is Jalalabad and inside a dirty straw shed, Nathu (Om Puri) and a pig are locked in a death dance. It is a long and tortuous scene but by the time the pig is dead, a cloud of doom has settled itself in the atmosphere.

Outside there is trouble brewing, everything points to it. Quietly the country is separating. Congress workers are not allowed into a Muslim *mohalla*, Nathu's feet knock over a *toona* (charm) and he fears for his unborn child. And then it happens: someone leaves a dead pig in front of the mosque. The communal whisperings become louder and a local leader senses trouble. "Vultures are going to circle the skies," he says. "The omens are all bad."

The Partition has begun. In an episodic way, the film moves forward and Nihalani continues to orchestrate the mood through smoky, surreal scenes. It is an enormous canvas crowded with incidents and people whose lives got affected by Partition—when the skies echoed with cries of hate and prayers for peace, a time when Muslims and Hindus became "them" and "us". Once it starts, the film does not let you relax. Each of the five hour-long episodes ends on an emotional climax. *Tamas* is a no-holds-barred experience: it's going to get every emotion working. "My first memory of blood, fright and panic comes from that period," said Nihalani who was six at the time of Partition. "I can still feel the heat."

In this rich tapestry, some scenes crash across the screen with a force seldom seen before. The Brahmins, with furrowed brows, are cloistering to fight the enemy. Tension is building up and the town bell rings: the spirit trembles at the sound. Certain characters become memorable: Ranbir, a timid schoolboy, who vomits when he is asked to kill a hen to his metamorphosis as a killer when he experiences new emotions—pleasure and pride. Jarnail Singh, a hot-blooded *inquilaabi* who turns mad as the country begins to divide. Shahnawaz, a sensible Muslim who, in a completely unexpected move, pushes a smiling, paralysed Hindu boy down the stairs. Outside, the body of a dead Muslim is being carried away and the cries of *Allah-o-Akbar* have got to him.

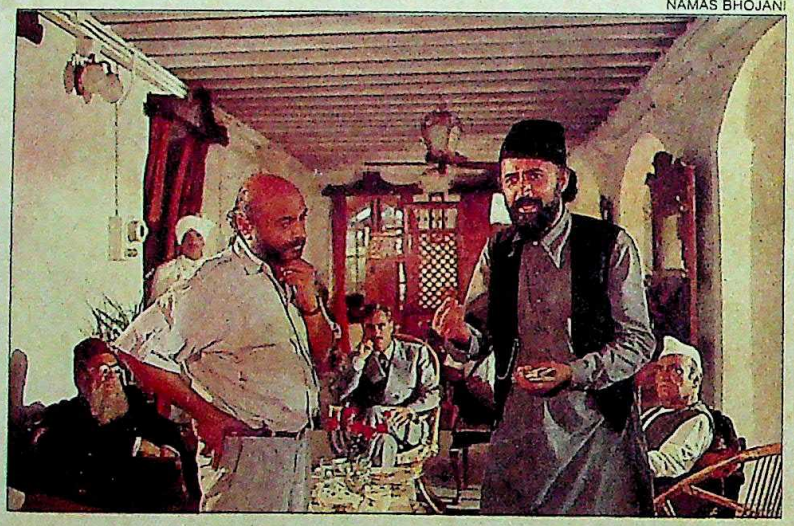
The movie becomes more and more disturbing. Harnam Singh, a gentle elderly Sikh (played by Bhisham Sahni) finds his home burnt. He tells his wife: "If the need arises, I'll kill you first and then myself." The English continue to sip gin and lime. "The whole town is being burnt," says the deputy commissioner's wife. "And I'm bored." In a gurudwara, the homeless are collecting and in the climax of the film, the women pray in a rising crescendo: the men have gone to battle and now they too move out, holding their children in their arms. The scene is carried out with such a matter-of-factness, it could make you cry. *Tamas* is, if anything, an attempt to see history through the lives of people.

It is Nihalani's triumph that he has shot this bleak, smoky landscape with warm, intimate moments. The tender, lyrical love story of Nathu and his wife Karuna links all the episodes together. Nathu, a *chamar*, has been ordered by a local Hindu leader to kill the pig that is later found in front of the mosque. A simple, superstitious man, he weeps on Karuna's shoulder. "It's all because of me," he says again and again. "My God! what have I done?" In his simple way, he thinks he is responsible for the country falling apart and so deep is his guilt, you can almost smell the dead pig on him.

With his invalid mother on his back and his hugely pregnant wife by his side, Nathu leaves the village. It is a journey that would look cliched to all except those who have made it. Bewildered and homeless, they are swept along with the tide, the common, suffering mankind. That's really what makes the film more than a document on Partition; the many characters that become part of the viewer's conscience forever. In the journey, Nathu's mother dies and his wife is ill. There is a child waiting to be born. Like a mad man, he cries: "For God's sake, will someone help me?" Harnam Singh and his wife appear, in answer to his primal cries for help. It is the merging destinies of the dispossessed.

Religion becomes a dark, brooding force. There is too much religion in it—and perhaps that is the point. Nihalani captures that moment when man becomes a fanatic, when the corpses fall and the praying men rise. It is a world where religion is all pervasive but where God, it seems, does not exist. "*Tamas* is much more than a film for me," says Nihalani. "It is an act of faith." Perhaps its strength

NAMAS BHOJANI



Nihalani on the sets of *Tamas*: a powerful experience

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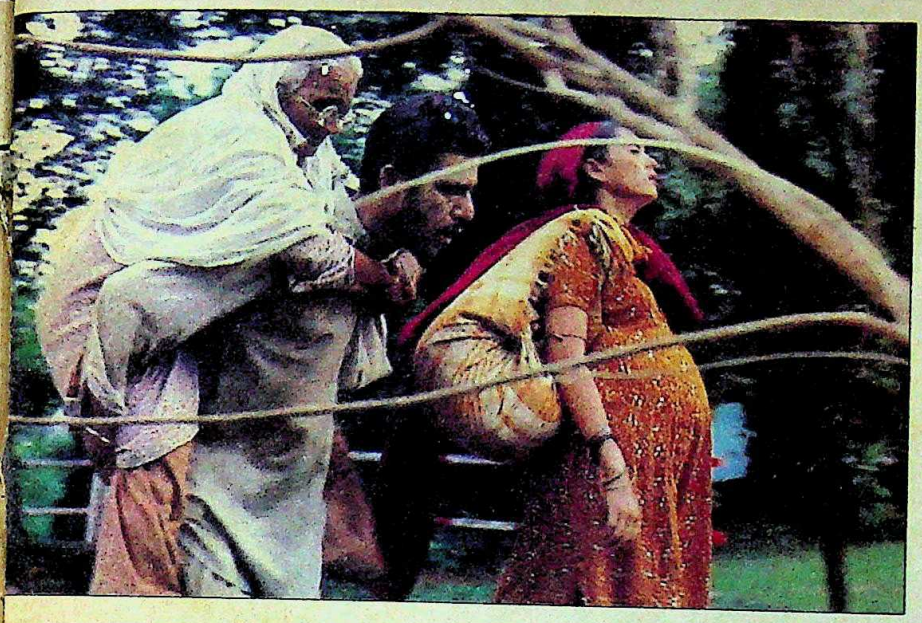

(From top) Puri and Sahi: a lyrical love story; and (below) scenes from the film: the winter of communal discontent

lies in the fact that Nihalani raises no slogans, takes no sides, he is simply telling it like it was. It is an attempt to share an experience, to let the terrible tragedy be felt. It is not a look back in anger, it is only an elegy.

In this disturbing revelation of what man has done to man, there are oases of peace, shreds of humanity that the fire could not destroy. Ultimately, there is heart in it. The communal group may be a monster but the individual is always kindly. As Harnam Singh and his wife drift through the landscape, they are given shelter by a Muslim woman. A Sikh woman, in the burning town, comes with the sword of God and rescues a Muslim "brother". True there is violence, but it is designed, so that you hate it. "What attracted me to the book," said Nihalani, "was that despite everything, there is a deep compassion in it". *Tamas* ultimately is a plea for peace.

Nihalani spends a long time establishing the tone, perhaps too long. But the milieu is rich. *Buniyaad* had created the mood, *Tamas* takes it further. Says Nihalani: "If I had to choose one film to be remembered by, this would be it." The series, with a budget of Rs 70 lakh, has been entirely shot in Bombay. With painstaking detail, the backdrop has been handled, the scenes with over 200 people hand-picked, it seems, from history, the elegant English bungalow with red roses in crystal vases on embroidered tablecloths, the dirty, cramped backlanes where the lives of the different communities lay so closely interwoven. It is an authentic glimpse into India's *mohallas* from where the train to Pakistan took off.

But the love story has a tragic ending. Nathu disappears into the night, and his wife must search among the corpses to find him. It is a strangely juxtaposed scene. The newly-formed peace committee is reassuring people that "all will be well". For the first time, Nihalani allows fresh, natural light into his *mise-en-scene*. Then the wind blows the sheet off Nathu's face. He's dead, the man who had carried her so many miles in the forest. His death is meaningless—and that's precisely the point. Just as the child is born a few minutes later, the cries of anguish rise again. That is what *Tamas* means. Darkness. It is the sort of film you don't want your children to see. It is also the sort of film you can't afford not to let them see.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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DURGA PRASAD

◆ Fabrics are obviously still her major off-screen passion, even though the heir to the biggest manufacturer of them all certainly does not seem to be any more. Film-actress **Tina Munim** looks like she's getting over textile tycoon Anil Ambani—by cutting a new career for herself.

It isn't even all that new—the idea, that is. The attractive actress has often styled her own seams in the movies though her once-upon-a-time plans to study fashion design in the US, didn't work out. So now she intends to fashion her

VIKAS VATS

Munim: cutting career

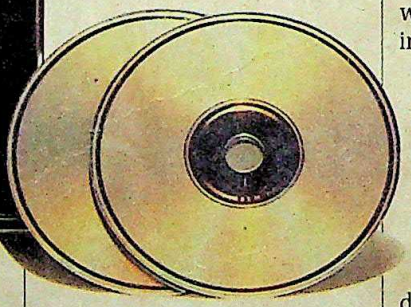
own designs. And display them—in a boutique that will also feature ethnic and assorted artefacts—slated to open soon in an apartment block in Worli. Tina's new venture has her knocking on

Mithun: swinging right

wood: "It proved lucky for my brother when he opened an office in the building, so I'm hoping it will be lucky for me too."

◆ It's an extreme switch, from left to right. In his early days, film star **Mithun Chakraborty** championed the cause of West Bengal's communists. Then he moved to tinsel town. And, as he reasoned: "There's no use supporting communists in Maharashtra as they will never come to power."

So there came a brief phase—about two years ago—when the lanky star campaigned for the Congress(I). Then, he discovered: "They



Udhas' disc: compact affair

didn't deliver whatever they had promised to the people." Obviously, another shift seemed in order.

Now, Mithun has decided to throw in his weight with the radical right—he's supporting the Shiv Sena in the assembly by-election. "Bal Thackeray is not communal...or else he would not have allowed me, a non-Maharashtrian, to appear on the political stage with him," said Mithun. That's hero-worship for you.

◆ Ghazals are going digital. Thanks primarily to soulful singer **Pankaj Udhas**, whose latest album—*Shagufta*—marked the arrival of Compact Disc recordings in India. Launched by Music India—along with 16 other CDs of film, bhajan and classical music—*Shagufta* has the popular vocalist's mellifluous tones taped to

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Joneja: celestial role

near-absolute perfection.

"What an incredible difference it makes. The sound is virtually studio quality," said Udhas, definitely happy about the change. The occasion was, however, not all that new for sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar who released the album. Five of his own CD albums have already come out abroad and, as he said encouragingly: "It is now time for Indian companies to manufacture CD players." Sound advice.

◆ After the ascetic, it's an angelic incarnation. First, she was Pragyavati, the holy woman who had renounced the world, in the tele-serial *Buniyaad*. And **Kiran Joneja** gave up her vivacious life in the family saga to become the serene sanyasini. Now, the model-turned-actress will play a celestial *apsara*.

In the tube's next serialised religious epic, the *Mahabharata*, Joneja's seraphic good looks will be a positive asset. But it will not to be the simplicity look that will be on view—she will have to turn on the charm. As she insists: "It's not really another holy character. Actually, it's quite a glamorous role." After her well-known austere act, she's obviously looking forward to the change.

◆ Art imitates, well, art. **Akkineni Nageswara Rao**, 63, the "evergreen hero" as he is called in Andhra Pradesh, has decided—almost—to follow in the footsteps of the man who has been his main rival on the silver screen—Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao. On television last fortnight, the veteran actor beamed across a state-wide message: "If people want me, I will not hesitate to serve them in politics."

Flooded with lots of approving fan mail, the man who would be a politician took the plunge towards a new role. "If you give me an hour, I will come to Delhi and talk to you," he told Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, at a recent meeting in Hyderabad. "Anybody can join politics at any time. This is the strength of democracy," he later added. And, needless to say, of the state's star-struck voters.

Rao: into politics

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